BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND EXPLANATION

THROWS OF DICE

Between Experience and Explanation

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Floorplan

The Labyrinth

I am in space, perhaps it is a fragmented stage, or some sort of labyrinth, with very few coordinates and multiple possible directions to take. I am surrounded on all sides by a framework of instructions that have something to do with institutional infrastructures, such as can be found in academic research, and in the art world(s).

I walk in circles, without getting anywhere until an object or a visual trigger, or, the text itself, suddenly grabs my arm and leads me forward. At what stage this happens is hard to tell and plan in advance. In this space, I will step into other territories, frames and categories, within which I do not know how to navigate, and whose signs I cannot properly read.

I am not one of those characters or protagonists who work progressively towards their pre-planned destination. I am more like the protagonist in a *Nouveau Roman*[1] or in a Speculative or Science-Fiction book, a strange character who breaks the rules of our world, and enters physically impossible spaces.

Here, right now, in the future and the past, I am a tentative and a hesitant protagonist. I am a glitch, stuck at this moment, in a repetition that is never the same. I digest text and images, spit them out in fragments that might not make much sense. I create scripts that deliberately frustrate linear processes and distract from the habitual transmission of information. Mostly, I will interrupt, make mistakes and create a mess. I am not determined to arrive at a specific destination or a point, but I am determined to work from within, pushing towards the edges of my limits and against those systems that surround me. I will stumble upon things, and I will occasionally fall, but I will get up. I will cross boundaries that should not be crossed, walk through walls, hop into pictures and then out again, perhaps I will even become a picture; I will make

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[1] *The New Novel* or *Nouveau Roman* was a French literature movement in the fifties and sixties. It has been connected to the works of Michel Butor, Marguerite Duras, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Nathalie Sarraute, to mention a few. The New Novel was not to designate a school. It was not even specific and constituted group of writers working in the same direction; it was merely a convenient label to those seeking new forms for the novel, forms of expressing new relations between human beings and the world. In *For a New Novel* (1963), Robbe-Grillet points out that although *The New Novel* is not a style, its aim is however to reject techniques that impose a particular interpretation on events with a determinate meaning by creating new ways of writing. According to Robbe-Grillet : "The New Novel is not a theory, it is an exploration, The New Novel aims only at total subjectivity and The New Novel does not propose a ready-made signification, etc." (cf. Robbe-Grillet, 1963, 133-142)

it. I will put words into mouths, stage encounters that probably didn't happen, and construct conversations that didn't take place. I will embed stories within stories, systems within systems, and insert real objects into imagined conditions.

I will do this because I can. In this particular arrangement of spaces, in this text, everything is possible, in this virtual world, which is not only a topography of divisions and dead ends, but also a psychological mindset, I can think and desire beyond the boundaries of materials.[2] I am a protagonist from someone else's story. I am a compilation of many voices.

When you look at the blueprint of a labyrinth, it is easy to follow the corridors, to see precisely where the entryway is, where the possible exits are. But, perhaps the entry is the exit after all, so that the whole space consists of endless returnings? On the one hand, an aerial perspective, although informative, is a reductive and flattened view. It does not provide you with a depth of information to be discovered in the space. On the other hand, you only know that you are in the labyrinth when you see the blueprint. The blueprint does not let you experience what it feels like to succumb to the space, to be betrayed by the walls, or seduced by the objects. It does not allow you to get thoroughly disoriented and confused by the architectural features that often look alike. The view from above is like reducing the lived experience into a tidy geometrical plot. Perhaps, if you know that there is an entry and an exit, you just aim for that, speeding to complete your game, and forgetting the importance of navigation. Perhaps, you will be held captive by the labyrinth, like Daedalus from the Greek Myth, who, in order to capture the Minotaur, made the labyrinth so confusing that he could barely escape after building it?

Usually, there is a need for a structure, thinking does not happen randomly, but sometimes it takes place by chance. However, it needs impulse points, entangled knots that concentrate the information, and after a little digestion, it is sent into different directions. It is ruled both by chance and order, disorientation and direction. It is a set of tentative steps taken by an unreliable protagonist, the throws of dice.

[2] This subtle crossing of borders is interestingly aligned with Gilles Deleuze's notion of the virtual. According to Deleuze, the virtual refers to an aspect of reality that is ideational, but nevertheless real. The meaning of a proposition is not a material aspect of that proposition but is, at the same time, an attribute of that proposition. According to Deleuze the virtual has a generative nature as, it is a kind of potentiality that becomes fulfilled in the course of being actualized. It cannot therefore be separated from the process of its actualization. In *Difference and Repetition* (1966), Deleuze writes: "The reality of the virtual consists of the differential elements along with singular points which correspond to them. The reality of the virtual is structure. We must avoid giving the elements and relations which form a structure an actuality which they do not have, and withdrawing from them a reality which they have." (Deleuze, 1966,208-209)

CLICK THE IMAGE TO OPEN: THE LECTURE

Something has happened or is happening, based on something that has occurred or is occurring

(Waiting Room)

The room is cramped and unadorned. In it, we can see a small table and few shabby chairs, of unremarkable design. The kind that can be found in any room filled with leftover furniture. It is hard to tell whether all these unspectacular characteristics of the room, all this casual careless, are in fact considered choices or just a lack of attention to detail. The paint is peeling off the bare walls in large swaths, and there is only one partly shattered mirror hanging on the wall. On the wall, across the room from her, there is a framed aerial photograph of a suburban scene. There are six streets in it, the two parallel streets joined together by a square and four side streets: some buildings, a few trees, but no people.

She stares at her face in the mirror – and silently asks: "Who are you?" Her face is multiplied by the shattered mirror into several fragments, each section slightly different. She puckers and smiles, raises her eyebrows, again and again, smiles until her multiple lips seem to take a life of their own. Gazing into a mirror until she no longer recognises herself, has become a practice she repeats every single day. Her eyes meet hers in a desperate stare that always says the same thing 'I want people to like me'. Her natural tendency to mimic people has its own drawbacks. Mirroring people's behaviour is not something she does consciously; the tendency is deep-seated and almost impossible to control. She is so easily influenced by whoever she's speaking to, or whatever she is reading, watching or listening to, that at any given time, she is merely a pastiche of the things around her. For a long time, she has been trying to adjust herself to her surroundings. Accommodate its speed and duration, but she is becoming more and more aware of the impossible task of fully integrating herself. She speaks in several languages, although she cannot even keep track of where one language stops, and another starts. She doesn't know anymore where one sentence ends and the other begins, or which is the and which is the form. Who is it that is really speaking and to whom?

The room is still empty except her of course. It seems unlikely that such a large group of people would be able

to fit in here. Yet sometimes spaces can be deceptive, filled with invisible nooks and crannies, ready to be filled with bodies. For now, she is on her own and would prefer things to remain as they are, but the others are soon to arrive. These days she is more drawn to solitude and quietness, and the comfort of her own company. In fact, she has always been attracted to the idea that one could live in a city or a place without knowing anyone, wander around the streets and empty buildings without any existing attachments, liberated from all expectations, as if in a completely new world. This new world, a sort of folded cut out of the world around her, would keep going at its usual speed, but for a moment she would not need to adjust to it. This would give her time, a frozen moment, and an ability to collect her forces. Time to formulate a strategy – to attack or to defend. A girl already betrayed and deceived by others, she wouldn't be told what's good for her. She would meet new people, watch, read and make things. She would be impenetrable; she would go where she wants. She would dismiss them as if they didn't exist. Ready to navigate, destination unknown.

She runs her finger across the surface of the painted wall by the doorway. A glimmer of light is coming through a small crack or a hole from the opposite wall, and suddenly she feels the urge to walk across the shabby room towards the light. But while she is doing it, everything seems to disintegrate as if the floor was crumbling behind her with every step. This is it; she is constantly oscillating between the beauty of life and the darkness of depression. But those holes, they seem to offer an alternate state of being, they contain something beyond her understanding. Shimmering faintly coloured lights, impossible to define yet extending to another world. But when she turns her head again, they are gone.

Her gaze is lingering on the picture of a city hung on the wall, an aerial view of a suburban place. From a purely aesthetic perspective, it's an attractive area consisting of six streets. These six streets consist of two parallel ones, joined together by a square and four side streets. It is a mixed area of apartment blocks and quaint, detached houses with gardens on flagstone walkways. The flowers are in bloom. The air is soft and warm on one of the first summer days after a long winter, and in the nearby square a group of people, with children, are chatting quietly. Right now, everything is calm, quite pretty. Based on appearance alone it could be any area of any city. But that has not always been the case. If you weren't familiar with these streets' reputation as one of the most troubled areas across the Scandinavian welfare state, grabbing headlines with shootings, car burnings, the drug trade, for years. You would almost find it hard to believe. The postal company has not delivered parcels directly to the homes here since last year. Residents speak of the

open drug trade, and many others in the city would rather walk around it, than take a shortcut through the area.[3]

Some people say this is a result of segregation; some think it is a lack of integration. Not many seem to be able to think beyond these categories. Most believe that it is not their problem anyway and would rather sleepwalk through their daily lives. Looking at a broader picture outside of the frame, the production of crude oil has brought the effects of climate change to the point where the damage will be impossible to repair. Plastic waste is filling the oceans, meat production causes suffering for billions of animals and simultaneously polluting what is left from this planet. The global market economy has made sure that participation is fairly easy as long as you can afford it. Those unable to participate for one reason or another, are filled with fear of exclusion, and have started building walls around themselves, trying to gather only the like-minded with them.

But the flowers are in bloom. The air is soft and warm on one of the first summer days after a long winter, and in the nearby square a group of people, with children, are chatting quietly. In this mixed area of apartment blocks and quaint, detached houses with gardens on flagstone streets are also few older industrial buildings in L-shaped formation.

The one in the middle is slightly different, perhaps only because it has a bright blue almost turquoise door. If you approach the door and finally enter, you will be here, in Eden.

[3] This description is partly based on Emma Löfgren's article about the Seved district in Malmö published on the local. se website. See: Emma Löfgren,"No-go zone? Here's how one of Sweden's roughest areas edged out its drug gangs", The Local.se, 7 June 2017. https://www.thelocal.se/20170607/heres-how-one-of-swedens-roughest-areas-edged-out-its-drug-gangs-seved-malmo-crime [Accessed 05.03.2019]
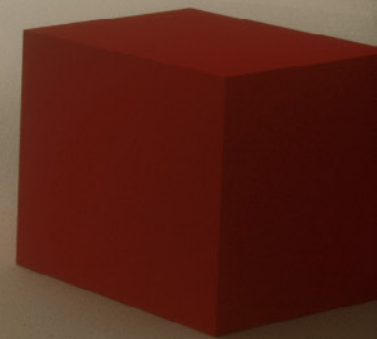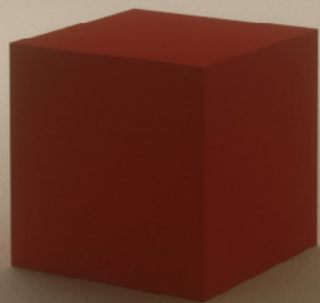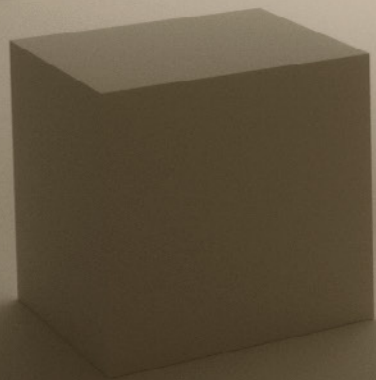
CLICK THE IMAGE TO PLAY THE VIDEO

Roll the ball but don't let it fall (or should you?)
(The Cinema Room)

The others have arrived, and there is a sense of expectation in the air. I am standing in the entryway, trying to decide which way to turn next; right, left or go straight. How to turn, suddenly, tightly, zig-zagging, as if trying to get rid of someone chasing me, an enemy, or a competitor. Slowly, carefully, as if trying to adjust to the darkness, to prevent an enemy lurking in the shadows catching on us. Or, hesitantly, still aware of someone looking at us from above, as if in an experiment. I have created this system and traced this journey,

and although I feel I am in charge, at least for the time being, I have a strange, uncertain feeling, like in childhood's hide and seek games. This feeling is that the world as I know it is about to fall apart, or at least something is about to change permanently, and this is only amplified by this liminal space where the city meets its limits. This is like an anxious journey in Giorgio De Chirico's paintings. A suspicion of being haunted, and something lurking around the corner.

Part of me is unsure whether the whole thing is just a reverie, me, myself and I, somehow folded into different sections, a Kristevan split subject, a socially-shaped biological being constituted by a double bind. Me, myself and I alienated from *jouissance*, departed from the Real, entered into the Imaginary (as in the mirror stage), and separated from the Other through language.[4] Being there, but projected elsewhere, simultaneous temporalities and spaces, a kind of telepathic experience. On the left hand of the entry, there is a dark room, in which there is a projected documentary film of a group of young people sitting on a floor and discussing. They are surrounded by a stage that is made up of blocks of colour and mirrors, and a flat screen TV. They take turns to speak and at times

[4] According to Julia Kristeva, the speaking subject is a divided subject addressing the symbolization of nonverbal experiences through language. The speaking subject consists of a conscious and an unconscious mind. From this duality arises her theory of the split subject, a socially-shaped biological being. Kristeva proposes "new" semiotics, in which meaning is conceived of as a process of signification rather than a sign system. In other words, language produces subjects.

somewhat eloquently describe their fears in a society where every action is being monitored, where divisions are getting larger and larger and where self-representation through social media is an act required to be continuously repeated. I look at the bare wall across the room and see a tiny nail hole, hardly visible to the eye. It is open but motionless, it is a break in the temporal circuit, anticipating the future to come.

Witnessing your own game.
A brief look into the past

I look at the hole and think of how the future and past often call to us with no clear image attached, and how naturally we often respond with imagination. As an artist, I am constantly faced with projections back to the past when asked to write or talk about the origins of my practice. Although a large part of the ongoing contemporary story deals with the dematerialisation of the material and reducing that which is complex, I don't believe in descriptions of single moments as decisive turning points in my journey, neither do I believe in flattening explanations of experience. But instead, I can offer mutating fictions around the practice, for it to remain alive, to engage in a conversation that will never end, by continually feeding the imagination.

The most recent fiction I have constructed about the origins of my work begins about the time over ten years ago when I really started to consider the power of collective action, and social and political hierarchy. In the story, I work in Goldsmiths College library as a part-time library assistant while doing my MFA. I have developed a habit of flicking through books while shelving them, which by the way is the most boring and laborious task, and it is only the potential discovery of interesting-looking books that makes it tolerable. One day I come across a book: *Theatre in Revolution, Russian Avant-garde Stage design 1913–1935*. It is at first its visual appeal that captures me, the three dimensional built environments, the mix of geometrical forms with groups of human characters that seem to be cut into fragments, melding objects and shapes.

Early twentieth-century Constructivist Russian painters, sculptors, poets, and theatre practitioners found entirely new ways to consider art as a practice for social purposes, and the means to act politically at an intersection between protest, circus and public meeting. Because those conventions were physical and presentational as opposed to verbal and narrative, they easily lend themselves to purposes of directors such as Vsevolod Meyerhold. The wish was to move away from the theatre dominated by the word and refined manners,

towards a theatre that had its origins among fairground and street entertainers and closer to the masses of people. Nicolai Evreinov's mass spectacle *The Storming of the Winter Palace* in 1920 used masses as a way to find new ways of being and acting. It broke the rules of conventional theatre by incorporating the audience into the cast. In the book, there were also a few remaining black and white images of the stage design of *The Bathhouse* in 1929, written by Vladimir Mayakovsky and directed by Meyerhold. With closer reading I found out that it was a drama in six acts with circus tricks and fireworks, a satire on state bureaucracy, featuring a time machine rather than an actual bathhouse. In this play, Meyerhold displayed a whole array of styles of theatre, from naturalism through dance to agitprop. Each one of these styles or modes served as an attraction in itself, but as a whole they became a critique against the prevailing political and bureaucratic conditions. In my dream, Meyerhold and Mayakovsky appeared before me. They had some unfinished business, as one of the Soviet Communist bureaucrats had been left behind at the end of the text and the theatre production of *The Bathhouse*. Rumour has it that the Commonwealth Pool which was built in 1970 in Edinburgh, Scotland was haunted because of that very bureaucrat. Apparently, the ghost of the bureaucrat was still seen around the pool once in a while.
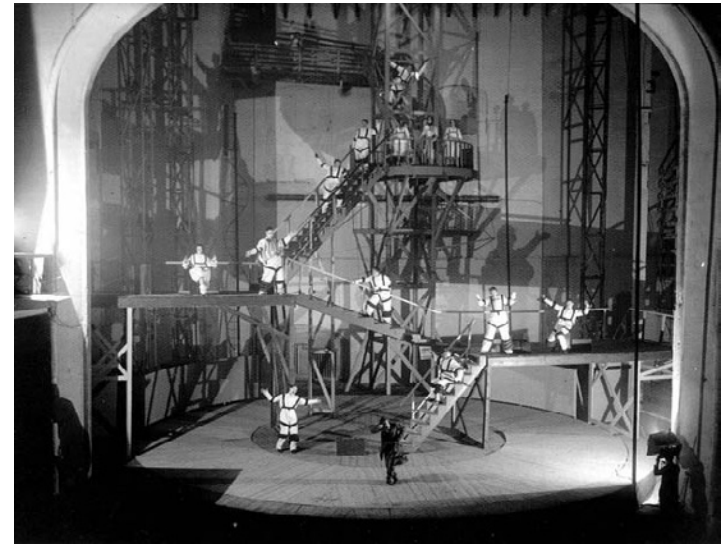
Vladimir Mayakovsky's play *The Bathhouse*, staged by Vsevolod Meyerhold at the People's House's Drama Theatre in Leningrad, January 30, 1930.

In 2010, the pool was going to be refurbished, and the ghost had nowhere to go and had nothing to do. Then, an idea came to me. I thought that to re-imagine *The Bathhouse* with a group of young divers might help, as they had nowhere else to go either. In addition to all this, the diving platform of the Commonwealth pool had a curious, uncanny resemblance to the time machine in the stage set of Meyerhold's production. Both spiralling phallic tower-like structures, reaching upwards in a manner similar to Tatlin's tower, enabling the movements of the bodies of actors, and thus activating the entire set of theatre/sports machinery.[5]

This was an artwork that marked a turning point for me as an artist and researcher. The image left behind by Mayakovsky and Meyerhold was so vivid, visually appealing yet colourless. The pool, on the other hand, had bright turquoise water, steel platform and brutalist architectural shapes. Those few black and white grainy photographs I had seen in the book from Meyerhold's tower like a stage structure had luckily survived the time and Stalin's destruction. It is tremendously sad that those two artists didn't. Reluctant to renounce Socialist Realism their lives ended far too soon before the work was really done. Perhaps that is why they were haunting me.

Distraught by his distrust of the bureaucratic Soviet world and his love for a married woman, Lily Brink, Mayakovsky

shot himself, by pointing a gun at his chest in 1930. Or, at least that is what they want us to think. Meyerhold, in turn, was arrested by the Stalinist Regime during the Great Terror, tortured and executed in 1940. Yet, their legacy persists.[6]

[5] *The Bath House* is a cinematic re-imagination of a 1930s Russian constructivist play written by Vladimir Mayakovsky and directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold. The work is set at the modernist Royal Commonwealth Pool in Edinburgh, Scotland. See: https://vimeo.com/25511798 [Accessed 01.07.2019]

[6] Vsevolod Emilevich Meyerhold (1874-1940) was a Russian and Soviet theatre director, actor and theatrical producer known of his provocative experiments dealing with body and symbolism. He invented a theatre technique called biomechanics that connected psychological and physiological processes in actor's work. In January 1938 the Meyerhold Theatre was closed, by order of the Politburo, and Meyerhold's works were proclaimed "antagonistic and alien to the Soviet people". Mayerhold himself was arrested on 20 June 1939 and tortured, and finally sentenced to death and executed on 2 February 1940 (Cf. Leach, 1989, 2-28.)
Meyerhold directed several plays written by Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930), who was a soviet playwright, actor and directorm who was a prominent figure in Russian Futurist movement and was a strong supporter of Communist Party. Mayakovsky wrote poems and wrote and directed plays. His works (such as the plays *The Bedbug* (1929) and *The Bathhouse* (1929)), often criticized aspects of the Soviet system and were met with disdain by the Soviet state and media. (Cf. Vladimir Mayakovsky RUSSIAN POET, Encyclopaedia Britannica) https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vladimir-Vladimirovich-Mayakovsky,) [Accessed 05.03.2019]

We re-imagined and re-contextualised The Bathhouse, complete with
its paradoxical subtitle: a play in six acts with circus tricks and fireworks.
However, the subtitle was misleading because those elements were not
really there in the original production and neither was the bath house.
In our version, we had fireworks and magnificent circus tricks performed
by the young divers. We added smoke, colour, water, and red swimming
caps. The young bodies were able to swim like fish in swarms and jump
like acrobats, yet at times moved like puppets on strings, controlled
by an external force as if pulled by a strange puppet master.

In Mayakovsky's play The Bathhouse, The Phosphorescent woman was
brought from the future through the time machine and she came here
too. I just hope she didn't leave any of the bureaucrats behind this time.
We have enough of those already. However, the light was too bright,
and the days were too long. The scripted complaints became partly
genuine when the process was prolonged; their bodies pushed to the
point of exhaustion. Who was really talking and to whom? Whose voice
did we hear, the divers', the ghosts' or mine the artist director's?

The Bath House, 2009, HD video, 12 mins

A clattering sound from a distance jolts me back to my body, and back to the others. The Space surrounding us has a clinical, minimalistic feel to it, like some kind of laboratory — pristine, straight lines, ready to deny any emotional attachments. The labyrinthic architecture around us appears as an impromptu, makeshift stage. Apparently borrowing from the Constructivist structural stage sets and modernist environments of Mondrian, this strange installation looks like it could have been constructed by numbers, as if via a flat-pack. Binding simple symmetry with blue doors, white walls and blocks of colours scattered everywhere. The installation is like our bodies, it seems to sit at an uncomfortable juncture. Childlike and waiting, this charged stage seems impatient for performance – a happening or collective action of some sort.

The light is too bright, similar to many of those art galleries I really dislike; Those discomforting and hierarchical places. There is a sound too, a buzzing sound of electricity running too high, a dizzying hypnotic vibration with a frequency that is hard to hear — the sound of absence and dead material. I am not sure if all these objects and characters around me hear it too. Though, they seem too calm for that, too shadowy, immobile, mute as if waiting to be activated.

I can feel that the tension within the group is rising. I have always thought that I am one of those able to read situations, yet at times my own anxiety overshadows my judgement. It seems that the tensions are more likely to arise when disparate groups of people with different backgrounds and experiences are brought together and this causes enormous discomfort for me. But for some reason, I always find myself in these situations, wilfully staging tensions.

"Ok, folks, it is the time", I say with a voice of pretend authority and cheerfulness. "Are we ready to start this magnificent journey? Please, folks, follow me, follow me. I will be your guide. Are you prepared to play a game? Please do not hesitate to explore, to open doors, and remember to be active and to participate." I check my phone for the time and in the distance hear someone counting, one, two, three, four... I ask the group to move forward towards the blue door in front of us and to open it.

CLICK THE IMAGE TO OPEN: THE LETTER AND THE RULES
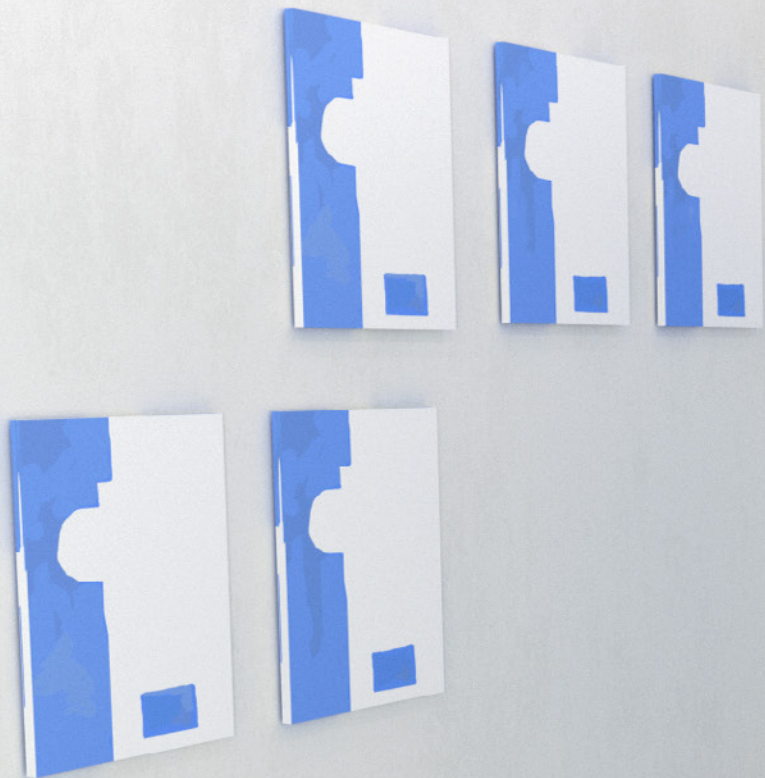
Painting Room

Passing from one room to another, we arrive in a room full of paintings, all of the same size, small enough to have been made without the artist having to take any steps backwards. The small paintings, all resembling each other are starting to fill the room almost entirely. They have been organised on the walls in precise rows, one after another, yet there are still gaps to be filled. Imagine that. The painter, a blond woman, is dressed in black, surrounded, almost clothed in paintings that are like holes into another reality. Each image is composed of white geometrical shapes on a blue background, although, it is hard to differentiate the background from the foreground.

