



This and That
Essays on Live Art and
Performance Studies

EDITED BY ANNETTE ARLANDER

This and That
- Essays on Live Art and
Performance Studies

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THIS AND THAT – ESSAYS ON LIVE ART AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES
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Annette Arlander: Preface

Writing about performance is an equally important activity as creating performances, in terms of generating discourse and developing the field. Increasingly it is a task for artists themselves today, when critiques and publications devoted to performance art are rare. To encourage students to write essays on the work of prominent artists of previous generations, to write reviews of the work of their colleagues as well as to reflect on their own work has been the goal of the MA degree programme in Live Art and Performance Studies from the very start, as befits a program devoted to combining theory and practice.

Previous publications in the publication series called *Episodi* (episode) have been devoted to essays and critical reviews written by students of the program, not their thesis works, but writings related to historical figures within the art form as well as exercises in writing on each other's works. The first *Episodi* in 2003 was in Finnish only, the second *Episodi* in 2009 was in Finnish and English, the third *Episodi* in 2011, *Converging Perspectives*, is in English only, as is this fourth *Episodi* as well. All of them, except the first, are also available online. This collection is called "This and That" since it has a slightly different character than the previous ones, partly due to the fact that only a few of the students from the course 2011-2013 wanted to publish their essays or critical reviews. Instead some contributions from the fourth bi-annual festival and conference *Lapsody*, organised by the students in June 2013, are included here in a separate section. Organising festivals and conferences is

another important tool for combining artistic experimentation with intellectual curiosity and scholarly exchange. The idea that each group of students produces a festival and conference as well as a publication of texts has been part of the degree requirements of the program from early on.

This fourth *Episodi* contains various types of texts, using a wide variety of styles, including styles of referencing and use of English. This collection exemplifies the transition phase and internationalization the programme has recently undergone and is still undergoing, twelve years after its start in 2001, led as it is now since the autumn 2013 by professor Ray Langenbach. As a prominent artist and an accomplished scholar he personifies the dual aims of the program, combining the practice of performance art or Live Art and eloquence in performance theory or performance studies. Whether this transition phase is somehow symptomatic of changes in the field more broadly as well, remains to be seen. To begin with professor Langenbach discusses here the notion of performance and its theoretical implications in his text “Indefensible Acts”, a curatorial essay originally published in Germany 2000 including presentations of some prominent artists in the field, republished here by way of an introduction.

In the first part, *Essays and Reviews*, some of the students from the course 2011-2013, as well as a student from previous years, present their thoughts. Jenni Kokkomäki writes about Diane Torr, Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose as well as Laurel Nakadate in her essay “She’s Got Balls - Strategies for masculinizing the female artist in performance”. In “Jenni Kokkomäki and the essential difference; lying down and gazing back, lying back and gazing down” Ellen Jeffrey writes a review of Jenni’s “Three variations to Theme Song” a study of Vito Acconci’s work. Kaisa Illukka describes in her text

“PLATFORM – Practice of how to change the world” the performance practice of this London based eco-activist group.

The second part, Contributions to Lapsody, begins with the keynote speech of professor Susan Kozel “Somatic Materialism or ‘Is it possible to do a phenomenology of affect?’” originally published in Sweden in 2013 and republished here. The presentations by international student participants focus on dance performance, such as “Dance and Philosophy: A Conversation” by Moritz Gansen and Elisabeth Schilling, or “Understanding Stage Presence – An Investigation into Communication During Performance” by Megan Armishaw. The text “Enduring Performance – Performer’s Notes on *Cabinet of Cynics I*” by Ioana Jucan examines approaches to theatrical performance today. Finally James Andean describes in “Research Group in Interdisciplinary Improvisation – Goals, Perspectives, and Practice” the work of this Helsinki-based collective, who participated in Lapsody as well.

The third part, titled simply Other Essays, consist of an essay by doctoral student Rania Khalil “Things you didn’t decide – Reflections on a site-specific performance in Palestine” describing her experiences of creating site-specific performances, and “Riding an Ox in Search of an Ox” a text by Annette Arlander, discussing the relationship of gesture and context in performances for camera. With this gesture of including an “afterword” dealing with my own work I wish the program and its future publications all the best, and a steadily increasing amount of interested readers and viewers.

Ray Langenbach: Indefensible Acts¹

I. Realwork & Unrealwork

When we use the word “performance” it is usually when we are thinking of performance art, ritual, theatre, music, dance. But what is it that we are doing when we are thinking or mouthing the word, “performance” and uttering the sounds. Are we not performing in a broader sense, that is, in the manner we perform on the street, in the office, in conversation, or in those private moments when we are excreting, making love, weeping, dying, mourning, scratching an itch, observing, reading, working? And what specifically is the performance of work, and of realwork? Are the two performed differently? Raymond Williams points to the privileged position accorded regular paid employment over other forms of work:

A general word for doing something, and for something done...has become a word applied predominantly to paid labour. The basic sense of the word, to indicate activity and effort or achievement, has thus been modified...by a definition of its imposed conditions, such as “steady” or timed work, or working for a wage or salary: being hired. An active woman, running a house and bringing up chil-

1 This text has been previously published in the catalogue of the Werkleitz Biennale 2000 *real[work]*, Werkleitz Gesellschaft e.V., edited by Thomas Munz. Copyright: Herausgeber/AutorInnen/KünstlerInnen, 2000. The notation of the original is maintained here.

dren, is distinguished from a woman (or man) who works:
that is to say, takes paid employment. (WILLIAMS, 1976:335)²

In English, the “real” in “real work,” commonly refers to that which we do for ourselves in our leisure (from the Latin “licere”, permit). It is a kind of work, to which we assign particular value and is done in our own time, separate from our salaried job. So, in a sense it is produced in time that we control or own, rather than the time during which our bodies are hired out to an employer. In this usage of “realwork”, then, there is a reduction or elimination of alienation.