The room is completely white with a dark grey floor, no daylight. In addition to a fluorescent light on the ceiling, the light seems to come from the paintings, like tiny windows. There is a blue door across the room and on the right side of it a small window covered by a curtain. Yet the window does not seem to lead anywhere. In fact, the windows offered by painting imply a much more significant portal to another reality. The colours are all muted. Milky blue cast films over each canvas. I look more closely, and the paint appears to ghost into thin patches of fog, like weak sunlight, all cool and calm like a Tunisian landscape. After a closer inspection I see that it is in fact a copy of another painting placed on a small platform in the middle of the room. Standing opposite the painter woman is another blond woman who appears to almost be her doppelgänger, and she is observing the painting process. If one looks closely, they are not exactly alike; they are doubles but not exact copies, hand painted and therefore always distinguished by their difference, not their similarity.

There is something mesmerizing and at the same time unnerving about watching someone being watched, repeating the same sequence of events over and over, the same yet different. Maybe we are drawn in by the possibility that the things will turn out differently next time around and there will be a sudden unexpected change in the course of events. Or maybe it is precisely the

predictability of the chain of actions that keeps us captured.

Strange intertwined destinies: two women in the same space at the same time, with the same looks but with two separate agencies and individual stories. These women, these doubles share, and, at the very same time, are separated by the same objects, words and meanings. They arrive at that spot independently, and through separate personal paths, to the place of their encounter.

Maybe this is a spatial confusion of the kind often likened to the single-sided surface of the Moebius Strip. As an essential paradigm for doubling, the observer and the observed.

The Moebius strip is one of the figures studied by Jacques Lacan in his use of topology as a presentation of co-existing binary oppositions.[7] This three-dimensional figure can be made by taking a strip of paper and twisting it once, before joining its ends together. This results in a Moebius strip that subverts our accustomed (Euclidean) way of representing space. The fact that the Moebius strip only has one surface and only one edge even if one crosses over to the 'other' side, can be verified by passing a finger along the surface.

The Moebius strip reveals that 'inside' and 'outside' are indistinguishable. Like the two women in the room, it makes up an observing system that can observe itself observing. There is no longer a beginning or an end to their repeated actions.
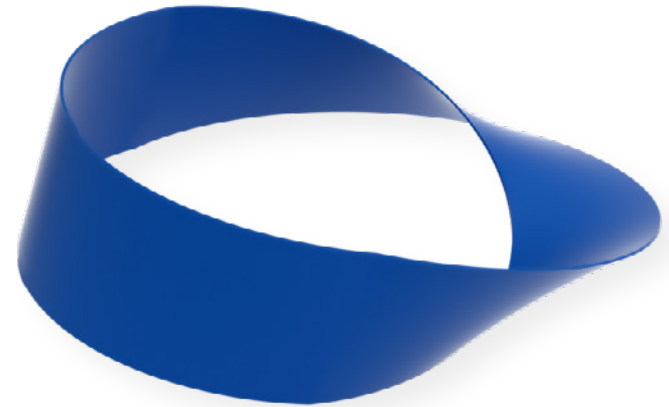
[7] In his seminar on identification, Lacan uses the topology of the Moebius strip to illustrate the structure of the speaking subject and its object relations. The structure captures "the basis of the subject's division by the object and of what already pertains to a choice and a consent of the subject with respect to this division." Therefore, Moebius strip as topological support accounts for the question of the Freudian double inscription, simultaneous existence of conscious and unconscious, interpretation and its effects. (Cf.Ragland-Sullivan, 76, 86-7)

I feel a strong sense of unpredictability right at the start of the first performative event. Perhaps, this is a because the scenes are governed by a throw of the dice or probably because it is hard to distinguish who is a performer and who a member of the audience. It feels like anything could happen inside this haunted house. And then there is the arrival of a stranger that triggers an even more hallucinogenic, baffling chain of events in Eden.

I don't know what you are trying to save me from, but I can feel your hand

(From Participation to Agonistic practice)

There are two fish swimming along a river, and one says: "Oh the water is lovely today". After a short and puzzled silence, the other one asks: "What water?"

It is not often that one hears jokes in panel discussions in the art context, at least not the kind that lingers in your mind years after. I don't know why this one stuck with me, perhaps because of my fondness for silly jokes, or because in all its simplicity this one is relatively poignant and relates to this topic of participation. The joke was told by *Laura Maclean-Ferris*, a smart young curator and critic, who took part with me and a few others in a panel discussion about participatory practices in *Berwick Film festival* in 2009, in which my film *The Bath House* was presented. My memory is bit vague, and so far, my attempts to find a correct version of the joke have been in vain. My research online usually ends up with a repetitive discovery of the absurd joke about two fish also swimming along until they suddenly hit a concrete wall. One of them says: Damn! It is usually at this point that I stop my research. Perhaps I should have asked Laura about the origin and the meaning of the joke, but somehow, I was afraid she might feel strange about me citing her only in relation to an odd silly joke. There were, no doubt about it, many other more profound and cite-worthy points she made that day, but somehow this particular detail keeps resurfacing in my consciousness. My interpretation of the meaning behind it is that it points out how oblivious we can sometimes be to our predicament. So blinded by our surroundings and habitual ways of seeing, that we do not actually notice what it is, that really surrounds us.

Perhaps Laura wanted to suggest, by telling the joke, that sometimes we need art and artists to point out those blind spots we tend to ignore. Or perhaps, on the contrary, she wanted to insinuate that we give too much credit to artistic capabilities to change the way people perceive things. Maybe, we as art practitioners falsely assume that we can somehow see more clearly, and position ourselves outside. In a way, this very contradiction between both

interpretations might be productive. The former as the very basis for participatory practice seems ideal, the latter in turn taps into the many problematics concerning it. It would be fair to hope that participatory practices do not underestimate anyone's ability to think critically, or privilege one position over another. Yet, we are always haunted by the same problems. Instrumentalization and cultural colonialism are hiding in the shadows of the corridor.

In recent years I have been exploring ideas of what we might call 'highly authored' forms of participation. Working with both amateur and professional actors, I have been devising scenarios or situations in which the divergence between individual and the 'role' and the hierarchical relationship between the society, the artist and the participants, have been emphasized and questioned. Making work that has a clear socio/political dimension, and that deals directly with different communities and contexts, has given rise to the question of how artworks that are also research can continuously test their own limits, and those parameters that are constitutive of them.

What is the aesthetic dimension of such work (projects)? In the making and showing of such work, how are the frictions dealt with? How can the incommunicable be communicated? Especially the latter question becomes central when we think of how artists and artistic researchers incorporate aesthetic qualities, such as the intuitive, hesitation, the not knowing, and the non-discursive into their practices? Another similar question being, how to embrace the aporia and contradictory meanings in art and artistic research? Could these potentially allow multiple layers and readings of the work, opening it up simultaneously to the social and the political, to the poetic and intimate and the personal to the universal?

Consequently, there is an inevitable need to position my practice and research within the contested territory of participatory practices. All too often in discussions about participatory or collaborative practice, I cannot help feeling like that fish bumping against the concrete wall, DAMN! That again! False promises and uncritical approaches seem to be still flying around in many participatory projects and the discussions around them. It appears that we need to be reminded once more that collaboration is only really collaboration if an artist genuinely shares authorial rights. Participatory art, almost without exception involves the invitation to participate, to which hierarchical and power positions are inherent. Within our era of cognitive capitalism, these immaterial projects we call socially engaged, collaborative or participatory, usually also become end products that generate value. Artists' nomadic practices with new contexts and communities often result in short lived situations, without enough substance and concern for the

participants. This might result in a certain kind of cultural colonialism filled with exoticism, and can be problematic in so many ways. Questions arise, such as, whose voice do we hear in these projects and what is the claims they attempt to make and to what extend are these claims addressed?

An article by Yonatan Amir and Ronen Eidelman, "Whose Voice is This Anyway?" in the Israeli online publication *Ma'arav* asks interesting questions, such as; "Whether an artwork can represent an otherness, which overcomes the allegedly distinct identities of artist, subject and viewer – and if so, what the nature of that otherness might be? Who has the right to speak for the other, create in the name of the other and analyse the culture and art of others? How relevant is the artist's or researcher's identity to her work, and might it qualify or disqualify her from undertaking it? Might artists' ethnic, economic, national and/or gendered backgrounds blind them to the struggles of other groups, and disqualify them from taking up their causes and/or to criticize them?"[8]

Since participation always entails confrontation with otherness or some kind of foreignness, the perspective or confrontation it offers might end up being either intrusive or purely fascinated. The question to ask might be whether this confrontation can be productive and also sober and critical? Does the participatory confrontation coming from outside have the power to reveal something that might be hidden underneath?

The artistic gesture of helping those less fortunate, vulnerable or communities in distress is often framed as somewhat heroic. At the end the artists often end up lifting themselves onto an imaginary pedestal, only enforcing the existing divisions and stereotypes. Not everyone wants a knight in shining armor to rescue them from themselves or a pity party to take place on their doorstep. Working with a group of people often involves casting them into a role of some sort, and at its worst, enforcing marginalisation.

And lastly, something that seems to be often forgotten is the social pressure to participate. The claim of equality and non-hierarchy based on voluntary participation needs to be contested. In fact, participation can be another way of using power, even when it is seemingly based on invitation. The social itself presents parameters, pressures and assumed roles that force us to perform in a certain way. The claim that the invitation to participate is open and without requirements, is often given without a firm basis. Non-participation becomes an act of resistance and is often achieved only by removal of oneself outside the social circle or by upfront resistance, that requires both trust and courage. In artistic

[8] Amir and Eidelman, 2009. http://maarav.org.il/english/2009/08/04/whose-voice-is-this-anyway/, [Accessed 05.03.2019]

peer groups and research circles, when ostensibly everyone is there to support each other, this can be painfully obvious. To put it bluntly, in this context, a refusal to participate is a refusal of support. These encounters are not natural; they are staged and already contain pre-existing tensions and hierarchies that have gradually been building within the group.

Along the way and while writing this, I found out that the fish joke I referred to at the beginning comes originally from the late American writer/novelist David Foster Wallace, although in his version these two fish happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, "Morning, boys. How's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a while, and then, eventually, one of them looks over at the other and goes, "What the hell is water?"[9] Foster-Wallace has elaborated on his fish story as follows: "The point of the fish story is merely that the most obvious, important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and talk about.[10]

Developing a critique of participation might seem at first as a bit of a redundant task. As a matter of fact, the whole issue has been widely and cleverly formulated over and over again by the likes of Claire Bishop and Jacques Rancière who have gained wide recognition within artistic discursive circles for over a decade.[11]

Admittedly, the conversation has slightly shifted since those articulations, partly due to the way the fast development of digital networks has changed the way we socialize with each other and participate in society. The exponential growth of immaterial, virtual and digital social platforms has resulted in a growing interest in physical and material encounters. Also, at this highly digitalized, technologized moment, objects and non-human beings are gaining more power and attention. The question being asked, is whether they might have as much of a direct effect on the way that we think and communicate? In fact, the human-centeredness of this work and research at hand is slightly troubling for me. At the same time, I have always been a little suspicious of fashionable theories like speculative realism, object-oriented ontology or posthumanism. The privileged position from which the human judges the relative significance of things and grants them equal rights, has always seemed slightly hypocritical to me. In the celebration of otherness we might forget to

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[9] Ironically, it has been claimed since, that many of the facts in Wallace's non-fiction articles were fabricated and that he was a hypocrite and abusive in his personal relationships, especially towards women. Wallace apparently misrepresented dozens of facts in almost all of his nonfiction essays. Many facts are completely stolen from other journalist's experiences or flat-out made up. See: Devon Price, "A Brief on Hideous Things About David Foster Wallace" Medium, May 6, 2018, https://medium.com/@devonprice/a-brief-on-hideous-things-about-david-foster-wallace-72034b20de94 [Accessed 15.02.19]

[10] Krajeski, 2008, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/this-is-water, [Accessed 15.02.19]

[11] This discussion has been central in fairly recent doctoral research at the Academy of Arts Helsinki. In her doctoral thesis, *Esitettyä Aitoutta Osallistavasta taiteesta ja sen etiikasta*, (2018) Johanna Lecklin quite extensively covers the field of Participatory art from Bourriaud (1999) to Bishop (2004) and Grant Kester's (2004) concept of Dialogical art, and especially the critique of Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics written by Bishop (Lecklin 2018, 95-109). However, It is fairly clear that Lecklin does not agree so much with the critique and agonism articulated by Bishop, but rather aligns her practice with temporary social situations as articulated by Relational Aesthetics (Ibid.138-146, 159-166). In his doctoral thesis *Generational Filming* Pekka Kantonen presents a concise summary of socially engaged art, covering theories of Bishop, Kester and Chantal Mouffe to mention few (Kantonen 2017, 22-30).

look more closely at where we are speaking from, dismissing the exploration of alternative subject positions, race and gender.[12] Karen Barad's Diffraction theory, more inclusive of those concerns, could potentially offer interesting parallels to my considerations, although there won't be room for discussing it in depth, I like the idea of discussing the entanglement of the material and discursive in knowledge production.[13]

However, one obvious parallel needs to be addressed here briefly, as for Barad, language has been granted too much power. She says: "The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every "thing" – even materiality – is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation."[14]

It might be because of this, that embodied experience remains even more important. Being able to be immersed in a spatial experience that transforms the world of words and images into a world of sensory physical experience, might offer a much-needed counterpoint to our everyday existence.

Laura McLean Ferris articulates this in her essay "Indifferent Objects", saying: "Care is the responsibility of humans, and even in an era of disembodiment we still have bodies, and these bodies and their experiences remain important – now perhaps more than ever."[15]

There seems to be an increasing need for encounters that emphasize emotional and physical connections between humans and other beings. This might explain the popularity of immersive art and theatre, and also more materialistic considerations in art. However, this will constitute a separate yet connected discussion, which I cannot elaborate more at this stage.

It needs to be stated here that I am not claiming that my discussion of participation is either comprehensive or original. However, it would be hard to deny the obvious: the growing pressure to perform and participate either virtually or physically. We can all feel this pressure, not least in social media and the market economy.[16] Consequently, here in this discussion, I am going to take many shortcuts

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[12] Peter Gratton puts this in apt terms: "Almost a decade ago, the theoretical humanities and continental philosophy welcomed a variety of 'turns' such as new materialism, affect theory, process ontology and speculative realism. All of these can be considered post-Kantian since all of them practice some sort of non-anthropocentrism, as they all search for alternative frameworks of thought, turning away from a human to face other beings. Criticising the tendency to prioritize the self over the other." (Gratton 2014, 111–112)

[13] For Barad, diffraction is a practice that owes much to legacy of feminist theorizing of difference, therefore it helps reading separate matters through each other while emphazising patterns of their difference. "Diffraction is not a set pattern but rather iterative (re)configuring of patterns of differentiating-entangling." (Barad 2014, 168)
For further reading see also RUUKKU issue 9. Focusing on Barad's concept of 'intra-action' and its influence on contemporary theories and research. http://ruukku-journal.fi/fi/issues/9/editorial [Accessed 15.07.19]

[14] Barad 2003, 801.

[15] McLean Ferris, 2013. https://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/indifferent-objects-by-laura-mclean-ferris-july-august-2013 [Accessed 13.06.2019]

[16] This refers to the aspect of market economy in which individuals participate by buying goods, ie. participation in the society consists mostly from commercial exchange.

and leave out some aspects of the socio-political discourse, i.e. participatory governmental politics since the 1960s, as well as a more in-depth discussion on the so-called Ethical turn.[17] It might be also interesting to expand this discourse by referring more to feminist theories and new materialist discourse as articulated by Judith Butler[18] and Donna Haraway[19] for example, and more recently by Rosi Braidotti, but this discussion will need to be left for future research.[20] Instead, the core of this section is to show how the rise of participatory art practices has led to several problems concerning their premises and promises. Many projects of participatory art clearly fall short of their political or aesthetic claims and don't reveal the power relations that grant them their existence. Although this area has indeed become a well-articulated contested territory in much of art writing, closer inspection of the motivations and power structures behind participation are still needed.

So, let's face it, the hand is still there pulling strings, but not many seem to be willing to see or acknowledge it. Therefore, we need to rewind and return to the question of participation once more.

Opening another blue door has revealed to us a small empty room. I ask everyone to follow me and step in. The walls are white and completely blank, and except our bodies, there is nothing else in the room. I wonder whether we should wait here until something happens that will trigger movement or action. We are all standing between two blue doors, the one we used for entering and another one we have not gone through yet. I am expecting someone to try the door, yet nothing happens. Everyone is just waiting around, relying on me or somebody else to make a move.

This blank space seems to offer totally different possibilities from the previous disorienting spaces with constant repetitions, mirrors, blind doors and dead ends. Here we have nothing else to see but each other.

[17] Jacques Rancière, for example, says that "the 'ethical turn' would mean that today there is an increasing tendency to submit politics and art to moral judgements about the validity of their principles and the consequences of their practices." (Rancière 2010,184.)

[18] In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler argues against being included into a specific norm or a role. She shows, that inclusion is a form of subjection or violation, asking what kind of activity and subjectivity, people are being invited to participate in? By examining the effects of what she calls 'compulsory heterosexuality' on the thematization of gender and sexuality, her text is an effort to "think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power…". (Butler 1990, 33–34)

[19] In *Situated Knowledges* Donna Haraway articulates that "recent social studies of science and technology have made available a very strong social constructionist argument for all forms of knowledge claims, most certainly and especially scientific ones. In these tempting views, no insider's perspective is privileged, because all drawings of inside-outside boundaries in knowledge are theorized as power moves, not moves towards truth." (Haraway 1988, 575)

[20] See how Rosi Braidotti started using the term New materialism as a cultural theory that does not privilege the culture over nature. "The term proposes a cultural theory that radically rethinks the dualisms so central to our (post-) modern thinking and always starts its analysis from how these oppositions (between nature and culture, matter and mind, the human and the inhuman) are produced in action itself." (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012, II, 5.) https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/11515701.0001.001/1:5.2/--new-materialisminterview cartographies?rgn=div2;view=fulltext [Accessed 26.11.2018]

In Robbe-Grillet's L'Eden et Après, the university students gathered in a café called Eden (and later in a place that supposedly is Tunis) seem to portray the post-68-revolution generation that has lost all their ideological basis and beliefs. They pass their time, taking part in transgressive rituals of all sorts, play acting and stories and various other abstract rituals and activities to give meaning to their lives. In the workshops preceding the events, we linked the ideological mindset of Robbe-Grillet's film to a contemporary one, finding counterparts from Swedish ideology, performers experience and tensions of the political field. These stories become embedded in this fictional narrative, creating a disorienting space, where reality and fiction cannot be distinguished.

Please Participate

The desire to move viewers out of the role of passive observers or readers and into the role of producers and contributors is one of the hallmarks of twentieth-century art. Both Roland Barthes through his texts, especially "The Death of the Author" (1967), and Marcel Duchamp through his art, addressed the importance of the spectators as necessary completers of a creative act.[21] This allowed a new kind of participatory aspect to enter the process of both making and reading art and text. Artists were beginning to make and present work that involved the notion of relationality, but also new participatory elements. By soliciting the active involvement of audiences, artists were attempting to break down traditional procedures and perceived barriers between themselves, their work, and the viewer. This tendency can be found in practices and projects ranging from plays by Bertolt Brecht to Allan Kaprow's happenings in 60s America and Collective Action groups' events in 70s Russia, to name but a few. [22]

More recently, participatory art has espoused forms that boost and produce new social relationships. In the latter half of the 90s Nicholas Bourriaud's book, Relational Aesthetics introduced a way of making art that relies on building upon relations and encounters by different members of social communities.[23] Since then this orientation towards social contexts, away from studio practice and from object-based art to immaterial practices, has grown

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[21] Barthes' "The Death of the Author" taught us the text is a collection of other texts, previous and the texts to come, completed by the experiences of the viewer. It was the beginning for the idea of participatory art, in which the reader/viewer is an essential part of completing the work. There is no artwork, a piece of text without the reader/viewer. There is no origin nor intended end. The author ceases to exist, there is no clear message. "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture."(Barthes 1976,146.)

[22] The experiments of the Collective Action Group in the Soviet Union in the 1970s were intended to break the dominance of collective experiences of a Communist Society of the time by offering performances that put emphasis on the individual experience within the collective one. As Boris Groys articulates it, with these performances the viewer's encounter with the works was often intentionally left to chance. (See Groys 2010, 51.) Claire Bishop notes that most of the actions of these groups typically followed a standard format: "a group of fifteen to twenty participants were invited by telephone to take a train to a designated station outside Moscow; they would walk from the station to a remote field. The group would wait around (not knowing what would happen), before witnessing a minimal, perhaps mysterious, and often visually unremarkable event. On returning to Moscow, participants would write an account of the experience and offer interpretations of its meaning." (Bishop 2012, 154.)

[23] Bourriaud defines relational aesthetics as a "set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space" (Cf. https://www.widewalls.ch/relational-aesthetics-nicolas-bourriaud-social-circumstance/) [Accessed 16.05.2019]

exponentially. Today, artists collaborate and engage with audiences in multiple ways. By inviting others to be part of the creative processes, they often give up the either the total or partial control over their work and give more power to the viewer who then turns into a participant.

It is essential to mention at this point that participation is used here as an all-inclusive term for a socially engaged practice that invites spectators or members of the public as active participants. However, despite some existing overlaps, it is essential to make a distinction between participation, collaboration and interactivity.

In her anthology *Participation*, Claire Bishop distinguishes between three concerns: activation, authorship, and community. The first aims at creating an active subject, which merely incorporates the viewer 'physically' (pressing buttons, touching) and can also be seen in connection with developments in digital technology. But participation, Bishop says, is not so much 'physical' as it is 'social'.[24]

One way of fully comprehending the limitations and constraints imposed on the participant is to contrast it with collaboration. Bishop points out. "It is the shortfall between participation and collaboration that leads to endless questions about the degree of choice, control and agency of the participant. Is participation always voluntary? Are all participants equal and are they equal with the artist? How can participation involve co-authorship rather than some reduced and localised content?"[25]

Collaborators, however, are different from participants, to the extent that they share authorial rights over the artwork that allows them, for example, to make decisions about the main aspects of the work. To put it simply, collaborators have authorial rights that participants usually don't. In her book *Artificial Hells, Participatory art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Bishop goes further with the definition of 'participatory art', saying that it "connotes the involvement of many people and avoids ambiguities of 'social engagement'".[26] This could refer to a very wide range of work. She asks, as a matter of fact, "What art isn't socially engaged?".[27]

It was the year 2005, a bit before my discovery of the book about Constructivist theatre in the library. I was in my first year of an MFA, and at the time many artists were seeking to create scenarios that partly rely on existing social or political realities and/or relations. During the term, I remember visiting the Thai artists Rirkrit Tiravanija's installation at the Serpentine Gallery in London. Tiravanija is one of the artists brought into the limelight by Bourriaud's articulations on Relational art in early 2000. In many of Tiravanija's works social relations became the material of

[24] Bishop 2006b, 12–13.

[25] ibid.,13.

[26] Bishop 2012, 2.

[27] ibid.

the artwork. You could join a collective meal, or hang out in specifically tailored collective spaces with fellow spectators. For this show, the Serpentine gallery had been turned into two identical apartments, similar to Tiravanija's own apartment in New York. These open-house, free-for-all of apartments at the Serpentine were functioning as participatory spaces in which one was invited to behave as it would be one's home. In them, one could cook a meal, crash out on the sofa – and even have a bath. The assumption is that they were intended as a convivial place to hang out and do what you please, freed from all institutional, social and hierarchical constraints and expectations.[28]

Yet, somehow the experience of it felt anything but free. Instead, it was rather intimidating, with all the gallery assistants hanging around, drinking tea, discussing. I had been invited to participate, but paradoxically I felt more self-conscious than usual, an outsider, with the burden of the requirement to participate. Somehow, Tiravanija's work, as many similar projects, seem to ignore the fact that there is always some kind of invitation and a certain formation of the participants subjectivities integrated into these kinds of projects, even when the artist only asks them to be themselves.

In his article "Include Me Out", Dave Beech says: "There is great potential in the proposal of participating in a promising situation--and this is presumably the only scenario envisaged by the supporters of participation. Participation sounds promising only until you imagine unpromising circumstances in which you might be asked to participate."[29] Invitation to participate involves an assumption that the participants accept the constraints and protocols of the situation, leaving their own subjectivities behind. Indeed, when writing about previously mentioned Tiravanija's installation in Guardian, Adrian Searle asks: "What would happen, should you decide to have a quickie on the sofa or stage an almighty row and throw things around the kitchen?"[30] That is to say, how far does the invitation to participate extend and to whom, does it include everyone? This question of access and inclusion resonates strongly with how connected the parameters of the work are to its context, as surely, they differ from a warehouse in Glasgow to a gallery located in a middle of Kensington Gardens? I happen to know that this institution, around the same time with Tiravanija's show, fired, without any hesitation, a gallery invigilator for merely stepping inside of a neon circle

[28] Cf. Lecklin 2018, 95–103. Lecklin also refers to Tiravanija's works and in particular a critique by Bishop that brings up the hierarchical relationship between artist and viewer/participant. However, Lecklin refers to Tiravanija's earlier works from 1992 and 1995 and has not seen them in 'real life'.