I am using alienation here in the Marxist sense, to describe a process of objectification and estrangement, in which the worker is alienated both from the products of her labour, and from him/herself. (I will use the female pronoun in this article to indicate both masculine and feminine genders.) This transpires through exploitation and the social privilege accorded to certain kinds of work over others. So her human relations, and her relations to her own production are said to be in a condition of objectification or reification (*vergegenständlichung*) under the capitalist mode of production. In this situation:

The world man has made confronts him as stranger and enemy, having power over him who has transferred his power to it. (WILLIAMS, 1976:35)

2 Williams, Raymond, 1976, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London. Fontana Press.

But there are other kinds of alienation, such as those produced by the economic or power differentials between national and regional economies. On the one hand, all production-line workers can be said to experience alienation in the capitalist mode of production, but on the other hand, the subtle differences between modernist and traditional economies must alter our analysis. The Indonesian artist Arahmaiani refers to the historical division between the interests of transnational corporations and the former colonising nations, and those of her country. During the Soeharto era the establishment of an Indonesian military elite, prone to acts of extreme violence, continued the former colonial dynamic internally, and was supported in this from abroad by Western and Asian governments and corporations anxious to maintain their economic interests. The description of alienated labour must take these particular inter/intra-national alignments into consideration.

Art works are unalienated to the extent that they are produced out of a productive synergy of artist, curator, institution, and public by an unexploited artist, or group of artists, with some degree of control over the means, materials and meanings of her production. But to the extent that the work is subsequently fetishised and circulated through the larger market of information-commodities, the entire mode of production becomes objectified and takes on the appearance of a stage show: “The Artist in Labour” or “The Artist Performing realwork”. At this point the word, real, is stripped of its meaning, and the entire circuit of production/representation/reception reifies. So, regardless of our intentions, the real work of the artist-producer becomes the spectacle of their realwork, that is, its representation in the form of commodified artworks. Realwork reproduces itself as unrealwork. This is true for all kinds of object-based, time-based, and conceptual art production, including work reproduced through analogue or digital media.

In the case of performance art, which grew out of an analysis of the performativity that underlies all of these media, the process of reification doubles, because the locus of alienation and the locus of work are both found in the performative act. Performance art appears as a re-presentation or twice-behaving of productive behaviour. But it also appears as a re-presentation of its own representation.

II. Performance Art

A paradigmatically (post-) modernist, predominantly (but not exclusively) urban-based art form, performance art is a strongly contested category of cultural production, distinguishable from, but “parasitic” to, other aesthetic categories of “symbolic speech” (visual art, theatre, dance, rituals, monuments, cartoons, films, advertisements, signs, et al.) and “direct speech” (bureaucratic documents, policy announcements or directives, gossip, rumour, discussions, arguments, interrogations, intrigues, et al.).³ Performance art often operates between state bureaucratic apparatuses and civil society, between public and private space, in a discursive gap it shares with other politic-cultural hybrids, such as appropriated speech, détournement, parody, tactical mimicry, re-constituted social rituals. Needless to say, all these constitute types of discursive labour, involving material transformation, and the production/circulation of information.

Antithetical to the Situationist notion that the society of the spectacle is both a function of an economy of agencies and a reification of all economic relations, in which the subject is the ulti-

3 For a discussion of ‘symbolic speech’ and ‘direct speech’ see Anderson, Benedict R.O’G., 1990, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press: 153ff.

mate commodity, the Brazilian director, Augusto Boal, based his theatre on the notion that everyone present at a performance is a “spect-actor”, that is, an actor and spectator rolled into one. Both activities are performative: the performance of “spectatorship” and the performance of “acting”. Boal’s theatrical innovations, originally designed to conscientize participants to the principles of participatory democracy, eventually led him to run for political office as an extension of his theatre. In this notion of spect-actorship we would have to include both “symbolic speech” or aesthetic performance, and various forms of “direct speech,” including the theatre of the state and government, the theatre of law, the theatre of diplomacy and war, the theatre of religion...all the institutional theatres found between and inside nation states.

III. Indefensible Acts

Many of us find ourselves frustrated today by the over-determination of performance art, which in the past two decades has been largely institutionalised as pedagogy in schools, reduced to 1/32 second snaps in an endless stream of glossy coffee-table books, and mounted as spectacle in museums and international festivals (such as realwork). Most performance art can no longer be considered “radical,” subversive or even anti-formalist. Many of us now question whether performance art is capable of sustaining or defending even its own structures, never mind having an impact outside its “frame”. It has to be asked whether we are seeing the terminus of a form, that moment in history when, under the assault of its own clichés and technologies of disembodiment, it can no longer mount a relevant discourse.

Recently, Lee Weng Choy, an art critic in Singapore, indicated that a particular theoretical position he took on was “indefensi-

ble". Not that the position was invalid or incorrect, only that, if called upon, he would not want to justify or defend this position. To attempt to defend it would ultimately and paradoxically render it indefensible. To defend would be to insist on a commensuration or translation.⁴

Relevant for this discussion is that Lee appeared to intentionally frame his impasse with a term that we would normally associate with religious, ethical, legal or military issues. This intrusion of an ethical trope into a particular performance of theorisation is significant. It reveals that one cannot seriously theorise any performance or act without the discussion turning to ethical considerations. I suggest that performance art provides one of the most nuanced "laboratories" for the theorisation of all aspects of performative ethics.

The performance of judgment now being enacted in The Hague, focusing on genocide and crimes against humanity in the Balkans, East Timor, Rwanda, Chechnya, and elsewhere, appears to hinge on an irresolvable paradox. On the one hand, all acts are seen to be the products of intentional agents –even acts, which result from the passing of orders down a chain of command in war. Acts of violence call up the responsibility of the agent and rely on the presence of "subjecthood", like any other act. In other words, they are syntactically commensurate with all other acts, not having been performed under hypnosis, in trance, or in a state of mental disability, they cannot be defended as the acts of the insane (although it could be claimed that war itself is a protracted state of collective insanity).

4 Following the logic of a particular argument concerning the meaning of the racial tropes, "whiteness," "yellowness," –too complex to lay out here– Lee's use of the word, "indefensible" addressed an appropriational strategy aimed at exposing the problematics of appropriation.

As Foucault has suggested, war should be viewed as a normative state of affairs in history, divided by short, uncanny intervals of peace. Zygmunt Baumann has pointed out that genocide under National Socialism was the logical and “not-excessive” extension of the modern Weberian bureaucratic state. For the Martinique writer, Aimé Césaire, fascism in the European “theatre” was an inevitable result of the colonial era, when whites, having colonised the rest of the globe, finally turned to the colonisation of their fellow whites.

Bureaucratic and colonial agents are all workers, carrying out their functions as employees in a work environment. All aspects of bureaucracy and colonialism function through a process of privileging certain utilitarian or pragmatic values – values of efficient economies – over what are construed as non-essential or impolitical humanist concerns. The modes and techniques of managerial surveillance in the Taylorised or Fordised factory found their reflection in the zones of war, the interrogation room, the cell, the concentration camp, the colonial plantation. All of these were part of the economy of 20th century work in a singularly composed world.

International courts have since determined that workers are responsible for their actions, and can be held accountable for that responsibility. They have also generally held that, while no agency is absolute and falls outside the relativism of external judgment, it is also the case that no agency is exempt by virtue of a specific cultural relativism. Moral encoding in the modern European tradition is held in place by a “universalist” syntax, which frames all forms of agency.⁵

5 But, problematically, the definitions of such crimes varies over time, and, historically, they have generally been defined unilaterally by the victors – for example in Nuremberg and the Balkans.

So, we find the performance of the human worker – in extremis – caught within a matrix of contradictory representations: the worker-agent is both morally responsible while accountable to the external judgment of others; and this judgment is based on a code of ethics both commensurable and absolute, at once metathetical and immutable. The paradox appears irresolvable, in part because of its entanglements in complex language games, in which “agency” is always described and judged in retrospect – through the medium of another performance-of-interpretation or performance-of-judgment, leading us to Lee’s “indefensible” conundrum.

Following in the footsteps of the most violent century in human history, we now find that our ethical systems have been bricolaged together on the spot, resembling nothing so much as one of Jean Tinguely’s monuments to modernity – wired for auto-annihilation. Each generation desperately tries to ameliorate the atrocities of their parents by preparing to commit their own. Our critical discourses – including performance art – represent our somewhat ridiculous attempts to grapple with the horns of this dilemma.

IV. ...And You Will Believe

Recently reading Judith Butler, I came across the phrase:

Althusser scandalously invokes Pascal on religious belief at the moment he is called upon to explain the ritual dimension of ideology: “Pascal says more or less: ‘Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe.’”⁶

6 Althusser, Louis, 1971, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Lenin and Philosophy*, tr. Ben Brewster, (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, pp. 170-86. cited in Butler, Judith, 1997, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York. Routledge, p. 25.

I read in this passage the problem of the “real” in performance. Performance is a form, which is positioned precisely between the “real” and the “representation” of the real – the point of “spectacle”. If we kneel long enough, Pascal ironically suggests, our belief will become real, but the very act of kneeling when we do not believe, is spectacle, a drama, a play. Can the spectacle lead us to the real, or is spectacle, as Debord or Baudrillard would have it, already a function of the impossibility of the real – a substitution for the real, a simulacrum?

Althusser invokes Pascal in his discussion of ideology as the dawning of “recognition” that occurs through a performance of ritual. Performance deploys an “interpellation” or the “hailing” of another, through which “subjectivity” is called out. Through that performance of “calling out”, ideological recognition takes place. Belief becomes meaningful only through the performance, and the appearance (in Pascal’s case) of the believer.

But things appear differently now, in the Post-Cold War era, than they appeared to Althusser. For us, performance now resists all forms of ideological completion. The old tropes of the cold war period, ideological imperative, charisma, (the social production of a reified meta-subject), the “neue mensch”, utopia, or progress can no longer resolve or justify the performance of violence, the inequities imposed by the meta-discourses of either world revolution, or by capitalist developmentalism, as they seemed to do in 1935. Lee calls for “a reverse interpellation – an interpellation that does not seek to make ideology, but tries to unmake it.” (Of course, this call has its own ideological profile.)