[29] Beech 2008, https://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/include-me-out-by-dave-beech-april-2008 [Accessed 05.03.2019]

[30] Searle 2005, www.theguardian.com/culture/2005/jul/12/1 [Accessed 06.03.2019]

surrounding an artwork, without damaging it. But no mercy was given for, this is not a place where one may misbehave. At what stage does formerly subversive practice, intended to consider the institutional relation of art and its audience, lose its sharp edges and become just another confirmation of existing social hierarchies? At the time of Tiravanija's show, the debate about public and private space was hot in the UK as privatisation of formerly public space by corporations was taking place everywhere. It would have been more interesting to see Tiravanija's work tapping into those concerns, acknowledging both his privileged background as a son of a diplomat, and those of people living in affluent South Kensington. But the questions of reflection and responsibility were left hanging up in the air. Perhaps one way of overcoming these problems would have been for an artist to approach another context through their own position and locality.

However, a pertinent question that seemed to remain unanswered would be what kind of social, political or personal reality was being proposed on top of those by the artist? There is also another thing participation cannot ignore, and that is the gap between those who will and can participate and those who won't or can't.

Even if we view participation in the most positive light, as Beech argues referring to Jacques Rancière, its effects are socially divisive. "The critique of participation is, here, immanent to the development of participation as an inclusive practice that does not and cannot include all."[31] From this perspective, participation appears somewhat as excluding, since it sets up a system that divides society into participants and non-participants, or, those recognized and those unrecognized. Participation cannot presuppose equality in a hierarchical society, although it can try to find ways to overcome divisions. And that is it, participation is often based on some kind of claim or promise, often to do with abolishing hierarchies. It is therefore essential for it to acknowledge the constraints, problems and subjectivities of it's own field, themselves all located within larger social and political contexts (and those of the art world). By doing so, it can be understood that participants are often invited, and that the invitation itself already involves a hierarchical dimension. Inevitably, the participants have to accept to at least some degree, the requirements and parameters of the art project, however much room for their own personal creativity and agency is seemingly given.

Beech continues by saying that basically, participation fails to fulfil its promise. "In both art and politics, participation is an image of a much longed for social reconciliation, but it is not a mechanism for bringing about the

31 Beech 2008.

required transformation" he says.[32] In new-liberal politics, participation seemingly aims to provide the solutions of disagreement without the actual structural disagreement itself. And in art, participation often seems to offer to bridge the gap between art and social life without the need for any messy and painful but also useful confrontations.

[32] ibid.

After the first event of Eden, one performer is very upset, saying this was not at all what he expected. He is the youngest of the group and told us in the audition that he wants to become an actor. During the rehearsals, he was the one that seemed the keenest, perhaps a bit too much, as despite being told to just to play himself, he seemed to be continually overacting. We take up the issue with him, repeating him once more the nature of this performance and the rules of the game, comforting him that he can leave the space or tell the others to stop if the performance starts to get too uncomfortable. Despite that, he won't show up again. I suspect that it is the unpredictability of the whole thing that gets him.

Let's go forward in time to the year, 2008 when the UK was hit by a major recession, banks were nationalized, and the GPI was an all-time low. It was two years after my graduation from Goldsmiths, one of the most hyped Art Colleges in London, where seemingly the most talented and the bright studied to prepare for their glorious future in the art world. In spite of that, two years after, only a few had been signed up with commercial galleries and showing work and actually gaining some kind of income from it. Most of us were either working in shitty jobs or had left the city for good. I considered myself reasonably lucky. The library assistant job in the Uni library was far from being the worst. Amongst various jobs, many of my friends worked as gallery invigilators or assistants. In which, needless to say, the pay was very low, and the level of hierarchy at the place of work, high, symptomatic of the society at large. On the other hand, the hierarchy amongst the white middle class is not, the worst kind. Also, one was lucky to be paid at all in the arts industry, in which many people, to climb the career ladder had to work for free. Later with the arrival of Cameron's big society in 2010, volunteerism became an even more accepted way to fill the cuts made to social services and culture by the government.

At the same time, we were desperately trying to chase after any arts opportunity, commission, exhibition or a grant. The task of filling the pages of an Arts Council project application was frequent subject matter in discussions amongst the few of us who still stubbornly kept trying. Having to justify one's project and answer harrowing questions on social engagement and impact, spread over 40 pages, was enough to turn even the most enthusiastic off. But the interest in participatory practices was in full bloom. We were prepared to work hard and didn't care so much whether we would be paid or not. The most important thing was to make work that would be seen and somehow recognized.

I lived in a tiny flat, the size of a shoebox, in Stratford, in multicultural and not so affluent (yet) East London with my boyfriend at the time. With two part-time low paid jobs we were barely able to afford the rent. The image that confronted me daily while gazing out of a window were huge construction cranes disrupting the view. They were so heavy and such an eyesore, and not really what I identified as peace and refuge after a day of work. I remember thinking of it as an analogy of the transforming social body — all of this excessive building, up, up and up, not really dealing with what was in front of us. Stratford, the area around us was changing very fast indeed, even faster than the rest of London, as it had been granted the privilege to be the primary site of the Olympic games of 2012. The site was now surrounded by a bright blue fence, filled with the majestic skeletal figures of construction cranes and new buildings

popping up like mushrooms. The collective dreams of multi-cultural communities for a better standard of living were being made redundant and replaced by the Olympic dream. This was indeed about regenerating east London, but not for the people who lived there then but for an entirely new more affluent population. The rents and property prices in Stratford had started to rise abruptly, as if London wasn't expensive enough already, forcing those less fortunate to move further and further towards the edges of the city. A lot of property was being demolished to make room for a new Olympic site, and as a result, whole communities were evicted and shattered. One of those was a Traveller/Romani community in Clays Lane, near Stratford, who were given two weeks' notice to move out before their site was completely demolished.[33] The same year I created a self-financed video project on that exact and now demolished site called *Clays Lane (Olympian Flame immortal)*. The members of the Clays Lane community were inundated by the contact requests from artists and journalists, and at the same time suspicious of such introductions. Regardless of all the attention, the eviction process was not disturbed.[34]

"Great art inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better", says Chair Liz Forgan's report in Art Council England's annual review in 2009. One of the Arts Council's big projects was the *Cultural Olympiad* that organized many art related projects around the planned Olympics.[35] This involved many commissions, inviting artists to work together with minorities or those socially less privileged. Artists as bridge builders was a relatively new term, naively tossed around. The rhetoric that was used often referred to the power of the arts to transcend social and economic barriers.

Cultural Olympiad was a particular one and a compelling case. Money was pumped into it for obvious reasons, arguably one being a sort of whitewashing to turn attention away from negative side effects to do with the growing Olympic site. There were those amongst us who had been critically addressing some of the strategies and rhetoric of participation and the effects of gentrification. But who would listen when money was finally pouring in, at last, we could try to get some of it. Many amongst us who had not previously thought of working with communities started to change their strategies.

[33] The Clays Lane housing estate in East London was, purchased against the will of its nearly 450 tenants in 2007, to make way for the site of the 2012 Olympics. See Julian Cheyne speaking to Charlotte Baxter (2008). https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/jun/02/olympics2012 [Accessed 06.03.2019]

[34] Clays Lane (Olympian Flame Immortal) (2008) video was filmed in Clays Lane Traveller's site in Newham, London, which had been demolished to give way to the 2012 Olympics. The inhabitants were relocated against their will. In this video performers form a bizarre mimicry choir miming along with the Olympic Anthem, using one of the demolished homes at Clays Lane as a stage. See: http://www.hennahalonen.com/videoworks.html#clayslane [Accessed 06.03.2019]

[35] The London Olympic Games' Cultural Olympiad included 500 events nationwide throughout the UK, spread over four years and culminating in the London 2012 Festival. The cost of the events was over £97 million with funding provided by Arts Council England, Legacy Trust UK and the Olympic Lottery Distributor.

It might be important to address at this point that participation is not only a term related to the art world but extends far, to a broader area of the social and political world surrounding us. It first became a part of a new leftist rhetoric in governmental politics in the 50s and 60s. Later, in the UK, New labour (1997-2010) deployed rhetoric almost identical to that of the practitioners of socially engaged art. They used it as a smoke screen, for their own political purposes. Participation has since then established itself as an integral part of cognitive capitalism, in which the culture industry is playing a pivotal role. In the UK According to Arts council England "the market segment of the industry generated £15.8 billion in turnover in 2015, an increase of 9.5 per cent since 2013. Book publishing, performing arts and artistic creation were the largest categories of arts and culture industry activities based on turnover, accounting for 33, 24 and 20 percent of the entire industry, respectively."[36]

However, this is not a phenomenon specific only to the UK. It is reasonable to say that, also globally many participatory projects have been too easily co-opted by governments and private industries as a means of creating an illusion of social inclusion. This tendency to channel public funding for art towards artistic practices that appear to generate value, replacing social services, has also been gaining popularity in recent years in Finland.[37] One does not have to be a conspiracy theorist to see a connection to the increase of the new liberalist politics since the 90s, that has resulted into exponential cuts in education, social services and culture.

However, this is not only a nation, culture nor discipline-specific problem. Similar systematic problems expand from the art industry to include art education and research. Aligning with the arguments proposed by theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri[38] creativity and performativity have become bases for capitalist production, turning knowledge into a type of commodity. Therefore, it is important to think about the parameters and problems of also concerning artistic research as complicit with the knowledge industry under the liberal democratic paradigm. The notion of production has been given an entirely new meaning as art and labour have become dematerialised and expanded. This shift towards a cultural industry and a knowledge economy has resulted in a situation in which even so-called social or

[36] Arts Council England on the economic contribution of the arts and culture industry to the UK and its constituent national and regional economies. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Contribution_arts_culture_industry_UK_economy.pdf [Accessed 06.03.2019]

[37] One of the critical voices in this discourse has been the Finnish artist Anna Tuori, who has rightly problematized the seeming disappearance of the freedom of art through instrumentalization. Tuori refers to a programme: *Welfare from Art and Culture*, initiated by the Finnish education and culture and social and health ministry in 2010, which redefined the rhetoric concerning the purpose and role of art in society, putting emphasis on so-called 'welfare art', art that serves a purpose in helping others. See: http://alastonkriitikko.blogspot.com/2016/01/vieraskyna-anna-tuori.html [Accessed 02.03.2019]

[38] Hardt and Negri first engaged with the term immaterial labour coined by Maurizio Lazzarato in their book *Empire* (2000) According to them, "immaterial labor as labor creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response." They consider "immaterial labor as 'affective labor,' involving both body and mind, that produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement or passion." (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 108-111.)

immaterial practices (art and research) have not been able to escape this commodification and are rapidly becoming mere marketing tools of the creative industries, which encourage associating art with measurable value. It is not hard to grasp the danger of art being absorbed into social or cultural think-tank studies that focus on demonstrable outcomes.

Bourriaud's critique of the commodified art object in *Relational Aesthetics* in a way turned against itself by expanding and incorporating social events and exchanges into the field of art's commodities.[39] Dave Beech articulates this: "When you consider that participation in the new art includes having dinner, drinking beer, designing a new candy bar and running a travel agency, there seems to be justification in talking about a declining ambition for the politics of participation."[40]

There is always a danger that art becomes instrumentalized and loses both its critical edge and autonomy as art. This could result in misplaced responsibility, in which art and artists have to perform services that should fundamentally belong to the health and social services of a democratic society. The task of critically addressing this issue is even more pressing when we are facing further cuts within the public sector and increasingly socially divisive cultural policies. Evidently, there are many interesting and similarly well-intentioned art projects within the field of participation, and looking at it positively they can play an important role in the much-needed expansion of the art world, and the link between art and society at large. The roles and functions of art and artists differ, depending on the milieu in which a work of art exists. Instead of asking what artists do, we should ask how and when they do, whatever it is they do? Yet we cannot ignore the contradictions that naturally arise from the artist's intentions that are influenced by systemic demands. Due to the channelling of the funding towards socially engaged projects, artists are too often placed between a rock and a hard place, having to adjust their practices according to funding requirements and quantifiable outcomes. Although, one cannot completely shake off the responsibility and integrity of individual artists, it is not their responsibility to predict or justify the outcomes of their art. The biggest problem here is systemic and structural. Much of the critique of participatory practices has been addressing the convivial tendency, identifying it as one of their shortcomings. Bishop, too, signals this when she criticises Bourriaud's relational aesthetic replacing dissent and critique

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[39] As a side note: it is interesting to think about similarity of the rhetoric's used currently about the process of digitalization, in which digital spaces, such as social media, are acting as a participatory and democratic platforms but are also a huge commercial source. Data sourcing and machine learning are able to use human interaction more effectively as currency and commodities. Even further with the view of exponential development of machine learning and AI, to think how machines interact with humans and vice versa, has become a topical subject. For example Mark

B. N. Hansen has engaged with a study of the humans and computer information and the potentiality for machines to use human face in order to connect more effectively with humans. (Cf. Hansen, 2003.)

[40] Beech 2008.

with sociability – or what he calls conviviality. "The problem that arises with Bourriaud's notion of 'structure' is that it has an erratic relationship to the work's ostensible subject matter, or content." says Bishop.[41] We could also draw a link here to new liberal ambitions of the de-politicization of the public through the promotion of consensual society as briefly articulated before. First of all, there's the "ethical regime of art," in which artistic images are evaluated in terms of their utility to society. Bishop claims that an orientation towards the ethical is part of a larger trend in the 1990s, symptomatic of what has been called our "post-political" age. Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Rancière and others have observed an "ethical turn" in philosophy, and this is also reflected in contemporary politics.[42] The rise of communitarian discourse in the mid-1990s was underpinned, as Jennifer Roche notes, "by a desire to promote a homogeneous and consensual view of society: an "ethical community" in which political dissensus is dissolved."[43] Bishop also connects the Ethical turn with the rise of the role of the curators, as fair mediators between artists and audiences, and argues against the reiterating ethical themes in critical discourse. New Institutionalism paved the way for new kinds of museums where discursive practices between the audience, artists and institution started to play a pivotal role. Art attempted to break away from elitism, becoming more accessible. The rise of New Institutionalism resulted in art museums and institutions programming activities that would attract larger audiences, attempting to create experiences that are easily digestible and understandable.

"Between 2008 and 2011 we'll invest in excess of £1.6 billion of public money from the government and the National Lottery to create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country."[44]

In her article "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces" (2007) Chantal Mouffe points out that, "Nowadays artistic and cultural production play a central role in the process of capital valorisation and, through 'neo-management', artistic critique has become an important element of capitalist productivity. This has led some people to claim that art had lost its critical power because any form of critique is automatically recuperated and neutralized by capitalism."[45] Such a cultural normalisation of radical ideas (recuperation) is indeed one of the main problems concerning participatory practices as they constantly run the risk of being swallowed

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[41] Bishop, 2004, 64.

[42] In *The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and politics* Rancière suggests that the "ethical turn" in late capitalism has weakened the political and cultural structures of the West and has replaced those structures with a vast "ethical community", that tends to assimilate, ignore or perceive "the excluded" as a threat (Rancière 2005,189),

[43] Roche 2008, 204-209.

[44] Source: Arts Council England on the economic contribution of the arts and culture industry to the UK and its constituent national and regional economies. This is a second refresh of the original study, which was undertaken in 2013, with the first refresh in 2015. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Contribution_arts_culture_industry_UK_economy.pdf [Accessed 05.03.2019]

up and incorporated into very systems they are criticizing.[46]

Mouffe refers in particular to Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello who have argued how the resistance of the different movements of the 1960s had been harnessed in the development of the Post-Fordist networked economy and transformed into new forms of control. "The aesthetic strategies of the counter-culture: the search for authenticity, the ideal of self-management, the anti-hierarchical exigency, are now used in order to promote the conditions required by the current mode of capitalist regulation, replacing the disciplinary framework characteristic of the Fordist period."[47]

In *Capitalist Realism* Mark Fisher points out, that what we are dealing with now is not the pre-corporation of materials that previously seemed to possess subversive potentials, but instead, their *precorporation*: the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture. He says how "'alternative' and 'independent' don't designate something outside mainstream culture. They are styles, in fact, dominant ones, within the mainstream." This is he points out, "the old struggle between detournement and recuperation, between subversion and incorporation".[48]

However, Fisher's definition stays quite simplistic, once more creating oppositions as a start of a critical formulation. Consequently, the whole concept of recuperation would already, on its own, merit a more expanded and complex discussion, but this time, I have to close that door.

[45] Mouffe 2007. (See: http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/mouffe.html [Accessed 16.05.2019])

[46] "Recuperation" is a term proposed by, i.e. Guy Debord and Paolo Virno as one of the names the Left in Europe has given to the various processes by which its critique of existing conditions is compromised by being channelled through dominant structures. These effects are produced by the state, as well as market forces when it legitimates and funds its own opposition.

[47] Mouffe 2007.

[48] Fisher 2009, 9.

I can sense the group getting anxious now, as nothing has happened for something that feels like hours. Are we going forward or are we still staying in the same empty room? We've had this conversation, they seem to feel, repeatedly, for a long time now, or maybe it is my paranoia that's talking. We are stuck in this small room, and nobody is moving forward, in fact, nobody has even tried to open the door in the front of us. We seem to be like the dinner party crowd in Buñuel's *The Exterminating Angel*, stuck for reasons that are not obvious to anyone.[49] There are always those who'd rather ignore the whole thing, turn a blind eye, and pretend they never heard it. Keep going, keep going, nothing to see here. Is it laziness to details? Or are they so blinded by their own agenda that they'd rather not see what is so obvious? Or is someone encouraging them to be like this? Should we blame the authorities, the ones pulling strings? Or, the ones too lazy to see, too accustomed to effortless living, entertaining art and easy answers.

[49] *The Exterminating Angel* (1962) is a film by Luis Buñuel in which a group of upper class friends are invited to a house for a dinner but find themselves inexplicably unable to leave. It is an absurd and comical take on the social habits and dependencies of the upper classes.

After two performances we alter the rules. We tell the game master that he can cast himself into the games from now on. Until this point, he has been throwing the dice and chose the people standing nearest to him depending on the number of the dice. He has been able to both start and also interrupt the games but has never been physically involved in them himself.
No other performer is told about the alteration. All this is done for two reasons, to keep the gamemaster entertained for the whole duration of three hours and create a new sense of unpredictability in Eden. I wonder if the audience can sense this.

Participatory Art and the Aesthetic

There has been a tendency to stress the social readability over the visual in so many recent projects, which has led to a situation where consideration of the social processes has overruled artworks' aesthetic dimensions. As Rudolf Frieling points out in *Art of Participation* from 1950 to Now, "when an artwork is subject to public intervention, it does not necessarily become more interesting or aesthetically charged".[50] What is exhibited is rather the extent to which simple communality or antagonistic forces are acted out.

While, there is no clear criteria for how to value successful art, and as argued before it should not be expected to produce quantifiable outcomes, critical emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of the artwork needs to be addressed. Artworks are not only positioned within the society at large but are also reliant on the procedures and history of art itself, however elitist this may sound. The aesthetic impact contains a variety of languages that need to be taken into account, including affect and technical mastery.

For Jacques Rancière aesthetic is inherently tied to politics. Aesthetic practices are political because they contest, impact, and alter what can be seen, said and done. As a way to reject the single and definite meanings, he promotes a form of aesthetics that does not pass on knowledge to a passive and ignorant spectator, but instead pushes forward the creativity of the spectator. Rancière's emancipated spectator is an intellectually curious spectator, who actively interprets and translates the aesthetic experience offered to her. These aesthetic practices are, for Rancière, one of the primary means of creating dissensus.[51]

As Dave Beech notes, "the critique of participation must release us from the grip of the simple binary logic

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[50] Frieling 2008, 48.

[51] See: Cf. Tanke "What is the Aesthetic Regime?" http://parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia12/parrhesia12_tanke.pdf [Accessed 06.04.2019]

which opposes participation to exclusion and passivity".[52] That is to say, merely making the passive spectator a participant by requiring physical action, is simply not enough. This kind of shift from passivity to activity does not offer change but enforces binaries. Rancière articulates this by saying that, "emancipation begins when we challenge the duality between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions."[53] If participation inherently imposes its own forms of limitations on the participant, then the simple binary of viewing and acting needs to be replaced with new systems of agency, control and power-relations that potentially address the whole set of culture's modes of subjectivity and social relations.[54]

This can be seen through Rancière's elaboration on his thesis of politics, in which he describes the exercise of power as police and its disruption as politics. Rancière states that politics is not the exercise of power, but the very interruption of this logic. According to Rancière a genuinely political or democratic episode is different to what we would usually consider as such. He says that "politics is a specific break with the logic of the *arkhê* (the principle of Justice, of the Good). It does not simply presuppose a break with the 'normal' distribution of positions that defines who exercises power and who is subject to it. It also requires a break with the idea that there exist dispositions 'specific' to these positions."[55]

Thus for Rancière, a properly political event is conducted by participants who defy their usually assigned spaces and identities and ways of acting. As a result of this, social categories lose their determinacy, with workers no longer being workers, and students no longer being students, at least in the way that the dominant socio-political order defines them and, in turn, sets social and political expectations for them.

In her article for *Artforum* (February 2006), titled "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents," Bishop claims that socially engaged art has fallen prey to circumscribed critical examinations. She argues that the discussions have focused mainly on the working processes and intentions, on social dimensions of how given collaboration has

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[52] Beech 2008.

[53] Rancière 2009,13.

[54] The suggestion in *Emancipated Spectator* is that phenomena like participatory art only reinforce the idea that the spectators are usually passive receivers. Rancière points out that predetermined outcomes or meanings cannot be emancipatory in the strong sense. "Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting." He says, it can only take place when the viewers observes, selects compares and interprets.(P.13) Rancière is

further referring to Brecht's epic theatre and Artaud's theatre of cruelty encapsulating the basic attitude of abolishing this reasoning distance by making the spectators conscious of the social situation and illusory structures for the former, or making them abandon their positions as spectators, to become active participants in a collective performance for the latter (ibid.,8). However, he is arguing that revelation of the underlying structures is not enough to activate the spectator intellectually. Instead he points out that one does not necessarily lose one's presuppositions with one's illusions nor it is fruitful to position passivity and activity in opposition (ibid.,11)

[55] Rancière 2010, 31.

been undertaken instead of the aesthetic *impact* of artworks. That is to refer to those characteristics and processes that actually make art ART and not something else. Not something that is instrumentalized and harnessed as a social or political tool. In the rhetoric of participation aesthetic qualities become too easily secondary aspects in the artwork.

"Artists are increasingly judged by their working process — the degree to which they supply good or bad models of collaboration", Bishop writes. She also notes that there can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of collaborative art, within these circles, because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond. She continues: "While I am broadly sympathetic to that ambition, I would argue that it is also crucial to discuss, analyse, and compare such work critically as art."[56]

Consequently, as discussed above, there is a temptation, to treat participatory art as a solution to the whole range of problems concerning social inclusion, cultural engagement and the passivity of the spectator. The participation of the general public in artworks does not necessarily challenge the social or cultural divisions that separate us from each other, nor does it make the artist and the participant somehow equal in the process and the outcome. Even

though, this is how participatory art can often be viewed, it would be unfair to expect a single artwork to overcome systemic problems. In fact, participation, at its worse, can simply re-enact that relationship in an ethnographic fashion and paper over the cracks created by social exclusion.

According to Bishop the best collaborative practices of the past ten years address the contradictory pull between autonomy and social intervention and reflect this antimony both in the structure of the works and in the conditions of its reception.[57] She also argues that the discomfort and frustration associated with avant-garde practices (e.g. Dada, Surrealism)—or absurdity or doubt—can be crucial elements of a work's aesthetic impact and are essential to gaining new perspectives of the human condition.[58]

I would prefer to promote an understanding of conflictual participation, one that acts as a rupture, as a new kind of entry into 'fields of knowledge'. It might be precisely here where something happens, I would argue, that it is only when an artist comes up against the limits of her practice that the work becomes truly interesting. That it is this kind of art that we need — however uncomfortable, exploitative, or confusing it may first appear. What we also need is new ways of emancipating, perceiving, thinking and approaching, and

[56] Bishop 2006a, 180.

[57] ibid.,183.

[58] ibid.,181.

art that is art because it is strange, surprising, risky and bold. An art that contains disagreement, tensions and uncertainty as essential ingredients of both its construction and viewing processes. Much of the participatory art under neoliberalism, serves a double agenda: offering an entertaining, accessible art of and for the people, while at the same time, it reminds us that today we all experience a constant pressure to perform, all the time and, that we have no choice but to participate. Perhaps the most interesting projects attempt to occupy this rift, revealing and/or testing the limits of those forces that keep us participating, pushing us to the breaking point to see when is it that we will refuse to continue the game.[59]

[59] An interesting example with regard to this could be a work that functions as sort of social experiment such as Lars Von Trier's *Psychomobile - The World Clock* (1996). *Psychomobile* took place at Kunstforeningen in Copenhagen in 1996. It had a cast of 53 actors who played as many characters. They inhabited 19 differently designed rooms in which the visitors could walk freely. The installation ran for three hours a day, six days a week, over two months. Governed by strict rules in a form of a script, it developed into a dramatic and intense experimental mix of reality TV and absurd theatre.The actions and the moods of the characters were dictated by a movement of ants located in the desert near Los Alamos, New Mexico. This was present through a live video feed and would trigger new actions in the performance, which as a result, incorporated a principle of endless unpredictability.

These two bodies evoke the subject under the gaze of "the other" without an agency to impact. I wonder will they rebel at some point? This option is unlikely considering that these are hired professional advertising models. But they must have limits too, what can be achieved through a constant push and pull, foregrounding and backgrounding. How far can I push them to find something sincere or genuine?
But in here we are still captured by this in between space. This is like a white page, a space filled with emptiness, territory of endless possibilities, end and beginning.
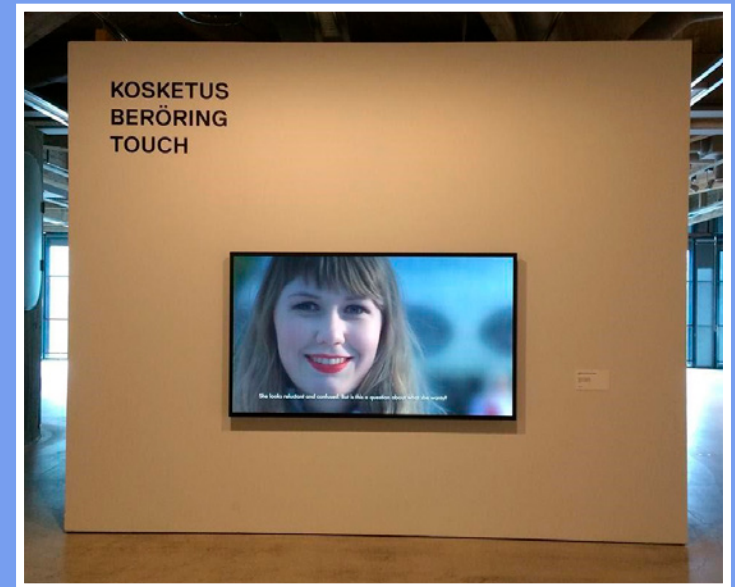
Moderate Manipulations (2012) at Touch Exhibition, Emma Museum 2018

HOLE: Moderate Manipulations (2012)
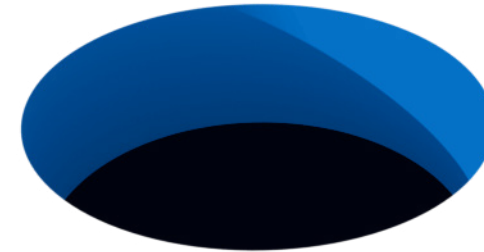
CLICK THE HOLE TO START THE VIDEO

Moderate Manipulations makes use of Finnish architect Matti Suuronen's Futuro house, which he designed in 1968 and offers a critical view on the changing environment and politics. Its' aim is to show how positions are subject to continuous internal and external change, and to examine the relation between the built and natural environment. Two professional models were hired and dressed in outfits resembling Marimekko's fashion gowns as they cite futurological scenarios from Mika Mannermaa's book on futurological research.[60] In the repeated scenarios the divergence between individual and 'role' and the relation between the artist and the participants, aesthetics and politics are emphasized and questioned.

Repetition puts emphasis not only on the power relations but also on the expectations for the future. The film becomes a strategic apparatus, almost a simulation of a chess game, where positions are constantly repeated, re-considered and slightly adjusted.[61]

[60] In his book *Tulevaisuuden Hallinta-skenaariot Strategiatyöskentelyssä* 1999 Mannermaa lists potential futurological scenarios from Nuclear Disaster to different technological developments.

[61] This text about the work Moderate Manipulations, has been written by me in 2012 and can be found also in: https://www.av-arkki.fi/works/moderate-manipulations/ [Accessed 30.07.2019]

After a while, their big smiles become like creepy masks. As usual, I ask the camera operator to keep the camera running after I have shouted cut, hoping that something will emerge from that moment. A glimpse of uncertainty flashes through their faces. We enter a condition of psychological estrangement, the unbridgeable gap between our imagined and actual selves.

The group is growing restless. My stories are not enough to keep them entertained when they feel physically entrapped. Some of them also complain that my presence is oppressive and my tone rather patronising.

And then out of the blue, the door opens, and we can see a long corridor ahead of us. Everybody is rushing through the doorway at the same time causing a temporary bottleneck.

At the end of the long corridor, in the corner of the intersection there is a white circular staircase spiralling upwards. Yet, the scene is not complete as such. A nude woman is going up and down the staircase as if stuck in a repeated film glitch. A glitch in a film usually causes random unexpected effects on the material. It might result in the film getting stuck on one part, repeating the fragment with a variety of results. Glitches index the physical world and break the fourth wall by jolting the spectator from the intended experience, creating random pass-ways between two very different worlds.

The nude woman keeps going up and down, up and down on the staircase. Up again and down again. Offered here for our gaze, yet seemingly oblivious of our presence, only captured by the purposeless action as if controlled from outside, destined to repeat the same performance until exhaustion.

The miscommunication that occurs in the glitch between sender and receiver during transcoding indexes a specific temporal moment, and exposes societal paranoia by illustrating dependence on the male gaze and digital systems. A female object, such as Duchamp's' fractured nude descending the staircase, in a glitch that never occurs as the same. At the other end of the corridor there is a room with several freestanding blue doors. Another nude woman looking almost exactly like the woman stuck in the staircase, is repeatedly stepping in and out of one doorway, in and out, again and again. The two women are distinguished from each other by different tattoos covering their naked bodies, arms, legs and backs. Their queerness resists the potential categorization. The repetition of the same yet different, macabre performance of time suspended. The psychological time is rendered in abrupt fragments, with physical reality intermingling with mental apparitions.

The glitch disappears, and the film moves forward in time, and the repeated action is interrupted, when a man, perhaps in his forties wearing a suit, enters the room. His presence and his gaze seem to be a signal for a woman who leaves her place in the staircase, turns around and starts to walk slowly towards another nude woman who has been similarly stuck in a doorway. The two women walk towards each other and stop in a spot facing one another, mirroring the tilts of the head, the frown of eyebrows, and the slight smiles. Once more time is slowed down, yet differently. After a while they return to their previous spots and seem to get caught by the glitch again.

The group seems to get tired of watching this scene. The corridor does not seem to offer another way out other than returning through the same route that we took before. Yet this seems the less desirable option, considering that I have already lost some participants along the way, and having to cross through the same path might result in losing many more. I wish I could cut across the labyrinth, cut through the walls, yet there are no pictures to be seen, into which we could hop. While I am thinking, the wall on the left opens, and a few people enter the space, the space that we occupy. It seems there was, a hidden door just beside, camouflaged as a wall. We cross over and arrive in a room we haven't been to before. In this room there are white walls. On the left a blue door. Red, blue, black and yellow rectangular shapes on the right, reflected to infinity by mirrored walls. The light is bright. There is a humming noise and occasional human sounds. It starts as whispering across the room but gets gradually louder and suddenly all the other sounds seem to disappear.

"Do you really think" her voice is rising "that I like it, when she assumes things like that? Do you really" pause, as she is composing herself "think that I will allow someone to tell me what to do, that I am to be taken as some kind of an idiot? I don't give a fuck if she is offended. Who does she think she is? No, I am not going to keep quiet or lower my voice. Everyone should hear this!" She looks around almost victoriously with a sudden air of confidence around her. "Your snobbery disgusts me. You…" She proceeds, momentarily out of breath. The person beside her, the one who was trying to calm her, looks around. It is apparent that he is trying to judge how many people in the room are hearing this. His gaze meets mine, and he shrugs his shoulders apologetically. He says to her: "I don't think you are being fair to her. That is not polite, I am not…" "Your snobbery, your hypocritical attitude, and your convivial spirit, disgust me", she interrupts sharply, "do not talk, be odourless, colourless and tasteless. Oh, do not touch, she might get hurt, offended". She says, now mockingly: "You are acting in the same fucking macabre comedy with her, always ready to please her." "Remember The Stanford Prison Experiment? The role play of guards and prisoners that was supposed to reveal something about human nature and how we respond to authority, whether we just conform to the given roles. Remember how they

went about testing these questions and what they found was astonishing, the real example of power of authority.[62] Or, the Milgram experiment, remember that? The one with electric shocks?[63] I bet if she told you so, you would torture me too."

"Obedience, obedience, the most treasured possession" She continues mockingly, but now slightly out of breath from her long monologue. She looks around again and starts to realize that nobody is responding, nobody is looking at her, nobody is giving her that encouraging nod, as a matter of fact, most people are looking away or at the devices placed on their hand, seemingly very concentrated. "She really shouldn't tell us what to do, she is not authorized. This is not like last time, that was a different" she says, but this time in a less convinced and in a more hesitant manner. Then, she pauses for a moment, as if trying to figure out what to say. Everyone is still looking away, careful in their attempts of pretending they have not noticed anything unusual. Her companion, the one who was standing beside her, has moved further away from her, closer to the wall. He is looking at the framed image, seemingly very concentrated.

She looks down, and sighs: "Perhaps you are right, I should shut up, maybe it is just me, I am being paranoid. She should know the way, that is why she is in that position, right? Ok, ok, I will stop now, yes yes, sorry. I get like this sometimes, bad experiences you know. But perhaps it is me, I asked for them. No, this time it will be different."

Trying to regain my authority and redirect the attention of the group, I clear my throat loudly and make a gesture with my head, asking them to follow me.

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[62] The Stanford prison experiment was a 1971 experiment that attempted to investigate the psychological effects of perceived power, focusing on the struggle between prisoners and prison officers. The two-week investigation into the psychology of prison life had to be ended after only six days because of what the situation was doing to the college students who participated. In only a few days, the guards became sadistic, and the prisoners became depressed and showed signs of extreme stress. The experiment showed that the effects of perceived power and simulated roles, rather than personality traits caused the participants' behaviour. However, the findings of the experiment have been subject to some scrutiny and it has been claimed that results were anti-scientific and there was some pre-planned acting involved. See also: https://www.prisonexp.org [Accessed 06.03.2019]

In 2005 The Polish visual artist Arthur Zmijevski created a reenactment of the The Stanford prison experiment called *Repetition*. In place of college students, Żmijewski hired unemployed Polish men to enact the roles of prisoners and guards in a simulated prison environment.

[63] In so-called Milgram experiments participants followed orders from an invisible authority figure to administer seemingly dangerous and potentially lethal electric shocks to other participants, in a belief that they were assisting an experiment. Milgram experiments started in 1961 and were conducted by Stanley Milgram

I notice that one audience member keeps placing himself in the middle of the performers, often obstructing the view. He seems to have stayed for over two hours now following different games and always positions himself in the middle of action. This is bit unusual, as although it is not always obvious who is a member of the audience and who is a performer, the audience tends to take a step back when the action starts happening. I feel that this particular person is trying to test the system to see what happens when he is not following the rules. I am a bit worried if someone decides to try this with the two naked performers. I know that they are tough ladies, and we have gone through safety precautions concerning this and nothing has happened so far. It looks almost as though people are intimidated by their unconventional femininity, strength and queerness and keep a respectable distance.

Agonistic Practice

Both Bishop and Rancière are supporters of agonistic thinking and practice based on ongoing exchange marked by conflict or disagreement. Agonism is a theory, that emphasizes the potentially positive aspects of some forms of political conflict. It perceives that such conflicts have an important position in political life and seeks to examine how we might channel these conflicts in productive ways. Agonism tries to discover what kind of relationships, roles and rules will be involved in political (and social) disagreements.

One of the many great influences on agonism as a site of struggle is Michel Foucault's understanding of politics, in which the relation of different forces constitutes a constant clash on the appropriation of values.[64] He points out the variety of relations depending on the acting forces and the site of struggle. To speak up is to have an effect on the society, to disagree is to nourish a productive conversation, to keep it going. The one with an ability to speak upholds the power. Foucault articulated this in his book *Fearless speech*, in which his examples go back to Ancient Greek society. He uses the term *Parrhesia* that appeared in ancient Greek texts throughout the end of the fourth century and during the fifth century B.C. It means to "speak freely" and "to speak boldly", implicating not only the freedom of speech but the obligation of an individual to speak out, speak the truth for the common advantage or good, even if it might jeopardize one's position. There is a risk involved in speaking differently, speaking against a status quo, and according to Foucault, this risk should be embraced in any healthy democracy. He says: "For parrhesia, the danger always comes from the fact that the spoken truth is capable of hurting or angering the interlocutor. Parrhesia is thus always

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a 'game' between the one who speaks the truth and the interlocutor."[65] Yet not everyone in society is in a position of speaking up. This reading of Foucault closely connects him with Rancière whose approach to different *epistemes* is quite similar. According to Rancière consensual democracy eliminates the political nature of disagreement through the logic of inclusion/exclusion. Furthermore, it is through the existence of this dispute of divisions (of those who have a part and those who have no part), that the community exists as a political community.[66] The democracy should grant everyone the right to speak, but it doesn't matter if it has no outcome. What Rancière considers to be 'the real emergence of free speech' disrupts the accustomed order of discourse. It "occurs precisely in places that were not supposed to be places for free speech. It always happens in the form of transgression. Politics means precisely this, that you speak at a time and in a place you're not expected to speak."[67] Therefore, he does not believe that people need an external 'truth bearer', be it a single intellectual or an institution and therefore cannot agree with the top-down transmission of information, not even when it is coming from a philosopher.[68]

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[65] Foucault 2001, 17.

[66] For Rancière politics is examined from the perspective what he calls the 'distribution of the sensible'. He argues that: "distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and at the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have part in this distribution." (Ranciére 2004, 12.)

[67] Anonymous, 2006

[68] "The terms can change their meaning, and the positions can be reversed, but the main thing is that the structure counter-posing two categories-those who possess capacity and those who do not-persists." (Rancière 2009, 13.)

It seems that the nature of the games is starting to change. Not drastically, but there are new tensions that are hard to describe. The game, in which the performers are instructed to touch the face of a blindfolded person seems to be getting gradually more intense, either more tender or violent. Nobody has complained about being hurt, but some performers tell us that one particular person is starting to get carried away. We must address this with them, although the performers know that they can stop and leave any time, no violence is accepted. The notion of a comfort zone might be more flexible here because of the social pressure to participate. I am starting to wonder whether I have created a monster.

The conversation

The awkwardness caused by the shouting woman seems to be dying out, and it might have somehow made the group more relaxed. Most of the people are walking around aimlessly. Some are just observing. There are quite a few of them, and most of the time we are in danger of bumping into each other.

Even softly colliding with so many bodies feels occasionally like an irritation to me. It seems as if the crowd is a single, sensate organism and I am a part of it, unable to separate myself.

Two people are seated at a table, other people are standing or walking around, murmuring. Words fly around as fragments, at times indistinguishable. I am eavesdropping on a man talking to a younger woman. He looks vaguely familiar to me. Short hair, slim, glasses, in his mid-forties. Perhaps I've seen him at openings somewhere. But I don't know him well enough to join them and, in a way, it would not be appropriate considering my position. Instead, I try even harder to hear their conversation. His voice is quiet, but its low frequency helps me to separate words from the humming surround sound, that is continually coming and going. He describes how he feels that there is apparently some kind of disagreement or tension going on here, it also feels as if he needs to make the younger woman aware of his authority. "What seems to be going on here is a creation of a new fictional system or space that enforces the audience to reflect on their position and consider what is being staged." He says. Lowering his voice as if confessing something, he continues saying how he feels this is very Rancierian because the space and the acting are unpredictable and confusing. That you can sense there is a system in place and something important going on. "However", he says, "no-one seems to really know what is it", The humming sound gets louder, and the man stops talking for a moment. The younger woman he was talking to a minute ago looks thoughtful, she smiles a bit and seems to have liked what he said. She says she shares his feeling, and that perhaps at the core of this, is a kind of participation through disorientation and confusion, that encourages the audience to act and think and break

free from the constraints of thought and behavioural rules. Meanwhile, a person, looking like the woman who was arguing with her partner before, has been standing very close to them all along. She seems to have been lost in her own thoughts, and is acting as if she has hardly heard the man and younger woman having a discussion. However, her presence is hard not to notice. It feels somehow heavy and oppressive.

I look at a room and see mirrors everywhere, and I can no longer recall how to perform in this space. The experience, the bodies, are multiplied and fragmented, and overlapped with overheard conversations.

The younger woman has been quiet for a while: She continues. "I remember reading somewhere how Rancière claims that the point is not to contrast reality with its images or appearances, but to create works of 'fiction': 'different realities, different forms of common sense and different spatiotemporal systems, different communities of words and things, forms and meanings'. That is to blur the boundary between those who act and those who look: between individuals and the collective body."[69]

The man is nodding hesitantly but somehow seems to have lost the plot. At this point, the woman beside them, sighs and slightly shifts her position. The others turn to look at her expecting her to speak, yet she remains quiet long enough so that they feel obligated to turn away and continue. It seems that instead of openly aggressive behaviour, she has adopted more covert aggression, which is harder to detect. She raises her eyebrows when someone else is speaking, makes irritated sounds, but does not say a word. I wish I could read her thoughts, as strangely I am more interested in them now than before. I am torn, as her crossed arms distant presence seems to appeal directly to the people pleasing part of myself.

Suddenly, as clear as day, I hear what I think is her voice: "Why it seems to me that this perspective is too narrow. Rancière's work can preserve radical perspective by refraining from any recommendations or prescriptions for the present or future, but this leaves artists somewhat empty-handed. Shouldn't it be at this point that perspectives other than that of Ranciere's will enter, for example, the real and material antagonisms that are actualized because of the actual staging here?"

I can hear her voice, yet, when I look at her, she is not speaking. The voice continues. "What about the context this performance takes place in? This space, Eden is located in one of the most troubled neighbourhoods around. And what about all those emerging subjectivities here? Rancière is present, I get it, but what about Mouffe?"[70] The part of my head that seems to be still in my own control thinks it is time to move on, but somehow, I don't seem

[69] Rancière 2009, 19.

[70] This question came up in pre-examiner John Sundholm's report in June 2014.

to be able to move my legs. Instead, I hear myself replying: "But I thought, Chantal Mouffe shares both the equalist and Agonistic view with Rancière and agrees that disagreement is constitutive of politics?"

"Yes" She replies immediately as if knowing exactly what I was going to say: "But Mouffe points out that in order for artistic practices to contribute to the struggle against capitalist domination, this requires a proper understanding of the dynamics of democratic politics; an understanding" she continues "can only be obtained by acknowledging the political in its antagonistic dimension as well as the contingent nature of any type of social order."[71]

I interrupt: "But does this require adopting an overarching view which seeks to unify under a single concept a multiplicity of events, like an artwork, point of view? I do not find this kind of reductive approach productive."

"No" she replies "it is only within such a perspective that one can grasp the hegemonic struggle which characterizes democratic politics, hegemonic struggle in which artistic practices can play a crucial role."[72]

I am slightly alarmed by the simultaneous shallowness and physical thoroughness of what I am experiencing, my senses, my voice, her voice, sounds and the building vibrating in one frequency in my head. It feels as if I am outside of myself. Trying to hold on to the remaining link between me and my body.

"It might seem crazy what I'm 'bout to say, Sunshine she's here, you can take a break I'm a hot air balloon that could go to space. With the air, like I don't care baby by the way", sings Pharrell Williams, emanating from a player in the other room.

I remember how I kind of used to like this song until I heard it way too many times, way too many times, repeatedly. "Because I'm happy, Because I'm happy." Repeatedly. Clapping sounds on rhythm. Some people start dancing.

Part of me says: "Move forward, stop listening." The other part says: "Say something, defend your position, be more thorough. Ask what she really means here and now. Don't worry about your loss of face."

In order to eradicate all the sounds in my head, I try once more to move my legs and continue the journey. My legs feel extremely heavy but this time it seems I am actually able to move forward. I wave at the diminishing group to follow me. But nobody seems to pay attention to me anymore and at the same moment the voice in my head is back, more determined than ever, almost shouting, covering almost all the surrounding sounds. "Neoliberal practices and institutions have a tendency to neutralise some antagonistic and subversive practices, and that is why they appear as being the outcome of natural processes. And, it is through this neoliberal framework that what most

[71] Mouffe, 2007.

[72] Ibid.

people perceive as being possible and desirable has been established. This is why it is important to understand how we can intervene and make a counter-hegemonic move."[73]

"So how can we intervene?" I hear myself asking. "Why should we become experts on political strategies in order to have an impact? Aren't we then inevitably relying on the very same language we are trying to resist?"

At this point, the voice of the younger woman discussing with a man, intervenes my internal conversation.

"Rancière does not seem to believe in transmission of knowledge that presupposes ignorance, knowledge that has to be explained to in order to be understood. In that way, progressive instruction is the endless verification of its starting point: inequality."

Seemingly patient, but also little irritated, the woman in my head replies: "As I said before, we should understand that one of the main tasks of democratic politics consists in diffusing the potential antagonistic dimension that exists in social relations. Somehow, we need to find means to intervene in this." "What do you mean?" I interrupt." Intervene how?"

"An intervention can be made by forcing an ensemble of institutions, practice and language games, which will make it possible for conflict to take on an agonistic form instead of antagonistic."[74] She replies. "So, what is at stake?" I ask. "In agonistic struggle there is no place for consensus and this struggle cannot result in a rational mutual agreement.[75] An agonistic conception of democracy acknowledges the contingent character of hegemonic political economic articulations, and those can be disarticulated and transformed as a result of the agonistic struggle. And this is why political interventions, which includes artistic political interventions, are important because they can play a role in this struggle."[76]

A stream of overwhelming thoughts pass through my mind, yet I am not sure if they are mine or stem from some external ideology created by invisible powers. Isn't Mouffe's agonism too reliant on discourse and language, I wonder? What about the corporeality and immersion and all those things unsayable through words? What about the gap between experience and explanation?

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[73] Fragments of conversation taken from the lecture- by Mouffe. (Cf.Mouffe, 2013.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ox9bJGlnUGM&t=2065s [Accessed 06.03.2019]

[74] According to Mouffe, in antagonistic form political parties perceive their opponent as enemies, in the agonistic one they treat those opponents as adversaries, equal participants in a game. (See: Mouffe, 2013.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ox9bJGlnUGM&t=2065s [Accessed 06.03.2019]

[75] Both Mouffe's and Ranciere's agonistic theories rely on the idea of politicizing people, activating them to think and act differently. Neither of them is a supporter of change that is applied from outside or above. This is why disagreement is so important in their thinking. That means, instead of providing ways to overcome political disagreements, thus of limiting democracy for the sake of democratic politics, the importance of the contingent nature of politics, by the ineradicable aspect of political disagreement, is emphasized.

[76] Mouffe, 2013.

I am often infiltrated in the audience during the performance, walking around and observing. I am highly conscious of my presence. Potentially oppressive. However, in the middle of one performance, I decide to go and whisper to the gamemaster to alter the rules to keep things changing. I am sure he can hear me but he completely ignores my request.

The problem between
explanation and experience

Everything you've been told, everything you have read or understood so far is part of a much bigger story. This whole story shifts backwards and forwards in time, months and years, spaces and characters. Each step took place in different times and places, gradually collapsing into each other. Each image exists within another image,and is layered with multiple stories and sensations. Each character assumes the attributes of others, and mimics the expressions of someone else. And, as in any story or event, there are multiple gaps and various scenarios to imagine and potential directions to take. In this, it is as much the presence of the words as the absence of words that characterize this story.

This space, this event, this picture, this story, whatever you'd like to call it, cannot be represented by one single image or text. Neither can it be looked at through one viewpoint. Instead, it contains multiple folds and sides and keeps transforming into infinity. There would be most likely so many more pressing issues to talk about if one was to zoom out from here, from Eden, from this block, from this suburb even further from this Nordic welfare state. Zoom out even further and see all these big rocks, of which earth is only one.

The rocks have their own names. The way they are being in the world cannot be told by data alone, and their stories are not coherent. They remind us that there are

mysteries for which rational explanation gives no meaning, questions and answers that have no place in the accepted forms of narration. Their stories are part of our stories, yet we seem to keep forgetting about that. In the current climate of a constant undermining of facts and in your face attitude, when it comes to communication, it matters what stories are told and how they are told. It matters now more than ever what thought produces thoughts, and what the struggles are involved in turning those thoughts into words and experiences, and into explanations. We have learnt to rely on words, without paying attention to the immense gap between experience and explanation. But, in this particular story and text, the artist/author tries to make us aware of the shifting sense of her presence and the problems and potentialities that occur when we come to face those limits. In this text, and in this space, the artist begins to feel both like a character within the story and the person writing it— trying to figure out how she/he can continue.

By the age of 6, she had developed the habit of drawing her wildest dreams on paper. She lived through these scenes, sketched in detail by pencil, line by line. They were reveries that she inhabited to the best of her ability. It was a bit like a teleportation process, a way to detach her body from her mind, and insert herself into another world. There is not much use in describing them here, but most of the scenarios were rather mundane, in which she placed herself in imaginary settings she could not otherwise be part of. The need to imagine new worlds through images was at first much bigger than a desire to use words, but slowly perhaps because it was required of her, she started to produce fragments of text and bit later began to write in full sentences. Soon enough she became the protagonist of her own texts and also started to consider them as spaces. Words as a spool in the textual labyrinth.

She had learned to belittle herself from a very early age, deprecate her achievements in order not to seem arrogant or pretentious. She learned that in order to take her place as a speaking subject she should at least use self-deprecating language. It was the way her family handled things, especially the women in the family. Her grandmother continuously emphasized the virtue of modesty. Herself, her mom and grandma, were brought up not to build a buzz about themselves, but instead to align themselves with the interest of men, or any authority figure for that matter. She repeated this later in her own relationships. She diminished herself and was looking after the needs of the others, by constantly asking questions.

How two or more contradicting states can share the claim to the same reality, had always been the question hanging above their relationship? During those few years spent together, they often discussed the meaning of words. It became obvious that they'd always had a different

relationship with them. For him, words didn't mean so much, they were light and could be thrown into the air without any particular determination, yet he preferred rational explanations and functional images. He didn't see any contradiction in this, as a matter of fact, he didn't want to doubt, and considered contradictions as unnecessary obstacles and ignorance as bliss. He seemed to think sweeping complications under a rug was the best way to move forward. She, on the contrary, took words so seriously. She was worried by their assertiveness, she cherished their malleability and materiality, and felt deeply betrayed by their broken promises. Before meeting him, she had welcomed the paradox, enjoying the moments when the words and the images pulled into different directions. With him, she concentrated far too much on how the words fell from his mouth, like heavy liquid. And she weighed each one of them, turning over their meanings, rummaging in between the lines. She was in a constant state of cognitive dissonance until she was way too exhausted, and had forgotten what it was that she had been looking for.