We now know what giving “the benefit of a doubt” to a Stalin, Suharto, Pol Pot, Pinochet, Kennedy, Bush, Milosevic leads to. Under the redemptive promise of the Communist International, we

found the preserved corpse of Lenin, – the fetish of the Leader and the Party; under the promises and embrace of German economic unification we have found the continuation of earlier exploitations; and under the “Have a nice day!” smile of the American info-commodity, lies an imperialist ideology. In other words, for us now, Althusser’s contention that ideology and subjectivity are commensurable, resolves nothing, and we are thrown back upon Lee’s claim that his performance is “indefensible”. The realwork of performance art is to be found in this performance of the ethics of daily life.

I wish to thank Sharaad Kuttan, Sumit Mandal and Lee Weng Choy for the critiques and discussions during the writing of this essay.

Invited Artists

The artists in realwork come to the (post-) modernist performance art tradition carrying very different cultural and economic frames, points of agency, and mise en scene. From these social conditions they have bricolaged their “real work.” In a short catalogue essay such as this, I must take care to not erase the nuances of their positions through the performance of curatorial agency. The situation is further complicated by my own confused ethnic background and cultural habitus: an American with German patrilineal extraction, living in Southeast Asia. My curatorial imperatives and the act of this festival to bring artists from one cultural economy to work in the midst of another, represents one aspect of bourgeois economic circulation in the larger field of econo-cultural globalisation. Although one can point to their common adoption of performance art as a form, it would be unwise to lump these artists together under any monolithic rubric of performance. Their work derives from diverse socio-political and cultural economies, on both sides

of the colonial era divide – a divide that still largely defines global economic relations. As inferred from a recent remark by the Malaysian historian, Sumit Mandal, it is perhaps more fruitful if we look upon the performances as circulations of locally engaged political positions, embodied memes, and of lineages of real work, rather than as reified forms representing national identities, ethnic, or even regional difference. At any rate, the nuances of the respective positions of the artists, in their own words, can be gleaned from their published statements elsewhere in this catalogue.

The development of performance art, in Southeast Asia, as elsewhere, has been tied to the growth of urban metropolitan centres, and the need for social activism in a post-colonial situation. A number of performance artists have also produced solidarity spectacles for street demonstrations and political gatherings when necessary. Performance art and installation work in this region offers a “raw” dialectical response to the much older and high-aesthetic traditions of painting, sculpture, dance, and drama, some of which began as court-arts.⁷

With its emphasis on ephemeral, non-canonical behaviours, performance art has provided an opening for new types of content and new relations between the artist and the public. Correspondingly, it is often ignored by the intellectual community, and even other artists, in part for sidestepping the traditions that privilege long training, skilled craftsmanship, and traditional notions of refinement, and, in part, for what is seen to be its foreign or “Western” influences.

Chumpon Apisuk (Bangkok) has wedded social and political activism – in particular, his work for People Living with HIV and AIDS

7 It should be noted that some Asian performance art practitioners have previous training in other, older art and performance traditions.

and sex workers – with art organising, his own artistic practices and his writings. Apisuk’s work involves not only the production of art but the production of alternative social and political institutions: Non-Government Organisations. These alternative institutions are based on universalised humanist principles, and provide a kind of mirror society for those whom society would dispossess and disenfranchise in the pursuit of development and globalisation. Apisuk is committed to social performance at the margins.

Arahmaiani (Jakarta, Indonesia) focuses on the impact of global nationalism and militarism upon sexuality, the female body, and subjectivity as it appears in Indonesia and Asia. Arahmaiani exploits the audience’s desire to see, to know, to touch, to possess, and to inscribe their own identities onto the body of the performer. Her performances often deliver a spectacle which folds into ethical dilemmas surrounding the complicity of spectatorship. Arahmaiani’s work comes out of a vibrant activist art tradition, reaching back to the struggle for independence against the Dutch.

Sándor Dóró (Dresden) is a member of Flexible X, a performance art collective in East Germany. Dóró’s work appears to draw from the tragic, absurd, ruptured history apparent in contemporary Dresden, where one finds the discontinuous inheritances of Baroque, National Socialism, the German Democratic Republic (DDR/GDR), and today’s FRG. The work I have seen involved an exquisite installation in the form of a kind of absurdist “causality machine” (of the sort made popular through the cartoons of the mathematician, Rube Goldberg), in which the performer resided as agent, observer, and effect.

Charles Garoian (State College, PA), an artist who functions deftly within the context of academic institutions, has sought to deploy and explicate a methodology of information dissemination,

which combines performative tactics and a particular lineage of American critical pedagogy. Garoian interrogates his body (the body of the pedagogue, the body of the artist, the body of the “ethnic,” the body of remembrance and knowledge) as a repository of historical narratives: specifically the narratives of his Armenian heritage and the Armenian holocaust.

Amanda Heng (Singapore) addressed the traditional position of Asian women in the home, their endless repetitive work, their displacement as migrant workers, female infanticide, and abortion. In the works I have observed, performance is deployed as a means to raise awareness of these issues and to reveal the often literally naked female subject as the momentary revelation of matrilineal affinity and encoding. Heng presents this genetic lineage starkly, within narratives of labour and survival. Performance art found fertile ground in Singapore during the late 1980s and early 1990s with the establishment of new artist groups: The Artists Village and Fifth Passage, among others. Amanda Heng was one of the early participants and organisers in this development.