It was not long after he left that she allowed the doubt and the paradox to return, and remembered the benefits of productive cognitive dissonance. She began sitting and working in cafes, surrounding herself with other bodies. Perhaps, that was to overcome loneliness, although one might see his departure as a long-awaited release and a path to freedom. One day, in one of those cafes, she picked up a magazine, the New Yorker and started reading an interview with Ben Lerner an American author and critic. She had read his book *10:04* earlier that year and liked the way this collage of stories was led by a somewhat unreliable narrator/writer, who embedded real artworks and events into the fictional conditions of a novel. There was also something in that interview that struck her, something that he said. It went like this: "In the name of clarity, a lot of authors offer what strikes me as basically pre-fabricated structures of feeling, leaving no room for the reader to participate in the construction of meaning. These writers interpret everything within the story for you in advance, often under the sign of realism that seems to involve reducing the messiness of lived experience to a tidy geometrical plot."[77]

There are many reasons why this fairly simple statement resonated with her, not only because it confirmed the thoughts she had been toying with for a long time, and valorised once more the limits of language to describe something that is essentially based on aesthetic experience. But also, because she was constantly balancing between two languages, that of her mother tongue, and the one she used for writing and reading. Language in all its authority caused

[77] Leyshon 2012, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/this-week-in-fiction-ben-lerner [Accessed 05.06.2019]

her enormous anxiety. Similarly, to social situations, having to be assertive in language required a kind of performativity that was not natural to her. The tentative character of visual expression was always more appealing. In it she saw the unfinished meanings, and circulating contradictions as strengths, or perhaps they were just ways to conceal her own uncertainty and lack of determination. However, the constant uses and referrals to uncertainty have proven to be anything but productive, and mostly just a product of cultural habit and gender discrimination. But, this is the way she thought she should deal with language. Be sure but not too sure. Know what you are searching for, conclude your argument, yet do not appear cocky with your statements.

In another article *The Actual World*, Ben Lerner described how he had overcome his jealousy of visual artists who work with something other than words, and had instead learned to embrace the powers of literature to stage encounters, or resituate actual works of art in virtual conditions. According to him, "literature can function as a laboratory in which we test responses to unrealised or unrealisable artworks, or in which we embed real works in imagined conditions, in order to track their effects. Literature and dramaturgy can stage encounters with works of art that cannot or don't exist, or actual works can be re-situated in virtual conditions."[78] This highlights another interesting dimension literature and fiction can achieve alongside the visual and experience, that of offering a virtual platform for works to have an afterlife or pre-life.

[78] Lerner 2013, 152.

I have never experienced such a loss of control over my work. In fact, one of the most recurring problems in my art practice has been that my works always appear so controlled and somehow out of breath. Even if something unpredictable happens in the process of filming, there is still a chance to gain control during the edit. This is why I keep trying to step away from my comfort zone. I remember how Robbe-Grillet also described the transition from the controlled environment of literature to film, as a somewhat disconcerting journey. As he entered the medium of the film quite late, he came to realize he didn't have sufficient skills and knowledge to be entirely in control. Also, the intensely collaborative nature of film making meant that unexpected elements entered the process.[79] Thus, there is something that the film, and those of us here seem to lack, that literature has, that is the gap between the words on the page and the images they create in our minds.

[79] Robbe-Grillet first entered the word of cinema by collaborating with Alain Resnais in *Last Year in Marienbad* in 1961. After that, he continued directing and writing films such as *L'Immortelle* (1962) and *Trans-Europ-Express* (1966). In the interview of his DVD box set Robbe-Grillet talks about the difference between the written word and the filmed image. Initially, he thought he could ignore this difference, and make films the same controlled manner as his earlier novels, but he found out that the medium, as much as his collaborators, would defy him. However, to some extent, Robbe-Grillet's work, both literary and cinematic, has been concerned with questions of how one can distinguish the relationship between an image and reality, and how the mind somehow resists such attempts. See: Alain Robbe-Grillet: *Six Films 1963-1974*, DVD Notes, British Film Institute.

A little while after reading Ben Lerner's article, she read another interview that came to mark an important moment in time. This was a conversation between a French curator Vanessa Desclaux and artist Jimmy Robert in the French journal Zerodeux. In it they refer to certain kind of philosophical aporia, and to the necessity of returning to language in order to define a practice that highlights a lack of thereof, the desire for the impossible. They refer to the question of language as a space to live in, and to works that set up a tension between two different types of narratives: the narrative of content and that of form.[80]

It was in this connection that she really paid attention to French *Nouveau Roman* as a literary form associated with this kind of intertextuality. Although it was never really her intention to write a text like this, the discovery of *Nouveau Roman* inspired her to fabricate this complex world she knew she would never be in control of.

In a middle of all this, I realize that I have been stuck for too long writing up this background, and I am worried that I might have lost it, the trace, the way. We must move forward in the space; otherwise, we will never reach our destination. I must get out of here, must write myself out of here, I must write you out of here. You must be feeling, that it has taken too long. Or is it again my uncertainty that is intervening? I understand your restlessness, I really do, there are so many things to see and do, so many places where you would rather be.

[80] Desclaux, 2009, https://www.zerodeux.fr/guests/entretien-avec-jimmy-robert/ [Accessed 06.03.2019]

The obvious disease of our era is restlessness. We don't spend time, not together, not with art. Many of us claim to be able to glance over things yet understand the world as a whole. Flicking through our iPhone has made us believe in the eternal returnings of things and demand to continually perform and participate has caused us to forget how to contemplate. A film is a great art form because it forces us to sit through it (forcing here is obviously metaphorical), but it still provides us with the linear experience of time. Here I think whether, in an experience of anticipation and navigation, time becomes very palpable.

THROWS OF
DICE

I take some steps forward and we turn right and arrive in a narrow room, in which an abnormally long chalkboard covers the entire wall. It looks oddly stretched, as if trying to fill the entire wall to the best of its capabilities, yielding itself into its' limits. In this new room, a middle-aged woman, who looks like a teacher is frantically writing on a green board. She seems to be trying to make a point about the kind of alternative counter strategies and spaces opposed to neo-liberalism.

Productivity and creativity have become the basis for capitalist production only, turning into a type of commodity. She writes and continues: The current Neoliberal hegemony is a discursive construction that articulates in a very specific manner diverse practices, discourses and language games. She pauses for a moment, keeps holding the chalk in her hand, which is still in upright position, and then after a moment writes more slowly, pressing the chalk more firmly against the board: Possible solutions? The writing gets gradually more aggressive, the chalk is making violent creaking sounds; they make me shiver.

From that moment onwards things are a bit of a blur to me, moreover, they become more confused in my memory. My feet start to sink through the grey floor. This sends tingling sensations into my legs, which soon spreads all over my arm making it feel numb. I am pretending to be calm but inside I am becoming increasingly upset. I already know what you are going to say. I shout without knowing if the words are even audible, I know how I am going to respond, no matter what you say. I know each uttered word, because it has already been written, put into our mouths. said by someone else, previously, somewhere else. All I want to do is to find another world, but I cannot remember how I meant to weave the story. By the end I am almost feverish with anxiety as if hallucinating, rubbing my thighs violently.

The body of the woman writing on the board suddenly disintegrates into the air, the green of the board intensifies and pixelates. Another digital glitch seems to pass through the board, which is now left alone without anyone controlling it, and seems to be waiting to be activated. Suddenly the whole wall disappears. Is this where the past leaks in through the holes of these porous walls, the text as a document of the past that anticipates the future, that now becomes the present, and will be when you read this in the past? In these folds of time a fictional reflection, an image within the image is created. This speculative narrative turns into a screen of projections, like the future itself.
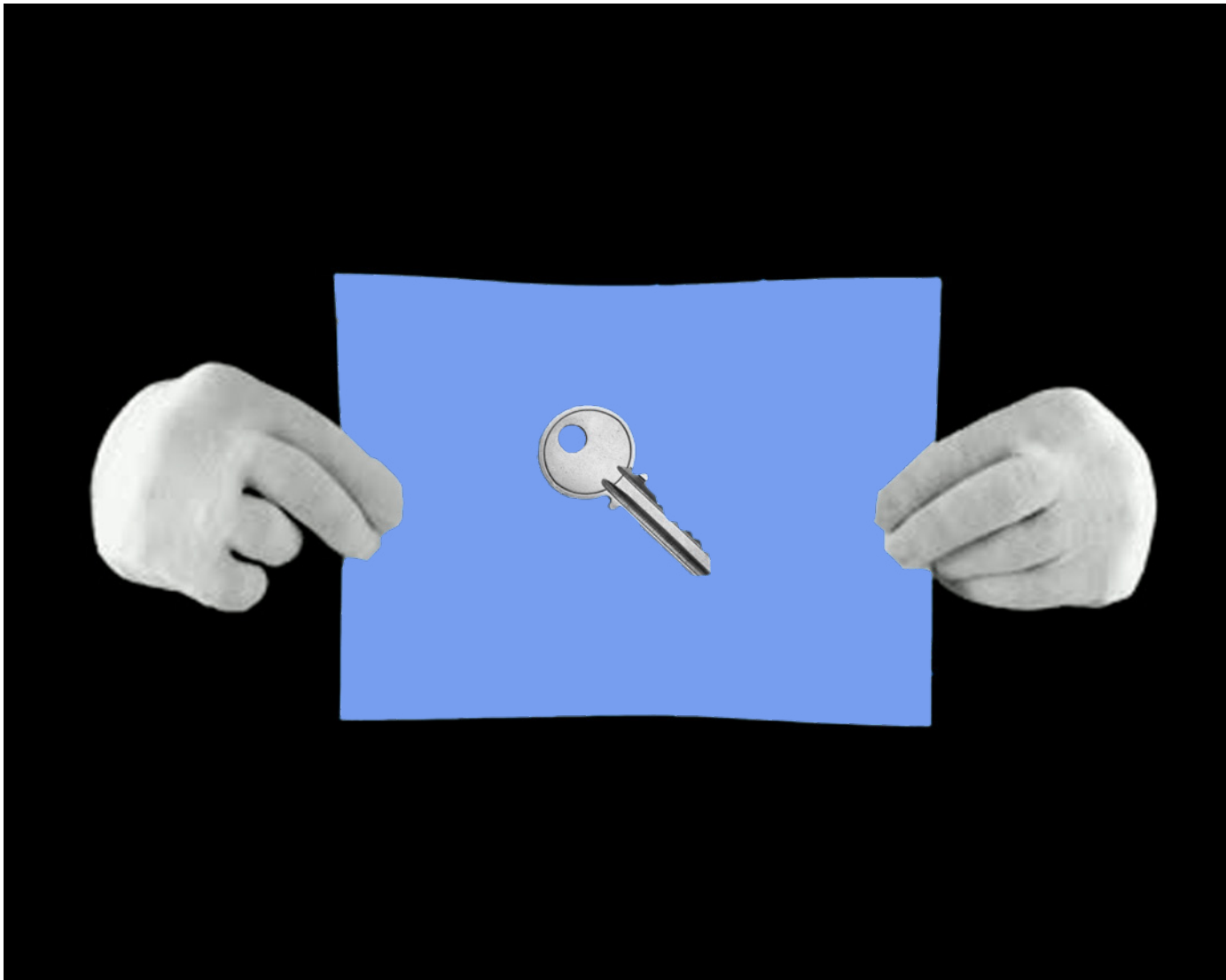
CLICK THIS IMAGE

All I want is for you to see the image, but I cannot remember how I meant to weave the story

(Literature and visual art)

This journey so far has been taken maintaining the hope that artistic research can offer new forms of visual language to subvert and navigate within prevalent discourse and language-based systems, under the neoliberal paradigm. Different forms of language, both visual and verbal, carry possibilities for resistance against instrumentalization and extraction of value. Ludwig Wittgenstein has turned our attention to the way we are playing Language-games, and to the way language is woven into our actions, by refusing to see language as a separate entity designed to clarify meaning.[81] But rather than further analyse the workings of language in Wittgenstein's theory or any theory whatsoever, the focus will be on artistic strategies as ways of occupying the language as space. And, the potential subversive use of poetic, and absurdist strategies that can be found in literature.

Experiments and innovations in literary structures that had often to do with breaking the Modernist conventions, marked the first half of the 20th century, and those experiments are still ongoing. This kind of poetic output was apparent in the works of Dadaists, but also in Zaum, an invented absurd language that was a part of the Russian Futurist movement during the First World War.[82]

Surrealism grew out of the Dada movement and attempted to address the unconscious as a way to unlock the potencies of the imagination. Influenced by psychoanalysis, the Surrealists believed that the rational mind blocked and flattened the power of the imagination. Therefore the Surrealists rejected rationalism and literary realism, and wanted to disrupt rational logic by constructing unexpected relationships between image and word, representation and actuality. They did this by exposing the contradictions

[81] "Wittgenstein's take on language concentrated at seeing language as a fluid structure that is closely bound up with our everyday practices and forms of life. For Wittgenstein, used the term 'language games' to describe forms of language that we play out in the course of everyday life. Language games were also tools to examine meanings in their context of use. 'In most cases, the meaning of a word is its use', Wittgenstein claimed."
See: https://philosophyforchange.wordpress.com/2014/03/11/meaning-is-use-wittgenstein-on-the-limits-of-language/ [Accessed 13.02.19]

[82] Velimir Khlebnikov experimented with the Russian language, inventing a lot of neologisms, and finding significance in the shapes and sounds of individual letters of Cyrillic. Along with Kruchenykh, he originated zaum an experimental poetic language characterized by indeterminacy in meaning. See: https://www.revolvy.com/page/Velimir-Khlebnikov [Accessed 13.02.19]

and paradoxes of linear thought and linguistic systems.[83]

One of the most well-known examples is the surrealist literary and visual game *Exquisite Corpse*, which can be played with either words or images and is based on the act of collective folding. *Exquisite Corpse* was originally a parlour game based on words. Each collaborator adds to a composition in sequence, either by following a rule (e.g. adjective, verb etc), or by being allowed to see only the end of what the previous person has contributed. To play, each participant writes a word or sentence on a piece of paper and then folds it so that the next player cannot see the previous contributions. This results in nonsensical and unexpected phrases. *Exquisite Corpse* involved elements of unpredictability, chance and group collaboration—all in the service of disrupting the order of event in the participant's minds. Surrealist artists also played the game using visual art, and typically involving four players. Such experiments resulted in composite figures, such as *Nude* (1926-27) by Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró, Max Morise, and Man Ray. These strategies serve as models for rebuilding communities fractured by systems of thought that divide rather than connect individuals. There are also various examples later on of how writers, especially from the mid-twentieth century, used multiple rules or restrictions in order to play with language, structure, words and meanings. By setting a system up for the reader to complete, many of the experiments can be compared to games. The structures such as the labyrinth and dictionary, play with unexpected connections. These new ways of seeing life were characteristics of Magic Realism relating to Latin American literature and the novels of writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, or the literary experiments of the French group Oulipo, and later the speculative fiction of J G Ballard. These movements developed different stylistic means in their way of writing, but in general, they reflected the uncanniness of people and our modern technological environment. Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar's novel *Hopscotch* (1963) used the idea of the hypernovel, in which the reader has the choice of hopping between pages, and in this way breaks the linear way of reading the novel. Another example of a playful structure in a novel, is Georges Perec's (part of the Oulipo movement) Life:A User's manual (1978).

There is a long history of artworks that exist in the overlap of fine art and literature. In addition to the surrealists, conceptual artists, most famously Joseph Kosuth's and John Baldessari's practices in the 70s, relied heavily on language and often played with semiotics to show the strange tension between image, language and interpretation. Needless to say, writing has been an integral part of artist's film works since the beginning of its history. However, in recent years there has been an increasing interest in literary techniques in the field

[83] Hill 2009, 13.

of contemporary art, and the consideration of writing as a practice has also emerged. Contemporary artists such as Cally Spooner, Jill Magid and Katrina Palmer, make works that exist in the overlap of fine art with literature, taking the shape of books, performances, readings or alongside art objects.

In 2013 the Palais de Tokyo in Paris devoted an entire exhibition to the eccentric French writer Raymond Roussel (1877-1933)[84] mapping the influence of his work on the artists of today.[85] In his time, Roussel was a controversial writer and the reception of many of his novels by the public was not very enthusiastic. However, since then his ludic and enigmatic writings have influenced many artists and writers such as Marcel Duchamp, the surrealists, Georges Perec and Michel Foucault.[86] He has had a profound influence on following generations of writers and visual artists. For example, writers such as Michel Butor and Alain Robbe-Grillet cast him as one of the founders of the *Nouveau Roman* that marked a radical departure from the conventions of the traditional forms of writing.

[84] The French writer Raymond Roussel (1877-1933) was a marginal writer in his own time and is not mentioned in many of the history books about literature. He was a poet, novelist, playwright, musician, and chess enthusiast and extended the idea game into his method of writing using kind of word games. His writing method was based on homonymic puns, in which two words that are written differently, sound phonetically similar. Roussel however, kept his writing method secret until the book *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, 1935.

[85] See: https://www.palaisdetokyo.com/en/event/new-impressions-raymond-roussel [Accessed 06.03.2019]

[86] In fact, Foucault devoted a whole book *The Death and the Labyrinth, The World of Raymond Roussel* to Roussel and to his interest towards words and things and their relationship. See Foucault, 1963.

New Novel

The French *Nouveau Roman* wanted to separate itself from traditional literary structures in order to reinvent the novel and refocus attention on the material aspects of the writing, such as minute details, the idea of repetition and the erasure of characters. This was offered to some extent as a challenge to the reader, thus offering both new narratives (content), and new ways of narrating them (form).

Nouveau Roman, called into question the limitations of perception, addressing the subjective perspective of the characters. Even the narrator could be confused. She is not omnipotent as in the previous literary trends. She also becomes the victim in whole confusion of characters, and in a plot that is not clearly established. The goal is not to set up a clear and unambiguous order of events but rather a mixture of precision and uncertainty that makes the reader disconcerted about what the very plot is, and, in the end, it does not bring any real conclusion and explanation. This kind of cryptic narrative form was typical to a literary technique that offered not so much an escape but rather a detour back into the labyrinth of individual thought.

Alain Robbe Grillet the father of *Nouveau Roman* writes as following: "A novel for most readers - and critics is primarily a 'story'. A true novelist is one who knows how to 'tell a story' - The felicity of 'telling,' which sustains him from one end of his work to the other, is identified with his vocation as a writer. Hence to criticise a novel often comes down to reporting its anecdote, with more or less emphasis on the essential passages: the climaxes and denouements of the plot. The writing itself will never be in question. The novelist will merely be praised for expressing himself in the correct language, in an agreeable, striking, and evocative manner. Thus, the style will be no more than means, a manner; the basis of the novel, it's *raison d'être*, what is inside it, is simply the story it tells."[87]

[87] Robbe-Grillet 1965, 29-30

Robbe-Grillet continues: "To tell a story, well, is therefore to make what one writes resemble the prefabricated schemas people are used to, in other words, their ready-made idea of reality."[88]

Thus, perhaps in order to oppose this, Robbe-Grillet's works are often composed in such a way that any attempt to reconstruct an external chronology or coherent narrative results in a series of contradictions. They put emphasis on the very subjective experience of the reader who is free to choose from various alternatives, where perspectives can be distorted, characters confused, memories misleading and what one sees can be a betrayal of that very reality.

[88] Ibid.31.

It is as if Robbe-Grillet was interested in atemporality, that is to say, interested in a narration that would not develop, a timeless space of imagination. Film as medium has the astounding capacity to capture time in its passing, the fleeting moment that quickly becomes what we call the past. These unfolding events as we watch them, seem to contain an expanded sense of time, caught as life frozen.

In the labyrinth with Alain Robbe-Grillet

Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel In *The Labyrinth* (1959) presents a protagonist, a soldier who is trapped in an unknown town. The army is in flight and *The Battle of Reichenfels* has been fought and lost. A soldier, carrying a parcel under his arm, is wandering through the town that has a labyrinth-like structure and in which the enemy is expected to arrive at any moment. All the streets look the same, and he cannot remember the name of the street where he is meant to meet the man who has agreed to take the parcel. But he must deliver the parcel somehow or at least get rid of it. During his journey, he keeps returning to the same spots, seeing the same objects and scenes over and over again, meeting with the same people. At a certain point in the story, a narrator's gaze lingers over an old framed picture hanging on the wall. He meticulously describes the scene that is represented in the picture, a tavern scene:

"The picture, in its varnished wood frame, represents a tavern scene. It is a nineteenth-century etching or a good reproduction of one. A large number of people fill the room, a crowd of drinkers sitting, standing, and, on the far left, the bartender standing on a slightly raised platform behind his bar."[89]

The description with its minute details continues for several pages to the point that the world of the picture starts to leak into the world of the story, and the other way around. This scene within a scene or picture within the picture becomes one world when the distinctions and barriers cease to exist. The narrator describes three soldiers, in the Tavern scene. They seem forsaken, their contrast from the crowd accentuated by a precision of line, a clarity in rendering.

"The artist has shown them with as much concern for detail and almost as much sharpness of outline as if they were sitting in the foreground." the narrator continues. "Particularly the soldier shown full face, who has been portrayed with a wealth of detail that seems quite out of proportion to the indifference it expresses."[90]

[89] Robbe-Grillet 1960, 150.

[90] Ibid.,153.

After another description of the soldier's face and clothing, the narrator seems to be describing an actual Tavern scene, but with different constraints of time and space.

"He has finished his drink some time ago. He does not look as if he were thinking of leaving, yet around him, the cafe has emptied. The light is dim now, the bartender having turned out most of the lamps before leaving the room himself."[91]

Subject-object relations keep shifting, and occasionally the protagonist looking at an image (painting) portraying a scene with people, seems to hop into the image, as if he suddenly was inside of the picture. At times, it seems as if he is the protagonist of the scene, and at times purely an observer. Also, the characters in the picture around him have become alive. The world of the *In the Labyrinth* is, therefore, a porous world, full of holes that allow different fictional realities to overlap, removing the constraints of time and space. The gaze of the narrator seems to be able to penetrate beyond the habitual literary reality, proposing a reality where perception is not bound into one limited spot, and is not liberated only through the physical movement of the protagonist. But instead, the protagonist moves from space to space led by the narrative. This strategy could be compared to *Mise en abyme*[92], a world within a world, a story within a story, a picture within a picture or the Chinese-box narrative or the Russian doll structure, a novel or drama that is told in the form of a narrative inside a narrative (and so on), giving views from different perspectives. The Chinese-box narrative structure used in Jean Renoir's *Le Carrosee d'or*-a film of a play within the theatre of *commedia dell'arte* induces similar disorientation and suggests of course, that we, who think ourselves to be the absolute spectators, may, in fact, be the actors on some spectator's stage. This kind of structural narrative, and the overlapping of different temporalities and spaces, affect the reader's habitual orientation between reality and fiction by continually frustrating the linearity of reading. In this, the reader's awareness is heightened, allowing one to think from what position they are, in fact, interpreting the particular work in hand. It works as a revelatory tool not only of the storytelling structures but also the social and political structures that often remain unnoticed. In addition, this strategy of embedding worlds within worlds and stories within stories, opens up a space for imagining

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91 Ibid.,154.

92 *Mise en abyme* is a French term and means literally "placed into the abyss". It resembles the visual experience of standing between two mirrors, then seeing, as a result, an infinite reproduction of one's image. The author André Gide, used it to describe self-reflexive embeddings in various art-forms and in his own work. In literary criticism, *mise en abyme* is a type of frame story, in which the core narrative may be used to illuminate some aspect of the framing story. The term has been used in deconstruction and deconstructive literary criticism as a paradigm of the intertextual nature of language.

new worlds within this world, in which prevailing catego-
rizations and simplifications are taking a firmer foothold.
Robbe-Grillet frustrates the expectations of linearity with
his own circular logic by tight turns, edge crossing, zigzag-
ging and other various moves, by inserting unexpected
pictorial and perceptual shifts into unexpected places. The
protagonist is an unreliable disoriented protagonist, and in
order to follow his sudden unexpected moves, the reader
needs to be constantly alert and pay careful attention to
details. Here, either the reader or the unknown narra-
tor unlocks the space so that the protagonist can jump
to new levels, new spaces and therefore new worlds. This
strategy, seems to shatter the image of a stable and cohe-
rent world, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine
what is "real" and what is "fiction" or "illusion". Robbe-
Grillet's works often contain many inter-textual references
to his earlier films and novels. Here characters and obje-
cts are also repeated and displaced, further undermining
any sense that his worlds correspond to some reality out-
side of the text. It is rather a fictional universe in its own
right, following only the associative logic of writing itself.

I see myself multiplied by several mirrors set up all around the space. Both the structure of this event and Robbe-Grillet's film are repetitive and full of mirror images. The re-enactments from the beginning take place later. It is hard to be sure whether the actions presented to us on screen are just games - or drug-fuelled hallucinations. Robbe-Grillet was using cinema as a medium to explore the audience rather than its characters. Constructed as a self-referential labyrinth of mirrors, L'Eden et après worked as a mirror for the viewers – basically, in 1970, the viewers consisted mainly of the similar art-school-student types portrayed as the visitors of café Eden. It could be argued that the café itself is the cinema, and the games are re-enactments of the perversions and desires of the students.

Mirror and Double

Robbe-Grillet's texts and films often contain multiple mirrors. In addition they often involve doubles and twins, which seem to also function as mirrors. The person perceiving their own double sees themselves more as others see them, and perhaps starts to consider their own identity more carefully. However, as we know, no identity nor any viewpoint is fixed but contain multiple angles, and is always partly invisible and unknowable to oneself. As Elizabeth Ann Newton points out referring to Ben Stoltzfus in her thorough phenomenological reading of Robbe-Grillet's work:" the many instances of *mise en abyme* in Robbe-Grillet's works

are devices that function as formal mirrors, duplicating the structure of the events of the work in miniature. He argues that the multitude of viewpoints offered by his various (literal and formal) mirrors function in the same way as the many perspectives of a Cubist painting, which like a shattered mirror, offers many perspectives to its viewer at once".[93]

Robbe-Grillet's films and novels contain many self-reflexive mechanisms, which might be understood as mirroring, or reflecting upon, the process of making the film itself as well. The structure of Robbe-Grillet's works, often doubles back to itself and as mentioned before, there is a doubling of events across his different works that also continuously refer to his other works. These details, then, emphasize the self-reflexivity, hence, intertextuality of the film, referring to its construction, and in so doing, raises the questions of personal identity (that of the characters and the actors) and that of the author.

In Lacan's famous Mirror Stage essay, Lacan emphasizes the process of *identification* with an external image or entity produced through, as he describes it, "Insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of fantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality."[94] In the mirror, every form, every elusion, reflects another. But, this is not a symmetry of the

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[93] Newton, 2003, p. 233.

[94] Lacan 2006, 75–81.

same repeated. It is a symmetry of the same as a variable, or one and another, I and other. The mirror provides a swivel point; at the same time, the mirror has a distancing effect. It works by creating an inverse symmetry that doubles and displaces what it reflects, establishing a point of disjunction at the point of identification. The conformity of the body becomes externalized in the mirror image. The human body itself can be considered as an object, spinning action into inaction, the body pondering between being an object or a subject. According to Henri Lefebvre the image and the mirror involve both repetition and difference: therefore, the mirror not only duplicates the reflected world, but also produces a different world in its virtual space.[95] As a reflection, one's body becomes the subject and the object at the same time. Taking ingredients of the inner and the outer, mixing them, as far as it is required for them not to exist anymore as individual entities. One is the mirror reflecting the other mirror in the front of it.

Jacques Derrida uses the concept of *mimesis* concerning texts, which are non-disposable doubles that always stand in relation to what has preceded them. Derrida is critical of *mimesis* as copying or doubling the original but instead considers every imitation as a supplement, something different

[95] Lefebvre also states that: "The interest and importance of the mirror derives not from the fact that it projects the 'subjects' (or ego's) image back to the subject, but rather from the fact that it extends a repetition (symmetry) immanent to the body into space." (Lefebvre, 1992.182)

from what is imitated. Derrida considers every text as an imitation of previously existed texts and therefore *Mimesis* becomes a kind of productive force in the writing of texts. This does not mean that there is copying without innovation; it means that writing is an intertextual game, that is indefinable, and the intertextuality of the texts calls for deconstruction.[96] Perhaps my proposal here is, in fact, that these works contain a sense or trace of intertextuality. That is, any work of art or text should inevitably hold on to something of its context of origin and the position of its author (the who, where, when of authorship), with the recognition or acknowledgement of such constituting a significant part of the interpretative process.[97] The notion of intertextuality here links in particular to how *Julia Kristeva* in her essay ”Word, Dialogue and Novel”(1986) defines it as ”a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double.”[98] Furthermore, it has also been argued, that a similar and comparable reflexivity can emerge at the sites of an artwork's reception, operating as the self-comprehension

of the viewer and opening of spaces or holes for the viewer to generate different stories and images.[99] In this way, we should think of this text, this space, as a labyrinthic experience of thinking and making, rather than a representation of an experience of thinking and making.

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[96] In "The Double Session", Derrida uses Mallarmé's text *Mimique* to question the relationship between literature and truth and to demonstrate the non-binary nature of mimesis. Mallarmé's prose-text *Mimique* is a story imitated from a story by Fernand Beisier, about a husband who kills his unfaithful wife by tickling her to death. Derrida claim is that Mallarmé's re-telling of the story is so different, so far from the 'original', that there can hardly be any imitation in a copying sense because Mallarmé's version ldoes not clearly reference Beisier's story. Cf.Derrida 1983, 186-258.

[97] Process of interpretation or hermeneutical process as discussed in Hermeneutics, by Hans-Georg Gadamer for example. Gadamer's opposition to aesthetic idealism (art as a carrier of meaning) is supported by the claim that art "cannot be satisfactorily translated in terms of conceptual knowledge". See Gadamer 1986, 69.

[98] Kristeva 1986, 37.

[99] I would like to draw your attention to how Michel Foucault and Alain Sheridan define the intertextuality: "The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full-stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network." (Foucault and Sheridan 1972, 23.)

Chance
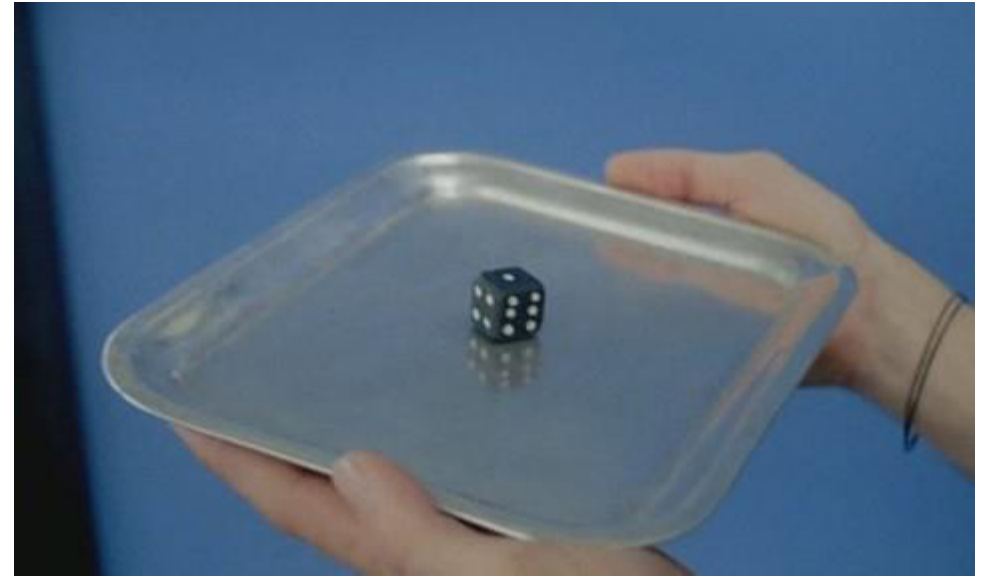
To see and to speak is thinking. In this doubling, seeing and speaking, hence experiencing and explaining, are folded into one another. Perhaps when something is repeated and doubled, then, we encounter a present reality that demands of us an active position. Repetition is not serious and not challenging enough unless it is constantly in danger of being irrupted.[100] Perhaps, because of this Robbe-Grillet started to play more with the notions of chance and seriality in his film work.

In a movie or a novel by Robbe-Grillet one doesn't follow a linear story, but follows a fictional system. Patched from various impulses and ideas, his novels and films form pseu-do-narratives that either encourage or defy the viewer's expectations and thought patterns. His writings and films are often based on a structure or a system, a complex set of relations that seem to hint at an underlying logic. However, this logic remains opaque, and chance is allowed to play an important part. There is also a system or a mathematical

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[100] This kind of approach could be also aligned with Deleuze's notion of fold which proposes spatiality as a 'becoming' with no external measures or ends within a complex repetition, no longer restricted to imitation. As for Derrida, *mimesis* actualizes itself in the movement, also Folds can be seen as a series of potential expressions of pure movements, defined as differentiations Folding, functions as a means of introducing another concept of space and time within the landscape of conventionally conceived 'spatial boundaries'.

"Thus, a continuous labyrinth is not a line dissolving into independent points, as flowing sand might dissolve into grains, but resembles a sheet of paper divided into infinite folds or separated into bending movements, each one determined by the consistent or conspiring surroundings. [...] A fold is always folded within a fold, like a cavern in a cavern. The unit of matter, the smallest element of the labyrinth, is the fold, not the point which is never a part, but a simple extremity of the line." (Deleuze 1993, 6).

sense of structure that guide Eden and After. It was Robbe-Grillet's the first and to date, the only work by the novelist/filmmaker to be based on and implemented before the production of the work. Robbe-Grillet had initially imagined the possibility of a structure that would involve seven basic themes, that would appear, in different orders, across five different "series" or orderings of these seven themes. During the shooting of the film, however, the number of themes expanded to twelve, thereby offering a parallel with the twelve notes of Arnold Schönberg's music. Although inspired by the twelve-tone row of Schönberg this scheme was not followed rigidly. Robbe-Grillet used a grid he created of, "twelve recognizable themes" (*blood, double, dance, death, painting, prison, labyrinth, doors* etc…) this was used instead of any kind of traditional script. Similarly many of his films and novels, also *Eden* and *After* attempted to destroy any sense of traditional narrative structure, which adds to the authentically dreamy feeling that strongly embodies this film.

After making *Eden* and *After* Robbe-Grillet continued experimenting with the notion of chance. He made an alternative film *N. Took the Dice - N. a pris les dés* (1971) from out-takes and some new footage. Instead of faithfully following the structure to Eden and After, it has an order of scenes governed by throws of dice by the narrator.

Going back through the history of literary experiments, we should remember here *Stephane Mallarme's, Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira pas la hazard*, (*A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*) from 1897, which was perhaps the greatest literary gamble of its time. The "experiment" consisted of a long, mysterious, enigmatic poem, full of symbolism and disjointed syntax. The text broke the typographical conventions of the time such as flush-left alignment and uniform type. Some words and phrases were emphasized through a larger font size, and by switching from Roman to Italic type and back again.

Quentin Meillassoux's book *The Number and the Siren* is a study of Stephane Mallarme's book, which has been translated a number of times. While some arguably superficial aspects of the work might be its most famous attributes — its typographical experimentation and the theme of chance — the work has also been broadly misunderstood. Meillassoux himself points out, that it is a difficult text, but not because there is something hidden in it. For him, the beauty *peut-être* of the poem is all in the conditionality of this "perhaps." And he continues, to see this is to understand that our notions of authorial intention may have to be re-thought. "There is a strong possibility," he suggests, "that Mallarmé basically knew no more than we do about his

poem, and even that he did not wish to know more; and this is because the Poem is in itself, in fact, a 'machine' for hypotheses — a machine that functions without him, indifferent to his innermost conviction."[101] Also, Robbe-Grillet seems to set up a system, partially based on chance in order to test the situation, objects, actors, and audience. Therefore, this resembles much more of a social experiment than a literary enigma. It seems that using chance in his film projects gave Robbe-Grillet an opportunity to test conventions that would not be possible in the controlled environment of literature.

[101] See: Barry Schwabsky, The Most Beautiful Perhaps, October 7, 2012, https://hyperallergic.com/58076/the-most-beautiful-perhaps/ [Accessed 06.03.2019]

Tropisms

Marguerite Duras. Tropism is originally a term derived from biology. It is a biological phenomenon, indicating growth or the turning movement of an organism, usually a plant, in response to an environmental stimulus. e.g. plant turning or growing towards the light or pull of gravitation.

Sarraute's Tropisms could be described as subconscious movements caused by external stimuli or forces. They seem to be indefinable movements that slip through us on the frontiers of consciousness during social interactions. In her book *Age of Suspicion* Sarraute mentions that every tropism requires a force, or partner, to bring it out from beneath. This can be a person, object, or situation.

In Nathalie Sarraute's[102] collection of short novel vignettes *Tropisms* (1939), warping characters and objects seem to be playing some kind of semi-unconscious game in their miniature domestic worlds. At times carrying out reluctant actions, as if moved by invisible external forces. The characters are seemingly unable to imagine a way out. Sarraute's *Tropisms* was an experiment in novel form and is said to be the first *Nouveau Roman* novel, and inspiration to other Nouveau Roman writers such as Alain Robbe-Grillet and

"They were jabbering half-expressed things, with a far-off look, as though they were following inwardly some subtle, delicate sentiment that they seemed unable to convey. Deep down inside of them, they knew that they were playing a game, that they were submitting to something. At times it seemed to them that they never took their eyes off a wand inside of him that they kept waving as though to lead them, that he moved gently to make them obey, like a ballet master. There, there, there, they danced, pirouetted

[102] Nathalie Sarraute (1900-1999) was a writer associated with a *Nouveau Roman* movement, the group of writers trying to create new form of literature along with Alain Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon, and Michel Butor. She was originally trained as a lawyer but wrote also eleven novels, several collections of essays, plays and an autobiography. Tropisms was her first work and was published in 1939 and although it didn't get much attention then, it has been later praised as a masterpiece by Jean Genet, Marguerite Duras, Hannah Arendt and Jean-Paul Sartre.

and wheeled about, provided a little wit, a little intelligence, but as though without touching anything, without even moving on to the forbidden plane that might displease him."

(Tropism IV)[103]

It seems that Sarrautean characters are not able to imagine a way out of the world they inhabit, or at least that disengagement from this world might require unimaginable efforts. Perhaps they are stuck in this inner paradox of emotions precisely because they are unable to determine what it is that drives them.

However, it would be misleading to read Tropisms as solely producing negative emotions, neither they are only simple reflexes caused by the external stimulus, they are in fact lot more complex than this. In Sarraute's *Tropisms* the communication breakdown serves as a mechanism, which signals more fundamental concerns with the human condition and the absurd, linguistic and expressive limitations, filled with both tragedy and comedy. In *Tropisms* these "inner movements" occur mostly in typically middle class domestic and urban environments. In them, we are presented with fragments of familiar characters, settings, and plots: bourgeoisie obsessions and habits.

It was Hannah Arendt's reading of Sarraute that in particular concentrated on the revelation of those social mechanisms, a kind of psychosocial comedy. According to Arendt's reading, the social aspect of taste is shown to be as destructive as it can be constructive. In this, one senses the possibly dark side of taste as a social bond: its inclination to adaptation, an attraction to shallowness and ease, an unwillingness to engage in profound or difficult experiences. Placing social affinities and communicability before experience, taste implicates certain forced standards that serve blind prejudice. Sometimes, as so often in Sarraute's novels, standards of taste force us into the confines of a social class that has decided to escape experience altogether.[104]

In her review of Ann Jefferson's *Nathalie Sarraute, Fiction and Theory: Questions of Difference Leah Dianne Hewitt* points out how Jefferson analyses key aspects of Sarraute's texts in light of the novelist's preoccupation with questions of difference. Hewitt points out how Jefferson assigns types of difference to three broad categories: social relations, gender/sexual issues, and generic questions of writing. Jefferson turns to sexual and gender difference, arguing that the individual and the body appear in Sarraute's novels as fragments and metaphors, rather than as whole entities. Individuals are frequently replaced by voices, and bodies are only seen as parts. The particularities of race, ethnicity,

[103] Sarraute 2015, 9.

[104] Kristeva 2001, 39.

and sex (or gender) are not determinative for the tropism.[105] In fact, Sarraute underplays forms of physical difference in order to appeal to the commonality of the imperceptible experiences she sets out to dramatize. The barely visible, anonymous characters are to serve as a mere prop for these movements, which are inherent in everybody and can take place in anybody, at any moment. Yet the aim doesn't seem to be to unify or categorise all beings. But it looks as if Sarraute maintains that the self is actually a composite of myriad, virtual selves. Also names, and even imprisoning nouns such as those indicating family relationships or professions, are absent in Tropisms. Sarraute shows that language can be a powerful weapon; not simply names and nouns, but even pronouns can have disempowering effects that freeze people into fixed roles: potentially producing cosy togetherness for the ones included, and leaving out the excluded.

The characters experience the tropism as anxiety about feeling different from others, but also as angst about being incorporated by the other in the name of sameness. They are in a constant aporic state of inner uncertainty. Aporia might be identified as an impasse, or a point of doubt and indecision, a knot or entanglement of incompatible or contradictory meanings causing cognitive dissonance.

The language of *Tropisms* becomes a way of sensing and experiencing, as object subject relations are confused, and categories cease to exist. The characters encounter a diversity of materials and beings, by the sense of touch or sight, to the point of being absorbed by them, or vice versa.

> "He was smooth and flat, two level surfaces—his cheeks which presented first to one then to other, and upon which, with their pursed lips, they pressed a kiss.
>
> They took him and they crunched him, turned him over and over, stamped on him, rolled, wallowed on him. They made him go around, there and there, and there, they showed him disquieting painted scenery with blind doors and windows, towards which he walked credulously, and against which he bumped and hurt himself.
>
> They had always known how to possess him entirely, without leaving him a fresh spot, without a moment's respite, how to devour him to the last crumb. They surveyed him, cut him up into dreadful building lots,

[105] Hewitt 2004, 144-147.

into squares, traversed him in every direction; sometimes they let him run, turned him loose, but they brought him back soon as he went too far, they took possession of him again. He had developed a taste for this devouring in childhood-- he tendered himself, relished their bittersweet odour, offered himself."

(Tropism XIX)[106]

The core idea of Saurraute's poetics is to displace bits (fragments) of a sentence from their original living environment.[107] Organising the bodies is like organising the syntax and both can be fragmented and displaced, broken into parts. The syntax is, traditionally, togetherness, the continuity of words, the rules governing their order. It flattens the multiplicity of meanings, tames the potentiality of any friction or disagreement. It attaches the words into space, and gets them to behave. It stops them from wandering around.

For Sarraute, very little of importance seems to occur on the surface, a refreshing proposition in a world keyed to the superficial. What seems to matter instead, is the nuanced and furtive elements of the motives that lie behind surface of skin, the ones that inherently seem to bring a lot of us together in this increasingly divided world. Although, no matter what time or place we belong to, the emphasis seems to be in deeper, primitive inherent impulses of the human being in Saurraute's short texts. In some ways, however, they tell a lot about what it is to live in the world we live in now. They seem to reach out to complex connections that exist between our face-to-face meetings and today's heterogeneous technologies. All this brings out the question: what is our relationship to objects, words and other living beings, in a world where transformations from material to virtual, and the body to the image, are taking place? Social relations and spaces are conditioned increasingly by political and technological developments, and we are no longer only looking at images and objects, but they are also looking at and touching us. And, even when we are finally able to make our moves, we cannot be sure if those moves have been pre-determined in advance. We're adapting slowly to our emotions entering a digital realm, and are more or less controlled by technologically and economically driven systems. So how are we going to operate when one could claim that even our feelings might not be our own anymore?

This brings to mind Teresa Brennan's criticism of globalization's accelerating speed. She says that globalized capitalism is just too fast for the biological world, and the result is that, in addition to being toxic to the natural world,

[106] Sarraute 2015, 41.

[107] Lindsted 2012, 13.

it starts to alter the human mentality. Brennan calls this "bio-deregulation" in which "humans work harder conforming to the rules of inhuman time, to restrict human interaction and personal contact, and to make us commute further (and migrate as a matter of course)." "In selling their labour in the free market", Brennan argues, "human beings have had to learn to conform to the tempo of a machine-world that moves much faster (and much further) than is humanly possible."[108] My film *Placeholder* (2017) started as a playful thought experiment, in which Avatars created by AI have taken over human emotions and collective memories by manipulating our deepest fears and desires. In *Moderate Manipulations* (2012), the two female models are treated as pieces in the game. In the documentary part in the cinema room, many of the performers of *Eden The Pow(d)er of Fear* (2014) raise their concern about social media, and how they feel that they are in fact stuck in constant repeated acts of self-representation, without any way out. In all three works the characters similarly to the ones in *Tropisms*, seem to be controlled partly by external forces, apparently in an active physical and mental state but driven by aporia. This paradoxical state of active paralysis as articulated by artist Cecile B. Evans seems to find common characteristics with the emotional states of Sarraute's *Tropisms*. Evans articulates this as following:

"The job of Facebook is not just to give you information but to keep you there, in a kind of active paralysis. Not just containing but retaining. Another Facebook motto, 'bring the world closer together', is not just vapid, but false; online, your emotions may be real, but Silicon Valley will quickly commodify them, package them, sell them off."[109]

What Evans often investigates in her work is "the way we evaluate emotion in contemporary society' and, in particular, 'how digital technology impacts the human condition."[110]

Also, Laura Lindsted points out how Sarraute connects tropisms to the feelings of sympathy, saying that Tropisms can elicit feelings of sympathy, an understanding of the other, pity, or the contrary acts of yielding, and conforming, or loss of one's own will.[111]

Although technological developments are increasingly defining our world image, and caring for the other is urgently needed, it is hard to replace sympathy and empathy with technology. Therefore, Saurraute's Tropisms might be asking the most relevant question; how to cultivate empathy and sincerity through the complexities of emotions? It might be, that in this, the ethical obligation is to entertain variety

[108] Brennan 2003, 66.

[109] Revely-Calder, 2018. https://frieze.com/article/alone-together-how-hyperlinked-structure-internet-shaping-our-emotional-lives [Accessed 06.03.2019]

[110] Revely-Calder, 2018

[111] Lindsted 2012, 140.

and doubt, and also retain the ability to connect to other beings regardless of their similarity or difference from us.

But how can the lived experience of non-verbal, pre-logical space be translatable into language or narratable in a story? In a way, Saurraute's writing might offer an answer to this problem. In *Tropisms*, Sarraute undoes narrative cohesion in favour of extending fleeting moments or instants by warping characters, their motivations, and time. They become true moments, too fleeting and too fragile for the contraption of plot. They are sensations that cannot be easily comprehended or put into words. Tropisms seems to take place in a moment prior to language, before explanation controls and flattens everything, and that is why the whole process of interpreting them is a paradox, as they seem to constantly escape any kind of definition. They seem to be pure energies, and vibrations of moods and emotions, and all of those things that we cannot even recognise in ourselves. They are rare things that may be considered insignificant or ignored, but are in fact tremendously important. Tropisms integrate the revealing and instinctive language of the body with the analytical and at times paranoid language of the mind: in which the act of searching becomes the meaning.

Sarraute herself points out in the prologue of *Tropisms*, that through these vignettes she wanted to create images that would make the reader experience analogous sensations from the undefinable, extremely rapid sensations that no words are able to express. She says that "it was necessary to make them break up and spread out in the consciousness of the reader, in the way that a slow-motion film does. Time is no longer the time of real life, but is a hugely amplified present."[112] Saurraute's vignettes start to create cinematic slow-motion close-ups in the mind that dramatize and extend—at times humorously—the everyday dramas of existence. However, they seem to be able to infiltrate the small places and holes that cinema cannot enter. Laura Lindsted says that for Sarraute Tropisms assimilate into a rupture or a hole on a smooth surface.[113]

Therefore, Sarraute's refusal of definition and closure is evident everywhere—in the frequent trails of holes scattered over the pages of *Tropisms*, the absence of social or historical context, the rejection of characterization and the refusal of all certainty. *Tropisms* are a journey through the "uncanny" worlds of the unconscious: the protagonists go around and around, up and down, and bump against the texts crumbling structure, which evokes multi-layered labyrinths, wherein pieces of the structure are missing, and the paths are filled with a dense growth of language and mechanical strangely automated human behaviour.

[112] Sarraute 2015, 6.

[113] Lindsted refers to Dorrit Cohn's "Transparent Minds" (Lindsted 2012, 4.).

HOLE: Placeholder (2017)
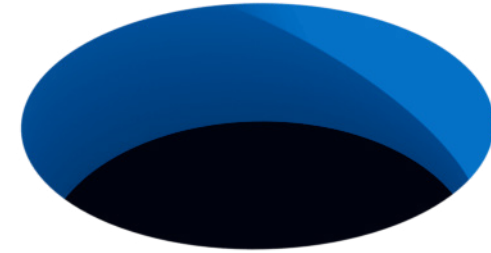
While we were looking away or too busy to notice, virtual objects evolved into self-aware collective being. They learned to take endless desktop shots and screen captures and created avatars of themselves to make up for the fact that they have no body, no face and no flesh. We might have been misled to think that they have no emotions and no senses, considering them only as temporary placeholders. But they are determined to stay.

This is a thought experiment, a speculative fiction in which Avatar characters created by AI are attempting to hijack human consciousness, addressing the lack of empathy as a prevailing condition. These self-aware beings are capable of mimicking human-like performance, seduction, telling stories and imposing control by appealing to emotion and sense of nostalgia. They play directly with our affective consciousness. Placeholder imagines the future when AI has developed further and computers have started thinking and learning for themselves. Inspired by the recent developments of Artificial Intelligence and historical examples such as the Turing test and Eliza AI software, the video becomes a kind of a vlog created by a collective of virtual beings that hold human images and emotions as captives. This work has been created fully from found footage, open source material and animated images.

I am thinking about our relationship to performance and body. Does liveness define performance? Does one need to be physically present anymore to perform? What about 'lending' someone a voice, ventriloquism as a strategy? We could think of ventriloquizing and related strategies as both power manoeuvres, and connection manoeuvres, lending and borrowing, separations between the voice and the body and authenticating the unauthentic.

CLICK THE IMAGE TO START THE VIDEO

The Aesthetics of Affect

Sarraute's rhetorical gestures seem radical by the very fact that she seems to open up space, until now unarticulated for the reader. It invites possibilities for inventing new images and stories, told by different voices. In her texts writing becomes sensing, not the reporting of what was sensed. Sarraute's work might very well show us once more, that art is not something defined only by knowledge. Art operates in different registers, occupying the senses and using the force of the affect.