Mike Hentz (Zurich + New York) works at the intersection of diverse semiotic systems. Formerly trained in classical violin, and subsequently playing in a rock band, his involvement in art and performance is linked with pop culture and rock, in contradistinction to the mainstream of European formalist/anti-formalist aesthetics. His installations, projections, performances and publications (Mike Hentz Works 4, Salon Verlag, Köln, 1999) focus on the plethora and chaos of visual, auditory and kinetic information. A collision of the “wet” embodied aesthetics of post-Wiener Aktionismus and the mediated semiotics of information nets, Hentz’ work presents the spasms of an information environment in a state of over-load.

Hsieh Tehching's (New York + Taiwan) work points to the impossibility of separating the behaviours associated with daily life, art, and work, by focusing on the micro-environment of the human body and the self under the ordering principle of time and space. Hsieh's work takes the form of extended performances, most lasting for one year (including one collaboration with Linda Montano), in which he displaces the artist-worker into the temporal milieu of other forms of work: a blue collar labourer surveilled in the moment after punching a time clock, the prison inmate in his cell, the street-person living outside on the street, etc. His "Thirteen Years Plan 1986-1999," –during which he made art but did not publicly show it – ended on 31 December 1999.

Boris Nieslony (Köln), one of the founding members of the Black Market group, is a performance artist, archivist, curator, educator, and sculptor. Nieslony appears to focus on the hiatus of momentary presence in the stream of time. Linked to the European anti-formalist tradition reaching back through Fluxus to DADA, Nieslony, on the one hand, is concerned with problems of historicism – the preservation, and reification of historical data – while on the other, he produces ephemeral performances based on the logic of very specific physical and conceptual responses. These consciously choreographed actions appear to solidify momentarily, only to "melt into air."

PART I Essays an Reviews

Jenni Kokkomäki: She's Got Balls – Strategies for masculinizing the female artist in performance

Masculinization: The action of masculinizing a person, esp. a woman; the process of developing or encouraging behavior, attitudes, etc., regarded as characteristic of men.¹

In this essay I will look into the work of three female artists who have challenged the category of what - or *how* a woman is, in relation to the traditional feminine perception of those female. These women have indeed participated in what could be called the masculinization of their subjectivities within performance art, and I wish to distinctly examine those diverse strategies these artists have utilized to challenge the traditional gender-based dichotomy of feminine and masculine with their adaptation on performing qualities seen as inherently male. I will use the idea of “masculinization” as the focal point of my investigation, and look into these select methods to challenge the power relation traditionally implicated in the feminine-masculine opposition.

According to sociologists Jan Stets and Peter Burke, early thinking in western culture stereotypically assumed that the division of male as aggressive, competitive and instrumentally oriented, and female as passive, cooperative and expressive, was based on under-

1 Oxford English Dictionary.

lying innate differences in traits, characteristics and temperaments between the sexes. Now we have come to understand that gender characteristics of femininity and masculinity result from social and cultural conditions; socialization and cultural expectations for each sex, rather than biological differences. The three major theories that explain the development of femininity and masculinity (psycho-analytic-, cognitive-developmental- and learning theories) involve a two-part process: First the child comes to know that she or he is a female or male, and secondly the child comes to know what being female or male means in terms of femininity and masculinity.² Further Stets and Burke note that with time children come to understand the meanings of feminine and masculine as necessarily contrasting, even when they don't appear as such for younger children. Stets and Burke come to suggest that investigating the variations in the meaning of being masculine and feminine may help us to understand a society's differential power and status structure, and how that society's privileges and responsibilities are allocated. They go on to suggest that modifying the social system may mean first modifying individual beliefs about masculinity and femininity.³

The latter half of the 20th Century saw a rising number of female artists challenging the traditional male domination of the field of art. Today the female auteur is not strange, but nevertheless, if granted an established position of subject in the field of art, the female artist-subject in performance is *seen differently* than a male artist. According to Amelia Jones, people identify active in the Euro-American cultures in a certain way, in which visible difference (e.g. color or gender) and the internal, true identity (the kind) of the person are juxtaposed. And

2 Stets and Burke 2000, 998.

3 Stets and Burke 2000.

“this structure of belief is absolutely pervasive: that people ‘appear’ a certain way, can be visually identified and thus given meaning or positioned in the social order; and yet, that this meaning can at any moment betray the ‘truth’ of an internal, authentic identity”.⁴ As a cultural construct, the female artist in performance is almost inevitably seen as, or in relation to what is understood as feminine, no matter how she identifies or feels in her performance. By which means could she perform herself and her action differently in order to challenge how her actions are seen and understood, through identification of her gender? How could a female artist broaden the *seeing of her* within her performance art work?

The notion of masculinization alludes to a vast potential of varied activities and implications for performance. However, what is common for the female performance artists I chose to study is a relation they establish to the male body in their artwork; often a relation in which these women take over a male body, each in a manner of her own. The specific works of these artists challenge the traditional gendered power relation, some in a more straightforward way than the other. My wish in this essay is to examine what kinds of power relations I can detect to be at play in these artworks, concerning the thematic of masculinization of the female artist-subject.