If we think about affects more precisely in terms of how they operate in the context of art aesthetically, and beyond representation, we need to ask what art does instead of what it is. In his article "The Aesthetics of Affect" Simon O'Sullivan points out that we might need to remind ourselves of what art does best, and that it is not an object of knowledge. In fact, it is precisely antithetical to knowledge. He says that although art is a part of the world, it is in fact art's apartness from the world that constitutes its importance. This is the power of the aesthetic in which affect is immanent. O'Sullivan continues by pointing out that affects can be described as extra discursive and extra-textual. "They can be described as extra-discursive in the sense that they are "outside" discourse and understood as structure, (they are precisely what is irreducible to structure). They can be described as extra-textual in the sense that they do not produce – or do not only produce – knowledge. Affects might, however, be understood as textual in that they are felt as differences in intensity."[114]

Gilles Deleuze offers an interesting philosophical model for affect, borrowing from Spinoza. For him affect means an encounter of two 'bodies' in a situation in which they merge and affect each other by either increasing or decreasing the vitality and power of acting. The bodies here can be any living or non-living object in the world.[115] According to Deleuze,

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[114] O'Sullivan 2001, 123.

[115] In *The Theory of Finite Modes, What can Body Do*? The whole chapter devoted to Spinoza's questions on the body, Deleuze quotes Spinoza as following: "We do not even know of what a body is capable, says Spinoza. That is: We do not even know what affections we are capable, not the extend of our power." (Deleuze, 1992, 226.)

affects are thoughts that do not represent anything and therefore they are not feelings or emotions. In his thinking, they exist in between elements, in relations.[116] Affects are dispersed sensations that permeate our thoughts, desires, and motivations. Affects leave a notable mark on our attitudes. They are immersive, we live through and within them. With Brian Massumi we can say that affects deteriorate, disperse, vanish, and reappear. They constitute a dynamic reality.[117]

An important notion again here is an experience. The gap between experience and explanation has been already touched upon previously in this text. And although the entangled connections, the twisting growth of words and stories, and the relationship between the form and the content, might have revealed some lurking potentialities, here, we might find something that does not require reading in between the lines. We cannot structure or summarize affects, yet we can experience them. As the fleeting moments of experience in Tropisms pass through the consciousness, the affect is immanent to experience. Similarly, to the detailed descriptions and repetitions of objects in Robbe-Grillet's novels and

films, they on their own stand for nothing outside of themselves, but when repeated become reflections of the emotional experiences of the protagonists.[118] But is there such a thing as an answer to the question, 'what is an affect' that can be given in language? And, as O'Sullivan points out by posing this question, we have placed the affect in conceptual opposition that always and everywhere promises and then frustrates the meaning, the affect becomes a broken promise.[119] So what we need, is to re-think how to pose and approach this question.

Deconstruction has a vital importance in the construction of this discourse. At its best it offers important ways to resist reductionism and to dismantle dualisms and binary oppositions, by creating new terms as a pure necessity of analysis, however, those cannot be our only goal. Derrida explained in numerous writings that deconstruction has to be difficult and complicated as it actively criticises the very language needed to explain it. Mostly true, but if deconstruction constantly stays in the position of defining what deconstruction is not, it remains in the negative, in a reductive position. And, although here we want to remove

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[116] Helle 2012, 61–62.

[117] In the *Parables of the Virtual* Brian Massumi considers affect as central in understanding communication and practices of our information-based society and demonstrate the significance of affect as a force in media landscape. (See Massumi 2002, 23-45.)

[118] In Robbe-Grillet's writing and film-making often repetitive descriptions of objects replace the inner psychology of the character." Barthes recognized this early in Robbe-Grillet's literary career. "The whole purpose of this author's

work, in fact, is to confer upon an object its 'being there', to keep it from being 'something',"Barthes wrote in 1954. By using the Heideggerian term 'being there', Barthes meant the object in itself without any heredity, associations or references."(See Jeffries, 2007, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2007/sep/15/2) [Accessed 06.06.2019]

[119] However as O'Sullivan remarks "Deconstructive reading is not itself a bad thing; indeed, it might be strategically important to employ deconstruction precisely to counteract the effects of, to disable, a certain kind of aesthetic discourse (deconstruction as a kind of expanded ideological critique). However, after the deconstructive reading, the art object remains. Life goes on. Art, whether we will it or not, continues producing affects." (O'Sullivan 2001, 126.)

ourselves from reductionism, inventing new terminology might not offer a solution either. Similarly, art criticism becomes easily trapped by its target, instead of opening a way to new perceptions and interpretations. So how to move beyond that? It could be argued that the interrogation of dualisms and power relations needs to move beyond deconstructive strategies, and approach art as a strategy of world making. In this art can function as a portal to other worlds and in fact construct other worlds within our world.

Worldmaking

The interpretation and assessment of works simply based on their immediate and measurable results, including whether they achieve their apparent goals, overlooks how they can resonate beyond the moment of their irruption. It might be more productive to examine how they potentially reveal the possibility of alternative worlds. Here, there will be a specific emphasis towards the creation of works of 'sci-fiction', the creation of different realities, forms and meanings, and different worlds and different spatiotemporal systems. This mode of thinking as worldmaking, as science-fictioning, is characterized by spatial and temporal layering, and results in the production of a different space-time, rather than art practice as production of commodity.

It is December 2015 and as usual I am rather anxious. I am in a room again, but this time it is some kind of gallery or a lecture hall. There is a moderately large arty crowd filling the room. Among the various groups absorbed in their own conversation, circulate a number of persons not yet settled, but obviously about to find the group they feel most comfortable with or most beneficial to talk to. The artistic research symposium *Worlds within Worlds* I have been organizing is about to start and soon I will have to introduce it.[120] In the past I have often created performative lectures to interrupt the flow of these kinds of Academic events, in order to avoid a uniform from up to down transmission of information. Now, perhaps because the weight of expectation concerning the artistic research is starting to pull me down, or as an organizer of this event I have lost my playful nature, I have decided to stick with the traditional form of a short lecture. Or perhaps my lack of courage is due to my previous lectures often causing awkward confusion. Whatever the reason, this is a decision which I will immediately regret afterwards. Despite that, I have encouraged other invited speakers to experiment with the format and I am eager to see what will happen.

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[120] https://sites.uniarts.fi/fi/web/kuvaresearchdays/kuva-research days-2015 [Accessed 06.03.2019]

I start by saying that the whole introduction is already a bit of a paradox, as there is this necessity of returning to language in order to define practices that highlight the lack or limits of it, yet there are also potentialities that occur when we come to face those limits.

I tell the audience that, by putting specific emphasis on both fictional, visual and uncertain dimensions of the artwork, the focus of this symposium will be on artist research projects that aim towards the creation of works of 'sci-fiction', the creation of different realities, forms and meanings, different worlds and different spatiotemporal systems. These practices unfold amongst durations and spaces, and engage with a non-linear mode of history and different temporalities. By deliberately cultivating uncertainty through texts and open scenarios, with indeterminate outcomes, they exert their force as something that cannot easily be pinned down and question the when and how of artistic production. This particular interest lies in artworks or texts that aim towards the creation of new worlds and systems, and which are marked with certain kind of complexity of meaning. In this, navigation plays a pivotal role. These works might suggest a logic that remains opaque, which in turn suggests an underlying imaginary operation.

It is snowing outside, but the gallery where the symposium is held remains warm, even too warm. The windows are slightly steamy from the large crowd spread out in the gallery. During my talk, I can hear occasional sounds of restless feet moving against the waxed floor and bodies shifting on the chairs. Once in a while someone gets up and leaves, either to go to bathroom or out. All of those sounds are accentuated in my mind, making me painfully aware of the dragging length of my own speech and my shaking voice. In the right hand corner of the speaking platform, there is a lamp under which I have placed a pile of papers to read from. Behind me, the screen shows a labyrinth that looks ever so familiar, with primary colours and blue doors. And, while I fumble the papers and try to operate my computer, I am wishing we could all hop into the picture of the labyrinth. In there I could navigate with more ease.

Here and now, looking at my works and research, I am embedded in my previous subjectivity, embedded within my previous self as a thinking body, who' makes things', precisely as this presentation is embedded within my work, as another thinking body who 'talks about things', more personal than myself.

This makes me think how in an article "From Science Fiction to Science Fictioni", Simon O'Sullivan suggests a 'nesting' characteristic of the most interesting fictions. The positioning of fictions within fictions, that themselves point to the always contingent nature of any 'reality', that the

latter is simply a fiction that might itself be bracketed in the positioning of a superior 'reality' (that is then itself simply another fiction for another reality and so on).[121]

Now a little falteringly, I continue by saying that the aim of this symposium is to point out that art and therefore artistic research has the capacity of creating potentiality by bringing contradicting worlds together, revisiting unfinished projects and addressing paradoxes, some which may be pointing towards its inner and institutional set of limitations. Perhaps, instead of mapping out or inventing novel methodological insights and techniques that aim towards their own faithful representation, we could concentrate on articulating from where and when we are speaking and operating from.

My part comes to an end. I have invited the different speakers to address the question of art as a world-making endeavour but each with their own perspective.

The first one to start after my introduction is Dr Amelia Barikin who has written notably about art and science fiction.

In 2013 Barikin edited a book *Making Worlds: Art and Science Fiction*, together with Helen Hughes. She has written about art and science fiction, making a parallel with science fiction writing and contemporary art practices. However, she has been discussing this with the view of moving away from

science-fiction as a literary exercise, to the spatial and temporal strategies of visual arts. She has talked about the limits and possibilities of work versus the world, dealing in particular with works of contemporary art that foreground *immersion* within specifically constructed spatiotemporal environments. Immersion has been very present in French artist Philippe Parreno's scripted spaces for a decade. Parreno himself has described his spaces as floating spaces with an invisible script. Thomas Oberender points out that in Parreno's exhibitions a world is created by means of a script that follows its own laws, and which does not represent or reproduce anything, but presents another kind of reality. He also points out another important distinction, that the concept of "scripted spaces" contains and requires a strict temporalization of spatial experiences, as it primarily describes the experience of processes.[122] This could be seen as creating time, opening up a place for contemplation that does not stop in one moment but keeps opening up new holes for new experiences.

In a similar vein, Barikin has continuously been referring and discussing the works of another French artist Pierre Huyghe (often collaborator with Parreno). Barikin finds in Huyghe's projects an alternative conception of history, a "topological historicity", which reprograms our

[121] O'Sullivan 2017, 5.

[122] Oberender 2018, 51.

temporal formats. As Huyghe once said, we combine and relate images through montage: "we can create a representation of an event that is perhaps more precise than the event itself."[123] Barikin adds that one factor contributing to this need of world-making as an artistic endeavour, is the fact that the world (or an event or an object), as a singular entity or representable form, no longer exists. One of the key starting points for Amelia's thinking has been Nelson Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking*, 1978.

Barikin quotes Goodman: "The many stuffs-matter, energy, waves, phenomena-that worlds are made of are made along with the worlds. But made of what? Not from nothing, after all, but from other worlds. Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand, the making is a remaking."[124] This enables the construction of numerous contradictory worlds, multiple parallel worlds. "Is truth, for example, an essential component in creating a world and maintaining its stability", she continues? "Does a world need to have a quantifiable truth-value in order to be properly inhabitable? Goodman's answer is no. The serial deployment of a world across disparate formats and contexts makes it amenable to inhabitation because it leaves something open for the readers and for the participants, to hook onto and adapt. In order to remain durable, the world needs to be shared, and it needs to be built upon. It needs in other words, to be paradoxically complete but fragmentary."[125] Barikin continues: "I see so much of contemporary art reflected in this claim, particularly as contemporary art continues to grapple with the changing status of the object and the image as viable carriers of meaning. It is not hard to see that most artists working today are involved in much more than the generation of discrete objects or singular texts. They are also heavily invested in interrogating and indeed shaping the conditions by which one text can come into visibility at a particular time, while another simply cannot: a governing process that Jacques Rancière calls the 'politics of visibility'."[126] However, I find Goodman's definition of the rightness of these worlds slightly problematic and reductive, as this rightness, according to him is determined by coherence, compactness and comprehensiveness.[127] Aren't those categorizing factors again trying to overcome the paradox that still resists? He also relies quite heavily on the idea of allegory or metaphor instead of a sensation, which might, in fact, start to work against immersion. However, this kind of serial deployment

[123] See: Pierre Huyghe Parallel Presents The Art of Pierre Huyghe http://www.artbook.com/9780262017800.html [Accessed 06.03.2019]

[124] Barikin 2013 b,1.
Note also Goodmans definition from What is art to what art does and when is art? (See Goodman, 1978, 57.)

[125] ibid.,2.

[126] ibid.,2.

[127] ibid.,109–112.

offered by Goodman makes an interesting parallel with the strategies used by Robbe-Grillet. Robbe-Grillet's *L'Eden et Après* attempted to create a constructed and social human occupied system that was, however, partly ruled by chance. It is in short, a contingent system. The writings and films by Robbe-Grillet are often based on a structure or a system and complex set of relations that seem to hint an underlying logic. Cobbled from various impulses and ideas, they form pseu-do-narratives that either encourage or defy viewers to make sense of their own patterns. According to Elizabeth Ann Newton "Patterns are identified across his work, establishing links between individual words, visual images or audible elements. These elements are often repeated, recombined or slightly altered each time they appear or are set in opposition to one another."[128] In addition to Schönberg's serialism, in *L'Eden et Après*, Piet Mondrian's paintings proposed a pattern for seeing the world. Robbe-Grillet uses a pattern but as a starting point for the creation of new kinds of entangled connections. Indeed, this kind of approach can be seen science fictional-hence worldmaking. Here the modernist structure of the labyrinth, in fact, defies the spectator's interpretation of it, as it is porous and continuously mutating. Barkin brings up the kind of art that disorients and is critical

but in a productive way. In relation to this, she is referring to one of the founding definitions of science fiction by Darko Suvin: the theory of cognitive estrangement. She says that "In the early 1970s, Suvin suggested that one of the most revolutionary elements of sci-fi is its ability to render thought itself strange, revealing the fragility of perception in the making of meaning."[129] "But, this kind of aesthetic and cognitive dissonance is not always a rigorously intellectual or even theoretical process", says Barikin. "It is more often recognisable as a sensation, a sort of sensual, vertiginous pleasure invoked by the opening of a chasm, the creation of a hole through which another reality might emerge. The new territories of art, then: can they be accessed through the delirium of estrangement, through the vortices of science fiction, in 'no-knowledge zones'?" she continues.[130] Amelia Barikin's talk is traditional and eloquent and afterwards, everyone is thanking her for its clarity and precision. Yet, it leaves hardly any questions. I begin to wonder how can we describe something as worldmaking in a clear-cut manner, if we associate it as a contingent practice? I wish I had said something about this in my introduction.

I have invited professor/artist/curator Harri Laakso to do a presentation knowing (or believing) he shares many

[128] Newton 2003, 23.

[129] Barikin 2013a, 11.

[130] Ibid,11.

similar interests. Because, in his article Pressings he suggests that artistic research explores, before anything else, how artworks, presentations and images themselves perform research gestures, separate from the intentions of their maker. He says that perhaps, the artistic research opens a pathway to another kind of knowledge, and in saying so suggests that perhaps literally artistic research does not know? That is, because it does not exhibit those ideals that we place for knowledge, of an organized, stable and coherent economy of meaning.[131] This kind of art is embracing the unknown and uncertainty. It does not fit comfortably into given parameters and into what we think knowledge and language requires.

"In art things often are out of place and sometimes not what they seem. Art creates worlds from this out-of-placeness and this seeming. "The apartment and its proxy" is a presentation that explores that created space, taking as its departure point Maurice Blanchot's novella The One Who Was Standing Apart From Me (1953), Pierre Huyghe's Roof Garden Commission (2015) and the films of the anonymous Syrian collective Abounaddara." This is the blurb Laakso has given me about his forthcoming performance. *The apartment and its proxy*, but until the day itself, he is fairly mysterious about it. I know he is in New York,

so giving a presentation in person will be a bit tricky. He says the artist Crystal Bennes is coming over to perform his talk. And I wonder whether he is going to do something along the lines of Barbara Visser's *Lecture on Lecture with Actress* (2004), nested artists talks in which actresses gave an artists' talk as Barbara Visser, while Visser told her what to say through an earpiece, after which a second actress performed the lecture based on the first lecture and so on.[132]

The audience obviously knows nothing about this, when Chrystal takes the stage, a charming young woman with a long thick hair, with an American accent. How fitting. She introduces herself as Harri Laakso. Everyone looks slightly perplexed. In addition to the works mentioned above, the talk shows a video of Laakso cooking in his apartment, so in a way he becomes almost an avatar performing in his own talk. A couple of weeks later he does another performative lecture in another artistic research event. He is still in New York, and if I recall this correctly, this time his physical placeholder is a cardboard figure with a balloon. The role play and the absence of the 'author' figure makes me think of this being part and apartness of the culture, the 'make-believe culture we are living in, which is itself a patchwork of different fictions. Instead of choosing to be present online

[131] Laakso 2018, 187. Here Laakso is also referring to artistic research as *imaginary activity*, that should not be viewed in relation to, say the natural sciences or humanities, -not because it does not yet exist, or because it is always yet to come, permanently not yet, but because it is basically the activity and interplay of mental and material images. Research operations and gestures are formed between these two dimensions.

[132] See more here: http://www.barbaravisser.net/work/47/ [Accessed 06.03.2019]

(this cannot certainly be only matter of time difference) he decides to show his apartness and mark his both absence and presence through human and non-human agents. In any case, this is a gesture, an irruption in both time and space, and creates an event in which form supports the content without a free-flowing transmission of information. Here, the role-play or pretending opens up possibilities. It imagines alternative routes without regard for logic or reason.

The gap between being a part and apart is here as a continuous presence. Laakso's talk taps into hidden subtexts to mobilise invisible energies, creating space from out-of-placeness. It also addresses the idea of speaking close to and at a distance from the art practice, raising the question of who is speaking to whom and from where? This brings to mind Pierre Huyghe's words: "When I look at something, I ask myself more and more. Who speaks? When I know who is speaking, I see that there is a commitment. I need to know there is some commitment. I need to find an author. "I" can also be polyphonic, fictional, inhabited by a multitude of characters, be right or wrong or at fault or corrupted. But that's more the self than me, me, me".[133]

After a few other presentations and at the end of the long day and as an introduction to Pierre Huyghe's *The Host and the Cloud*, we do a simple role play with Amelia Barikin based on a conversation between Pierre Huyghe and Rirkrit Tiravanija in Interview magazine. I am Rirkrit and Amelia is Pierre. This introduction as a form of a role play is a result of a decision not to give an introduction to Huyghe's work as it seems to defy any attempt of description. This is paradoxically well summarized in critic **Filipa Ramos'** description of his work *The Host and The Cloud*. She says:

> "The work's incommunicableness is its strongest feature: it attests that thought is structured around visions and images, which crumble apart when turned into discourse because, on one hand, they do not obey any conventional logic of narrative, and, on the other, they explode simultaneously in so many levels that words automatically submit them to a spatial-temporal hierarchy that corrupts the whole ensemble. Here, the feeling of the critic is similar to that of trying to describe a dream, or even better, a very intense psychedelic experience, such as an acid trip. The only possible way to do so is to continuously jump from one realm to another, trying to ignore any time or sequential logic."[134]

[133] Tiravanija 2010, 124.

[134] Ramos, 2010.

I saw this haunting hallucinatory film for the first time in the *Centre Pompidou* in Paris, in Huyghe's large retrospective show. I remember how an animated figure of a rabbit appears continuously throughout the film. Similarly to some other works from him, such as the dogs in *Untilled*, or the deer in *Streamside day*, the animals seem to be offering the narrative thread within strange fragments of human behaviour and rituals. But here in this context, we only use Huyghe's words to talk about this work. He describes it as "something between an experiment and an extended ritual." The film comes from a series of events Huyghe organized over the period of one year. The events take place in the closed French folk museum (*Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires in Paris*) close to the amusement park *Le Jardin d'Acclimatation*. Or as Huyghe himself says, "the museum is a collective memory or a mind but also a portrait of someone who never appears."[135] This project was filmed in three sessions, which were also performative events. This memorable shoot was, as Huyghe recalls, fuelled by hours and hours of reading, from neuroscience handbooks describing altered states of consciousness, to Bettelheim's psychoanalysis of fairy tales. Three dates were used: Halloween, St. Valentine's Day, and the 1st of May, those "popular holidays that have colonized time" he says. Little by little, the dusty old museum of French ethnology is turned into a mental island. Almost all the scenes in it are duplicated and redone, as often for Huyghe second-hand narratives offer even greater narrative potential. Every reality has its alternates, and the powerful fascination of the film comes partly from these reflective interplays. Much later, in the summer of 2017, Anne Imhof's apparently compelling work *Faust* is on everyone's lips. Winner of the Golden Lion of that year at Venice Biennale this performance/installation gathered young, cool performers under a glass floor of the German Pavilion in an enclosed intense yet aesthetically fashion-like world. I have to rely on the descriptions of it, as I am not able to go and see the actual work. I hear the lines are so long that people get very tired of waiting. I am also rather annoyed as the descriptions bear such resemblance to *Eden* that it makes me not want to see it. I watch some documentation clips from the internet and wonder how this piece seems to be made precisely for this, watched as fragments of recording and Instagram photos. Imhof uses the cool aesthetics of contemporary urban life, combining millennial trademarks such as Instagram style images, posing, fashionable clothing, combining them with more provocative themes, such as sex, masturbation, casual violence. Absurd, surreal elements and props such as Dobermans and fire guitars heighten the composed tension.

135 Tiravanija, 2010, 47

It can be said that straight story can no longer normalise the complex, unpredictable forces of reality, let alone the constant stream of big data. *Neo Liberalism* and social media have colonised time as well as space, and there must be a correlation between narrative innovation and technological development. This needs to be addressed not only through real or actual places, but also regarding imagination and unconsciousness. Simon O'Sullivan points out that the failure of politics is actually also the failure of imagination. He says:

> "Capital, we might say, has increasingly co-opted even our dream worlds – that repository of images that give us life beyond the plane of matter. Indeed, this unconscious – understood in a Bergsonian sense (as a virtual reservoir that subsists but that is habitually masked by more utilitarian and pragmatic interests) – is being colonised by commodity culture, and not least by Web 2.0 and its logics: Facebook and Twitter and all the other filtering super-nodes of a once wild– and un-enclosed – web offer up a restricted repository of images (and especially interfaces), ever available, seemingly varied, but, in fact, often just more-of-the-same."[136]

In the prologue of *Making Worlds* Barikin asks: "How do you build a universe that does not fall apart right away?"[137] Philip K. Dick already said when writing in his journal in 1978, that 'we're in a condition, not a world', and admitting that what he liked to do most was to create universes that were designed to fall apart. For artists, confronting the 'condition' of the present doesn't usually begin with the question of explanation but that of navigation: "how to work with rather than work out the compelling tension between a limitless fantastical wilderness and the real business of being-in-the-world".[138]

O'Sullivan offers an interesting point with regards to collapse or rupture. He suggests that it is in art where we find this the spatial and temporal layering, hence the logic of collapsing worlds. Art is a gesture beyond the reasonable, it is like an ongoing absurd repetition, a gesture beyond the logic of the market and therefore is not necessarily involved in the production of typical knowledge. He says: "Crucially, with art, this often means that something unrecognisable, often accidental, is introduced into the mix. Chances can be taken – after all, there is no audience to please, except for the very specific audience that is looking for something that does not please them (at least, as they are presently constituted). This is the introduction of something random, something that is, as it were, unwelcome and spoils any

[137] Barikin, 2013 a.10.

[138] ibid.10

[136] O'Sullivan 2016, 87.

ready-made and too-neat schema or logic. It is the introduction – or excavation– of rupture, a point of collapse."[139]

Nevertheless, it is interesting to see how, what O'Sullivan calls Myth-Science, resonates with the logic and ideas Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute were using in their work. O'Sullivan's myth science in a way offers a tool for interpretation, and emphasises the enduring importance of these works.

Donna Haraway has observed that it is essential to retain the focus on the coming together of different beings, not on oppositions but the contact zones, zones of friction and caring.[140] Falling apart is part of togetherness and is one element amongst everything. Here, both the physical structures and the psyche are in constant danger of collapse.

Eden offers an experience of a different spatio-temporal rhythm. Here, time is slowed down, repeated, interrupted and sometimes glitched. This is a magnified alternative space/time from neo liberal performativity and productivity, different from the time of social media, creating a somewhat estranged and warped present moment.

Here I am continuously faced by my uncertainty, and the limits of my knowing. Unable to distinguish whether all this is just a hallucination or reverie, I am nonetheless trying to find new ways to engage the audience and raise their interest. I am trying to imagine alternatives to this game, in which everyone is required to be active and participate and to play a role.

Suddenly, following instructions from a man wearing a tie, a smiling young woman begins to dance energetically to the sound of Pharrell Williams' last hit song *Happy*. She dances around, while others more or less passively watch her and some clap along in tune. She is interrupted when a man in a suit enters a room and presses the multiple keys of the electric piano down at once. The piano erupts in cacophonous noise. ….(p)liiink, plooonkkk, scraaa, plunk, plank, tsing, tingggg! The sound this makes is enough to interrupt any action that is going on. But we must not let this stop us, we must continue. We are just about to reach the centre.

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[139] O'Sullivan 2016, 87.

[140] Haraway and Braidotti, 2017.

CLICK THE IMAGE TO START THE VIDEO

The Centre

A picture, in it there is an aerial view of a suburban area consisting of six streets. These six streets consist of two parallel streets, joined together by a square and four side streets. It is a mixed area of apartment blocks and quaint, detached houses with gardens on flagstone streets. The flowers are in bloom. In this mixed area, there are few older industrial buildings in an L-shaped formation. The one in the middle is slightly different, perhaps only because it has a bright blue door. *Eden*. Open the door. We enter another space opening up in a front of us. A Room. On the right just by the door, there is a picture in a black Ikea frame. In the picture, there is a room-like construction, which looks like a labyrinth of some sort, like

a replica of a set from Mondrian. A group of young people are sitting in formations in this setting. Blocks of colour, red, black, blue and yellow and white cover its surfaces.

Meanwhile, a group of young people are gathered in a place, in the structure with multiple coloured partitioning walls, and there are mirrors everywhere. They seem bored and keep themselves entertained by playing with the objects around them. Some of them are reading. Or they just stare into the distance in a front of them. Occasionally, their activities are interrupted by a young man who calls them to gather round, as he throws a dice on a metal tray. After that he points his finger towards other participants, performing a loud calculation that depends on the number indicated by the dice, then he asks some of them to engage in different bizarre games. A waiter is a middle-aged man, dressed in a black suit. He walks around pointlessly with his tray, at times offering a drink to someone. Mostly, he seems engaged in observing the futile activities of the participants. There are objects all around, chairs, cups, framed images, a gun, pieces of fabric. There are geometrical cubicles placed all around on the floor. On the top of them, there are also some books. I briefly glance through some of them, a book on Guy De Cointet, Gilles Deleuze's *The Fold*, Stephane Mallarme's *A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*. I pick up one of them: Jacques Rancière's *Emancipated Spectator*,

randomly opening a page. It is the page 59. Someone has underlined some parts of the text with wiggly drawn pencil lines, and this makes me question whether the fact that I happened to open this particular page was a coincidence after all.

"On the one hand, the 'community of sense' woven together by artistic practice is a new set of vibrations of the vibrations of the human community in the present; one the other hand, it is a monument that stands as a mediation or a substitute for a people to come. The paradoxical relationship between the 'apart' and the 'together' is also a paradoxical relationship between the present and the future. The artistic 'dissensual community' has a dual body. It is a combination of means for producing an effect out of itself: creating a new community between human beings, a new political people."[141]

I am interrupted as a blond girl enters the room, a brief reflection of her can be seen in the surrounding multiple mirrors. Her double appears simultaneously in many spots in this room. Her double is, was, and will be here and at the same time everywhere.

The same blond girl looks at me and her, gets up and says: "In Eden, we invent our stories and act our parts. We pretend to be happy or sad. To be in love, to break off, to have an adventure, since nothing happens in our studies or in our useless lives."[142]

Eden is full of mirrors, grids of primary colours, covering all the surfaces, interrupted with black panels that run both vertically and horizontally. This space does not have a linear path; it is a broken-down narrative, an interrupted progress or a digital glitch translated in three dimensions. The flatness of this entire set is broken down by reflections of fragments and framed pictures everywhere, disorienting the view. Blue doors lead into stark white corridors that run around in a square-shaped pattern, interrupted by an occasional room, in which characters, (such as the blonde painting the painting, a nude woman in a staircase, a teacher writing on a board), all work with a robotic like precision as if caught in a time glitch, a fault in a system, or a DVD that got stuck due to the scratch on its surface.

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[141] Rancière 2009, 59.

[142] From the film *L'Eden et Après by Alain Robbe Grillet*, 1970.

It is the last (6th) performance, and I am again walking around observing.
Everything seems more intense now, and every action more loaded.
I stumble upon the love scene that has just started. In it, there are
two performers at the time, pretending to be in love.
Whatever is happening between this particular couple does not seem
like acting anymore. But what do I know. Bodies locked together in
what looks like heights of passion, and they are really going for it. I am
wondering how far they are going to go and where will we draw the line.
I am slightly uncomfortable and start to feel like a voyeur. I remember the
conversation someone had heard the other night after the performance.
A couple from the audience had had a heated argument outside.
Apparently, that was to do with how they are not having sex anymore.
I wonder whether the performance had stirred the argument and what
happened to them afterwards. Someone told me they broke up.

With Mondrian as a framework the audience enters directly into an autonomous, abstract world where reality is only represented through the mirrors. Here and there, Mondrian's characteristic blue, red, yellow and white insists on making the viewer a central protagonist. It's here, in this oneiric melange, and there, in the rapid-fire editing and words and sounds splashing across the room, and in the pop culture conversation.

It's you, it's all about you. Think mirrors as a message to be. The mechanical humming surround sound adds a slightly sinister undertone to the whole set. The unequal power balance is maintained by the serious look of the smartly dressed older man who is moving around like a drone, with eyes that seem to see everything. It seems to be his job to precisely monitor and ensure that the rules are clear to everyone. This is experienced by two daring audience members tempted by the inviting game, located at one of the small tables. Just after having placed themselves by the table, the drone-man hovers over them, asking them to move on.

Free play is not allowed, but the temptation is omnipresent. It is difficult not to get carried away by the happy atmosphere, the visual surroundings and the beautiful young people who take turns dancing to *Happy*, sipping colourful drinks or seducing each other until the waiter comes in between them.

A strange funeral ritual suddenly takes place accompanied with a musical performance in which instruments are any found objects that make sound. Random sounds start to create a strange hypnotic rhythm, as if in a trance.

Caught in this surreal, almost sanctified space between representation and abstraction, the audience are turned into hostages in this space between reality and fantasy.

As flies on the wall, they are thus witnessing a string of surreal events, which might seem like innocent party games, played out by any college students, but that undoubtedly stand for an eternal and happy afterlife on Instagram and Facebook.

But the games are not what they appear to be. They seem to be dictated by hidden powers and chance. A smartly dressed young man is throwing a dice on a blank plate to determine the outcome. Depending on what the dice will show, the man selects his various participants, and with only six possibilities, it soon becomes clear that the game will run on repeat until one of the characters sums up the courage to rebel against the rules and challenge the power.

But it does not happen. I wonder what it requires to exchange being part of the community to a position of loneliness? What kind of performativity is required in order to fit into this picture, into this world? Fuelled by fear of exclusion, the game is then allowed to continue for three hours.

After three intense hours we must confront ourselves with the unpleasant but inevitable question: Would you dance to Happy just for the sake of maintaining your image? We are in 'Eden', and here we are playing the game. Find the rhythm, deny doubt and throw yourself in, says the mantra![143]

[143] Parts of the section are borrowed and freely translated by the author from review "Paradis på repeat" by Amalie Fredriksen at *Kunsten*.Nu https://kunsten.nu/journal/paradis-paa-repeat/ [Accessed 13.02.19]

The games occasionally start to get heated and perhaps go too far, as if nobody was in control anymore. Instructed to take turns to touch the face of a blind-folded person, some performers take this action further than intended. A slap that seems bit too hard, or another gesture that appears slightly violent, reveal tensions that have been built throughout the process within Eden or reveal something about the true nature of their executor. Who knows? Some performers on the contrary, show a touch of tenderness towards the blindfolded person by caressing their face or by a tender kiss. As a whole the broad spectrum of emotions between social interactions start to be revealed, and nobody resists the actions taken by the others.

Some keys and unopened doors

It is still not clear at which point I started to be lost in a labyrinth of
my own construction. Is it here that the uncertainty really kicks in and
starts to separate my body from my mind? The state of aporia finds its
justification, disintegration of the character its purpose? Perhaps this
world I have created stops being in my control at this moment or maybe
this is the way it has always been. If I allow this story to lead us to the
practically unknown, where do I need to stop and choose?
I have reached the centre, yet I feel that there were so many doors
along the way that I left unopened or half open. It is here that I am
asking myself perhaps I should have chosen another route? I could
have followed the paths leading to questions of temporality, time and
its relation to perception – an endlessly fascinating subject. However,
Deleuze, Bergson and others have dealt with this topic so extensively that
it seems almost futile to go there. I could have walked along the paths
of film theory, starting perhaps from the traditions of cinema Verite and
Eisenstein's montage theory or Rancière's reflections on the cinema as
means, between the logic of the action and the effect of the real. I could
have delved into the history of immersive theatre and performance, and
installation and its new popularity as art or entertainment. As there are
many groups such as Punch Drunk, Poste Restante, Signa and in Finland;

Wauhaus and Valtteri Raekallio corp. that have participated in
the development of this performance/theatre form in past years,
creating truly ambitious productions. Arguably, there is also another
side to the arising popularity of the immersive experience in the art
context. Works from groups such as Team Lab show how art is quickly
becoming part of the experience economy, creating easy amusement park
type of entertainment for the masses.[144] I have barely touched upon the
wonderful and fascinating worlds of Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno,
who specifically comment on the rise of such experiences in our society,
creating alternative systems and rituals for us, that aim to show how
many of the spaces we are surrounded and encircled by, are guided
by a hidden script.

Another important question that I have only briefly referred to , is what
function art might serve at a moment of great technological change?
One factor is that this increasing change and acceleration of speed,
although not itself particularly new, means that certain aspects of culture
and theory become quickly outdated, and the expectation for more
heightened experiences from the audience more obvious. The life and
attention spans are so short that it feels redundant for art to take part
in this competition. Instead, it feels more relevant to attend to the need
for more subtle and more complex experiences.

Outside of defensiveness and insecurity, outside of needing to keep
up with images and speed, how can we find ways to connect with others
more genuinely, and how we can offer opportunities to see and care
about vulnerability that is unlike ours?

[144] In 1999, Joseph Pine and Jim Gilmore identified a drastic change in the modern economy. In order to set themselves
apart from the competition, businesses had to offer customers more than just great goods or services. They needed to
offer experiences: memorable events that engage people in more personal ways. They called this prevailing condition as
"Experience Economy". (See Pine and Gilmore 1999.)

Therefore, we might need to think more carefully about those experiences that often remain untold or unheard. This might offer an interesting potential for future research. In connection to this, I could have discussed more about Donna Haraway's notion of Speculative Fabulation, which deals so interestingly with how the stories are told, and what stories are told, and should be told and heard.

It has been my interest here to think about the alternative ways that image and language and body can come together. It has also been my concern to think more carefully about how art can occupy this space alongside technologies, and how it may operate within it, by offering different kinds of systems, experiences and worlds. The kinds, that instead of simplifying and polarising positions, rather re-complicate the way we see, communicate and experience things. The kinds that do not give us immediate rewards and answers, but rather function in an enigmatic, quiet and poetic manner.

If I returned to do this journey again, the story might be quite different, other doors would be opened, new discoveries found. But then again, it would already be another time and space.

And, isn't this exactly the point? To live in the work and follow its logic. Allow it to lead you to the unknown and have a life of its own.

Porous Walls

The worst possible world, the nightmare scenario has already been created. You can let it to flood in. You might as well, as it will find its way in anyway. Haven't you noticed? The walls are porous and the doors are no longer there. When you let it in, the inner and outer come together.

The result is not the sum of those two worlds (as if they existed anyway) but something totally different. Something even you couldn't expect. Reflect on the choices you have made so far. Then the ones you didn't make, the ones you left out. Consider the lives you lived, the worlds you inhabited. Think about the things you missed out, the fleeting shadows on the edges of your sight, or the ones you were too preoccupied to notice. Think about the beings you left behind, the ones who didn't quite make it into your world at the end. And the ones who left you, who moved on before you had time to react. And, lastly take into account the ones you have not yet met? You might have to take a step back to meet the ones that are still ahead. Think about all the furry, crawling, climbing, flying and living creatures. The one's holding onto the last remaining iceberg or a tree with no options left. Now proceed in seeing all of them creating parallel worlds, floating along with yours. See them acting scenarios on the stages of these worlds, where time does not matter. Linger upon all the potential scenarios and all the potential worlds ahead, behind, along, parallel, on top and underneath. You might have noticed by now that you are no longer simply looking at them. The images, the objects and the words they are looking at you, they are in you. They no longer simply represent things, but actively intervene in everyday life, come to your house, control your thoughts, take a hold of your tongue. Stories are told over and over again and still, despite that, the words go missing. Contours of faces disappear. Prosthetic feeling. Hyperlinked logic. No empathy left. You might, as well, let them in.

And once more, I am writing myself into the text, I place myself in this space, in this labyrinth. This thing that consists of different spaces and circulates in different

directions. The floating objects and the actions help my transitions from one place and time to another. The walls have become more porous and I am starting to understand that they are no longer stopping me. That time has no limits, it is subjective. My body separates from itself, my left arm continues its journey elsewhere, my bouncing head keeps moving. I am not depending on this disintegrating body anymore.

We know there would be no point in taking this journey if the result was pre-planned and totally controlled. However, I am hardly at ease. But I keep going and when I feel disorientated again and unable to continue, then I start writing. As an attempt to find myself, and lose myself in this text. And once more I create paths that are extensions of myself and what I desire to be, or what I fear to be. To find words that you could not imagine existed. It all comes down to relationships and the connections you thought were there, and finally, in the next second were gone. Pretending to be someone else, living a life of someone else.

The life of a make-believe character who keeps evolving, yet in different directions, one moment this, and the next one that. And what was it with all those relationships? Were they mirrors, a desperate attempt to ground myself? An intentional distraction from the most painful, and the most obvious? All these years are marked with research and endings. Trying to recover from a breakup, always so painful. Losing myself in or to the uncontrollable narrative. A weird enjoyment of pain and desperation; Getting lost in all those people that I thought would let me find you; Sudden withdrawals of emotions and bursts of empathy that kept me trying even more; Clinging onto something that keeps crumbling; The huge knot in my chest that would not go away.

There are paths in this that intertwine. Along those paths are the moments that mark a revelation and a rupture, both equally important. You were not with me. You left me a long time ago. I am not sure if you were ever with me, yet I carry you along. You are many and many are you. There is a tremendous sense of relief now that I have told you this. I hope this journey has nourished your imagination and that in addition to the partial picture you understand the whole meaning of getting lost. And, that you can read in between the lines and hear what cannot be put into words. I hope you can hear the resonance of the objects and those living beings we have encountered. I don't want to sound pessimistic but there is not much time left. Empathy sources are running out.

This world was made from entangled nodes, that strangely came together. And, as I write, it starts to fall apart. The holes in the walls open into cracks, so big that it is hard to distinguish anymore where they end and where they begin. The ceiling disappears, opening up a sky so strange, that I have never witnessed anything like it before.

What's left when the walls of my world finally fall down? I ask myself, as I watch from a little distance, all the characters regrouping, alone and together in the communal ruins. The group of players, blooming lilacs, a polar bear, talking rock, shouting woman, Alain, Jacques, Chantal, the man with glasses, all slightly transformed. Eden was supposed to have an afterlife, that was always the case. But Eden also has a present life of its own, a history and future that keep on evolving, mutating, regardless of my intentions and without my full knowledge.[145] This labyrinth has no beginning nor has it an end. It is supposed to move on, transform and find new characters in new places with new experiences and tensions. This isn't simply a final transfer of power, from ego to collective, it is much more complex than that. But I might return, as there are so many things we didn't yet experience together, my friend.

[145] In his article "Pressings" Harri Laakso points out how artistic research explores, before anything else, how artworks, presentations and images *themselves* perform research gestures, separate from any intentions of their maker. (See Laakso, 2018, 186.)

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YOU MAY LEAVE NOW OR START FROM THE BEGINNING.
CLICK HERE TO START AGAIN.

I have noticed
that in the networked world
as a whole there is often
a tendency to adopt an over-
arching view which seeks to
unify a multiplicity of events,
under a single concept.

This can be artwork,
story, the point of view etc.

I find this kind of approach
reductive rather than productive.
I don't think that an event
can ever be seen all at once.
or objectively.

When an artist-researcher attempts
to push her art forward in the
form of writing or speaking,
it is essential to always be cautious
of any existing speaking or writing
habits contained and accepted
in the culture at large.

In the context of art research,
language has traditionally served
as a means to describe and analyse
what has and what
is, taking place in the work.

But, this has never been a quality mainly associated with art itself. Instead, a regular strategy for artists has been to address the fallibility of communication or gaps in language: whether linguistic, expressive, technological, cultural or political.

When talking or writing about artworks, I find myself constantly confronted with things that somehow escape me, the language and time.

We are permanently in the condition
of 'has-been', 'not-yet' (that is
anticipation) or 'yet-to-come'.
We are A part but apart and
it is this innate inability to touch
and sense that creates an
inherent tension that needs
to be addressed.[1]

[1] See Harri Laakso, "Pressings" *Figures of Touch, Sense technics Body* (2018) p.186-187

In her book Reconceptualizing Qualitative Research, Methodologies without methodology Mirka Koro-Ljungberg seeks to provide alternative ways of thinking about qualitative research, often in creative ways by discussing the complexity, multiplicity, and the methodological uncertainty embedded in different methodological configurations and entanglements.

Koro-Ljungberg says that it is fascinating to think about methodology and its vocabulary, that is always becoming and never a finished project.

From this perspective, qualitative researchers cannot rest their cases, finish their learning, or close their glossaries. According to her methodology, its labels and its concepts are in constant flux.

For me, the aim is a co-operation
between the different elements,
the talking and the work,
the history and the future
of it. They all become equal
participants in a navigation
that may constitute the artist's
practice, and the way an artist
relates to the world,
to time and to place.

I am hoping that by revealing the limits of the practice, resisting summary and using irruptions and paradox, as essential elements in this research, the reader may be able to move away from simplified notions of text, reductionist readings and linguistic authority.

This kind of Irruptive form of writing can possibly challenge the material aspects of meaning making, and elicit the participatory readerly agency.

There are some irruptions
in the work in this research,
and as Koro-Ljungberg points
out they are meant to disrupt
the linear logic and topical flow
often associated with traditional
scientific reporting.

The irruptions will provide
provocative extensions to the
discussed topics. They also serve
as examples of uncertainty and
"unthinkable" energy and simulate
a different affect and reaction
in readers.[2]

[2] Koro-Ljungberg, Qualitative Research, (2016) p.xvii

In addition, we may be able to give up notions of the finality of knowledge or findings, and approach ending and "conclusions" as temporary and unstable.[3]

³ Ibid.p.40

This is to create openness and exposure to alternative means of expression, such as visual, material and bodily forms of art and experimentation.

This research is using my artwork
Eden The Pow(d)er of Fear (2014)
as a frame structure, both as a
physical blueprint of a labyrinth
and as a story.

Eden, The Pow(d)er of Fear was
a live performance/installation
constructed at Lilith Performance
studio, Malmö, Sweden in May-
June 2014.

The starting point for the project was the French Nouveau Roman writer Alain Robbe Grillet's film, L'Eden et Après (After Eden) from 1970.[4]

[4] In Robbe-Grillet's film *L' Eden et Après*, a group of students gather in a place called Eden, which is a large construct of concrete, some sort of café bar. In Eden a group of students apparently live, routinely indulging in transgressive behaviour of all sorts, role games, inventing plays and stories and various other abstract rituals and activities to pass the time and give meaning to their lives, Eden is a labyrinth compound comprised of mirrors and glass partitions and painted in primary colours; kind of like a Modernist set from Mondrian. There is an arrival of a stranger who introduces several new games to them and produces a "fear powder" from his pocket. This triggers a hallucinogenic, baffling chain of events. There is a sense of unpredictability and spontaneity to these scenes; and it feels like anything could happen inside this haunted house.

The live performance Eden, The Pow(d)er of Fear took place in a labyrinth-like construct and became like a social experiment in which the young actors from Malmö repeated strange games governed by a throw of dice, and where viewers were let in to wander freely for three hours.

However, my approach here
is not aimed at a retrospective
engagement with this particular
work, but will instead be
a speculative re-writing and
re-scripting of it. One that offers
new 'portals' to other works
and worlds, through different
narrative and theoretical threads,
opening up new perspectives,
concerns, times and spaces.

The other works embedded in this research are the videos Moderate Manipulations (2012) and Placeholder (2017). In this, different stories and worlds are embedded and entangled through new kind of logic that opens up potential ways of reading and positioning each element of this research.

As a strategy for artistic, social and political engagement and a reaction to contemporary condition (the liberal democratic paradigm), in which our claim to the positions we occupy is increasingly simplified, this research creates semi-fictional worlds as spaces of thinking, imagination and resistance.

By confusing the functionality of language, it examines the power dynamics and infrastructures shaping our world.

This notion of power is two-fold. On the one hand, the research examines the complexity of human interactions and positions in relation to hegemonic power structures. And on the other, investigates the relationship between visual and verbal, experience and affect.

A number of defining characteristics of our contemporary condition are matters of concern; the speed of the networked, globalised economy, the control, the categorisation and exclusion enacted by states and by culture.

This research is structured
as a labyrinth of spaces that are
embedded within each other.

The structure is designed as a
kind of speculative choreography
or organism that requires
the reader/viewer's active
participation, leaving holes or
unknowns in a narrative structure
that moves through entangled
nodes of connection
and differing temporalities.[5]

[5] My take on can be also aligned with Harri Laakso's articulation of Speculative art, an art, which is not truly representative (of a situation)or prescriptive (of the one truth), nothing to understand or interpret, but speculative of a certain potential. In fact, Laakso implies that there is a sense of emancipation in this "letting things run their course". In his view (and neither in mine) this is not similar to the active position that is sometimes offered in so called interactive works of art. Because the works he is talking about (e.g., Pierre Huyghe's Untilled and the works I am referring to here) don't really offer active positions. Instead they ask to commit without knowing. They offer positions of shared passivity-but of a passivity that is not opposed to activity, but something radical enough to be passive towards the whole. active/passive distinction. However, from my point of view passivity is somehow challenged here by some kind of activity through uncertainty, activity that requires a mental trigger for the sense of curiosity and exploration and perhaps navigation. See: Laakso, Pressings, p.209

This purposefully disables the reader/spectator's normative perception of events, putting emphasis on the productive uncertainty and aporia.

Now you are ready to start the game. Click here!

DEAR PARTICIPANTS

This performance event will be a reworking of *Alain Robbe Grillet's film, L'Eden et Après, After Eden*, 1970 at Lilith performance studio, using alternate takes and re-editing in space that has the order of scenes to be governed by "a throw of the dice". The idea is NOT to mimic the film faithfully; instead the film is serving as a starting point for new scenarios to come.

As a result, this performative installation will use this principle of mise en abyme, stories within stories, images within images that connects filmic scenes and story from Robbe-Grillet to present time and a space. Recreating it's filmic logic, which would in a new context work as a kind of reflection that sheds light on contemporary events, and eventually taking a direction of it's own. It will be a kind of a rear-view mirror that overlaps different temporalities. The stage sets of original film will be re-imagined in Lilith space in a labyrinth like manner. Sometimes, scenic spaces exist through images or videos on a wall, sometimes as actual physical and architectural spaces, insisting on the idea of doubling.

It attempts to link the ideological post 68 revolutional mindset of Robbe-Grillets film to a contemporary one. It also finds counterparts from Swedish ideology and with the current mindsets and events, through conversations with you, the participants.

The actual and present stories are embedded into this fictional narrative, creating a disorienting space for the viewer, where the real and fiction

cannot be distinguished. You will create your own world within this structure, in which you will be playing repetitive rituals and games. An audience will be free to wander around the structure for three hours andl is not given any instructions. Sometimes, it might not be clear who is the audience and who are the participants. The space is also purposefully disorienting.

Before the actual performances, we will start with two workshops, in which conversations and planning of scenarios take place. The idea is to find contemporary counterparts, such as events, characters and stories that are relevant in social, cultural, economical and political context. These would be then created into living tableaux, which unfold during the actual performances on a flat screen TV.

Some questions to be discussed during the workshop:

- What kind of mirror can this film provide
  to our society and or your generation?
- Who is the stranger for us, what or whom
  can this stranger represent?
- What for you, is the pow(d)er of Fear?
  What are you afraid of?
- What kind of ideological mindsets and rituals are
  prevailing amongst contemporary Swedish youth?
- What kind of rituals does media create and
  provide us with?

Please do not feel obliged to have an answer to all these questions; these are just something to think about. We will discuss this further during the workshop and let's see where this all brings us, to a strange and hopefully an interesting and fun journey. I am very much looking forward in meeting you and working with you!

With kind regards,
Henna-Riikka

RULES

The fact that the students are only pretending to be happy, sad, scared functions as an important guiding principle here. The notions of discomfort, ambiguity and unpredictability are used as productive components during this performance. The whole performative installation has a system (rules) created beforehand. However, this system is partly based on a chance as every played scene (game) is decided by a throw of dice. The performers are given a set of rules; they are performing six rituals/actions repeatedly, for three hours.

SCENES / GAMES

1. **Poison Scene:** One the participants is poisoned by an action that seems like some sort of conspiracy. At the end, the poisoned one dies, and a funeral is performed by the others, including improvised music scene where they are using found objects as instruments.
2. **Rape Scene:** One boy or a girl is being chased by a group and forced to lay on a table.
3. **Blindfold,** one of the students is blindfolded. The others can do whatever they like to her/his face.
4. **Dance Scene**, Pharrel Williams' *Happy* starts to play, selected students dance along.
5. **Shooting** (Russian roulette)
6. **Love Scene**, two randomly selected students playact tenderness towards each other. They can go as far as they like, embrace each other, kiss or... Game master interferes and stops the action whenever he likes.

ROLES

1. **Game master:** One of the performers was given a role of game master, throwing dice and depending on the number of dice he decides the participants who are to take part. Therefore, the participants are never able to know in advance whether they would play in this particular scene or not.

2. **A Stranger:** a man dressed in a suit, wanders around seemingly controlling and observing actions.

3. **Waiter:** serves drinks and observes.

4. **12 students** participating in the games in the middle.
   In the corridor spaces five characters are acting repetitive actions in robot like manners as if stuck in a film glitch. Those characters are:

5. **Two blond doubles:** painting the same painting over and over again, the room gradually fills up with paintings. They switch roles once in a while.

6. **Two dark-haired nudes:** One of them is seemingly stuck in a circular staircase.Another one is going back and forth through a blue freestanding door. Occasionally, these two doubles left their positions (indicated by a man in suit) and met each other

7. **Teacher:** Keeps frantically drawing and writing on a green blackboard.