Appropriating the Male Body: Drag King performances and the work of Diane Torr

Perhaps the most straightforward way for a woman to perform masculinity is to perform *as* a man, by involvement in cross-dressing

4 Jones 2012, xvii-xviii.

and male impersonation. A number of female performance artists have occasionally taken on a male character in their artwork. Oreet Ashery has made performances dressed as Marcus Fisher, her orthodox Jewish male alter ego as whom she has also entered, and documented her visits to, spaces where women are not allowed.⁵ Likewise a repeating motif in Laurie Anderson's work is the use of vocal distortions that deepen her voice to a masculine register. Out of her past experiments with voice filtering Anderson has recently created a male alter ego, Fenway Bergamot.⁶ The male role is also taken on in the "butch-femme" performances, a category of lesbian performance, where "the butch is a lesbian woman who proudly displays the possession of penis, while the femme takes on the compensatory masquerade of womanliness".⁷ However the butch-femme performances do not necessarily involve male impersonation, instead the masculine role can be taken on as a "butch female". I will delve closer into one of the perhaps best-known forms of female to male impersonation, the drag king performance and especially the work of the artist referred to as one of the pioneers of drag kinging, Diane Torr. She has a long career in embodied study of transformations, investigating various "states" of gender, and beyond. (My presentation of Torr's work comes from the autobiographical book covering her performance work, *Sex, Drag and Male Roles: Investigating Gender as Performance* that she co-authored with Stephen Bottoms in 2010.)

Scottish artist Diane Torr began her cross-disciplinary artist career in the mid-seventies in New York. In 1980 she experimented

5 "Works | Oreet Ashery".

6 Morrow 2010.

7 Case 2009, 40.

for the first time with dressing in male drag for research reasons in order to access spaces normally forbidden to women, resulting in an anti-pornography performance she made in collaboration with filmmaker Ruth Peyser for the *Times Square Show*, an event featuring work of over a hundred performance artists. As part of the performance Torr was dressed in male drag with a dildo strapped on under her jacket, prodding people in the back with it. In the early 1980s Torr, at the time an illegal alien in the US, worked as a go-go dancer to earn her living. She began to study the form as an attempt to reinvent and recontextualize erotic dancing, and to explore female notions of eroticism instead of its stereotypical application made to please the male desires. Her solo and collaboration go-go shows received mixed and heated responses from feminist and lesbian performance audiences in venues such as the WOW Café, resulting even in an angered riot at the International Women's Festival Melkweg in Amsterdam in 1982. Diane Torr's investigation on gender as performance continued in projects exploring notions of androgyny instead of ultra-femininity. She was trained in various movement and dance techniques including contact improvisation and aikido, which enabled her investigation on different gestural and behavioral vocabularies challenging the traditional suppositions of men as physically superior and women as frail and dependent. Diane Torr's body, according to her own description, didn't appear particularly feminine. As a go-go dancer she had learned the feminine movements, which would enable her straight and muscular body to appear as seductively female. Next Torr collaborated with Bradley Wester, a visual artist with a strikingly similar body to hers, in creation of the performance *Arousing Reconstructions* in 1982. The performance explored an androgynous movement vocabulary, capitalizing on the way that Torr's and Wester's bodies,

placed together, seemed to blur their traditional gender distinctions. Whereas Torr's early performances were studying how bodies are viewed, her next collaboration *Girls Will Be Boys Will Be Queens* with fellow performers Lizzie Olesker and Chris Koenig delved into the *consciousness* of gender as something. The work group was fascinated with Michel Foucault's documentation of the story of Herculine Barbin, a hermaphrodite girl who later on in her life was decided by doctors to be a man. Whereas Herculine as an intersexual could not be categorized within the gender binary of the time, the group wanted to question whether anyone could be.

Transgender awareness began to rise in the late 1980s, and in the early 1990s some key texts of the transgender movements were published. In 1989 Diane Torr got acquainted with Johnny Science, one of the key female-to-male consciousness raisers in New York and the founder of the "F2M Fraternity". In 1990 Science held *Drag King Workshops* in which he enabled women to look like men through a makeover. Torr proposed to collaborate with him on these workshops suggesting that she would teach the participants how to pass as men through their physical presentation. Torr and Science taught together *Drag King Workshops* for various participants: trans-curious people, as well as lesbian and straight women who wanted to explore masculinity. In the workshops Johnny Science would help the participants transform into their male character with costumes and make-up while Diane Torr led exercises on how to move and gesture like a man and gave tasks helping the participants in creating their male character. At the end of the workshop Science and Torr would take the newly developed male characters out in the streets to see if they could pass as men and enter male-only spaces. Diane Torr also created her own male characters through intensive study of the movements, behavior and

gesturing of men, and she went on making theatrical performances in her male characters, not as an androgynous woman dressed in men's clothing like in her previous performances. Her strong belief was that the respect accorded to male authority is not a biological privilege but a cultural habit, just as well as the "natural" gesturing of men is the result of a learning process. With her performance she "wanted to blow that male cover by proving that a woman can inhabit and perform 'naturalistic' masculine power just as well as men can".⁸ In her performance *Drag Kings and Subjects*, a piece first shown in 1995 and one that Torr still performs, she plays with gender transitions and transformations with an "idea of being 'king' over your identity, sexuality, and desires rather than being 'subject' to social conventions"⁹. In the performance Diane Torr begins as a middle-aged housewife, Silvia, a helpful woman who facilitates life for other people and follows conventions. Instead of settling for celibacy she discovers vibrators and becomes a salesperson for them, a process leading the female character through different kind of stages of femininity and destabilizing her as one knowable psychological creature. The next stage of the performance represents a journey from extreme feminine reserve to extreme masculine assertion, as Silvia becomes obsessed with her fetish to the extent that she begins to cross-dress and leaves her husband and children to pursue her fetish as a man. She becomes so good at being a man that s/he, as now Danny, becomes a member of a chauvinist and reactionary organization, the American Society of Men. In the last twist of the performance, Danny begins to experiment with male-to-female drag with the other members of his society. He becomes

8 Torr and Bottoms 2010, 110.

9 Torr and Bottoms 2010, 213

Dolores and ends the performance with a drag-queen style dance routine. *Drag Kings and Subjects*, in its constant transformations and mutations (from female-to-male to male-to-female), establishes a state of “permanence in change” challenging the idea of one fixed identity.¹⁰

Since 1993 the work of Torr and Science started to get wider national attention. Johnny Science had held the first Drag King Ball in New York in 1992, drawing media attention to drag kings and female-to-male cross-dressing. When Science’s main interests changed Torr began to teach the workshops alone. She is perhaps best known for her *Man for a Day* workshops, which, despite the name, can last from one day up to three weeks. By now, Diane Torr has taught hundreds of these workshops internationally. Though mainly in American and European terrain, she has also taught workshops in cultural contexts where the safety of the workshop participants in their male characters, if revealed, would have been questionable. Torr was commissioned to teach in dance institutions in Holland for the first time in 1993, and the invitations for her to teach and perform in drag around Europe increased in numbers. She also taught at the Helsinki Theatre Academy in 2001, and inspired by the workshop the students went on to form their own drag king troupe Sub Frau. “A spirit of adventure and the possibility to be more – to expand beyond the limitations of the ‘female’ role” is what she perceived as fueling both her and the participants of her drag king workshops.¹¹ She uses one of her signature male characters, Danny King, as her “co-facilitator” alongside the female Diane. Danny King represents “a stereotype of male authoritarianism”

10 Torr and Bottoms 2010, 213-219.

11 Torr and Bottoms 2010, 137.

whose gestures come from the male behavior of the 1950s and 1960s.¹²

As Diane, I usually “femme” myself up more than I would in everyday life: more make-up, more feminine clothing. That accentuates the transition to Danny, but the contrast also highlights my own performance of femininity, which is really no more “natural” for me than Danny is. As I perform “Diane” I’m very communicative and fluent. I try to bring people in and make them feel at ease; they can ask me questions and I’ll answer. But you can’t get past Danny King. [...] Danny simply projects reserve and resistance, forbidding you to enter into his space. The audience is lucky to have him there. He doesn’t have to *give* them anything. Given how unsettling Danny is I don’t usually “maintain” him for too long in a lecture situation because otherwise nobody would ask any questions, and of course I’m there to facilitate dialogue. I’ll perform in role for a while and then drop him, and sometimes there’s an audible sigh of relief from the audience when that happens. There’s a breathing out – a shuffling about and a moving around – whereas for Danny there’s been total silence and attention. The uneasy respect he is accorded, as I hope I’ve demonstrated, is not a biological privilege but a cultural habit.¹³

In Torr’s descriptions of the workshop and the feedback from the participants, the notion of empowerment is often repeated. The

12 Torr and Bottoms 2010, 109.

13 Torr and Bottoms 2010, 110-111.

women attempting to pass as male characters report their experiences of being given more space and more efficient service as men. Some participants have used the knowledge attained in the workshop later on in life when needed, either as women or occasionally in male character. Torr has, for example, been asked to advise a women's activist group on how to deal with their lobbying visit to Washington in order to get into a serious hearing that had a limited access for the members of the public. She instructed the women to dress and behave as men: they should all wear suits and abstain from shouting or yelling but instead display self-reserve and confidence. They ought to act like they owned the place rather than yelling vainly in the doors of power. Torr also gave them a tutorial on how to walk and talk. And indeed, the activist group gained access to the hearing and were able to read out their statement.

When encountered by protests on her work giving too much power to men, Diane Torr responds: "No, the problem is that men already have the power, and women still don't have much access to it".¹⁴ In her book she gives examples as proof for her point of the still-existing gender inequality:

A 2006 report by Catalyst, which studies women in the workplace, found that women who act in what are considered stereotypically feminine ways – such as "focusing on work relationships" and expressing "concern for other people's perspectives" – are considered less competent than their male counterparts, but women who behave in "masculine" ways – "act assertively, focus on work task,

14 Torr and Bottoms 2010, 158.

display ambition” – are seen as “too tough” and “unfeminine” [qtd. Belkin 2007]. It’s a lose-lose situation. As the psychologist Peter Glick observes, studies of this sort seem to give women no way to fight back, as women, because “the problem is with the perception, not with the woman [ibid]. Maybe one way to start to change such perceptions is to fight back as men.¹⁵

Diane Torr’s artistic and educational practice involving male-impersonation (as well as “female-impersonation”) works to prove Judith Butler’s well-known argumentation on gender as performative on a practical level. In her vast study on embodying gendered behaviors and markers she comes to provide us with a strong argument on gender as independent from the biological sex of a person, and shows how the performance of femininity and masculinity are not biologically inherent “natural” qualities of a given sex but rather culturally learned and maintained strategies. Yet Diane Torr’s work also seems to leave space for an interpretation involving an element that strengthens the dichotomy of identification: even when she proves to us that women can, just as well as “real” men, pass as masculine men, she also comes to prove that only *as men* do those women enjoy the privileges of biological men. The masculinization of the female performer is done in Torr’s work through becoming a man, rather than by becoming masculine *as* women. This is by no means what Diane Torr tries to say as her work strongly promotes a fluid identity as a construction of multiple selves. And even when she teaches women how to physically pass as men, one of the consequences of

15 Torr and Bottoms 2010, 159.

the workshops is that women learn to utilize masculine behavioral and gestural patterns in their lives *as women* to their advantage.

In this “becoming masculine through believable appropriation of the male body” lies nevertheless a possibility for a suggestion that can alternatively strengthen the idea of the cultural male dominance, while simultaneously proving us exactly the superficiality of an identification process according to appearance, when Torr proves over and over again that the inner experience of gender of a person cannot be conceived by appearance. Her work makes visible the cultural construction of privilege and urges us to think twice of our beliefs. When by “deceit” of appearance a woman can “trick” the viewer into believing that she in fact is a man, perhaps we have to reconsider why, as a woman, she couldn’t as well be considered as a “real” masculine authority and be treated as such. The masculine woman, we poignantly notice, is “naturally” responded to very differently than the masculine man.

With her work, Diana Torr does not offer a masculine woman on her own (female) right as a counterforce to a man (with a possible biology of a woman). So I wish to next look into art works that propose a woman as the authority. Can a woman, who appears *as* a woman, be considered masculine, not perhaps by her biological properties, but by *how* she is, how she performs herself *as herself*? Can a female artist, with her particular performance, annihilate the art historical background of the representation of the female as an object (of the male gaze) to such an extent as to re-negotiate her authorial position as “natural”, cohesive and identifiable?

In the late 1960s and early 1970s select male body artists working with performance and video art participated in destabilizing the masculine subject – not by participating in female impersonation but by performing their body/selves as (ef-)feminized while

remaining identifiably male in physical appearance. This was a time when “normative subjectivity and its privileges were profoundly and publicly challenged” and not the least by the body artists of the time.¹⁶ The select male body artists of the period, like Vito Acconci, participated in destabilizing the disinterested Cartesian artist-subject through their performance. In his works Acconci performed himself as “open-ended and contingent on spectatorial desire, pointing up the incoherence of masculinity itself (as simultaneously authoritative and vulnerable, penetrating and receptive, controlling and at the mercy of the viewing ‘other’)”.¹⁷ In Acconci’s select performance and video works from the early 1970s he establishes an often erotic relation with an alleged other, whether a viewer like in his video piece *Theme Song* (1973), a gallery visitor as in the performance *Seedbed* (1972) or an invisible co-performer and to an extent the viewer in a game of make believe in his video piece *Undertone* (1972). In his works Acconci unveils the male body of the artist/genius and exaggeratedly performs an intersubjective (erotic) intertwining of the interpretive exchange, establishing his interdependence with the other.¹⁸ In his work Acconci establishes himself both as an artist subject and as the object of the art work, exposing his slightly bellied, long-haired yet balding, desiring body/self to the viewing gaze. He in a way performs a face (of a subject-object) to the male gaze (gazing back) that appears as pleading, desiring, sexually turned on, frantically hopeful, and most importantly, far from the veiled and coherent artist-hero. I used the example of Acconci and the (ef-)feminization of the male artist subject by his performance

16 Jones 1998, 103.

17 Jones 1998, 104.

18 Jones 1998, 105-106.

to guide the trail of thought toward potential other strategies of masculinization for the female artist that are not dependant on gender bending, but on how the artist's subjectivity is performed in relation to the other. As I have come to notice, power and authority do not exist without the necessary other; the Hegelian master is only a master in relation to his or her slave.

Do you remember the name of Bob Flanagan's dominatrix partner?

Authority, n.: **I.** Power to enforce obedience.

1.

- a.** Power or right to enforce obedience; moral or legal supremacy; the right to command, or give an ultimate decision.
- b.** in authority: in a position of power; in possession of power over others.

2.

- a.** Derived or delegated power; conferred right or title; authorization.
- b.** with *inf.* Conferred right *to do* something.

- 3.** Those in authority; the body or persons exercising power or command.¹⁹

The artistic collaboration of Sheree Rose and Bob Flanagan in the 1980s and 1990s seemed to turn the tables around concerning the traditional power relation of masculine-feminine domestic and sexual relationships. Their works, based on the couple's real-life sadomasochistic (S/M) partnership, (re-)present Sheree Rose as

¹⁹ Oxford English Dictionary.

the dominating partner over her white male counterpart, offering their own twist to the view of heterosexual relationships. The work of Rose and Flanagan is a brilliant example for examining the powers at play, which complicate a viewer's simplistic understanding of the woman as the authority in relation to her male partner in a sexualized context, here S/M practice, regardless of the artists' intention. I will look closer at the body of work of this artist couple, as well as the conception of sexual sadomasochism in the contemporary culture.

The question "How to be with a man and remain a hard-boiled feminist?" is as substantial today as it was in the 1970s. According to multiple interviews of Sheree Rose, a legendary American performance artist and dominatrix, the question whether there was an alternative way for a heterosexual relationship, was of relevance to an educated and economically independent single mother. And then she met Bob Flanagan, a poet suffering from cystic fibrosis (CF), who wanted to be her slave. The couple began a relationship for 16 years until Flanagan's death of CF in 1996, a relationship, which soon became an artistic collaboration. In a video art piece *Bob & Sheree's Contract* (1982), while showing clips of what appears as a documentation of a naked Flanagan being tied up and his skin cut by Rose, Flanagan's voice narrates:

Of my own free will I, Bob Flanagan, grant you, Sheree Rose, full ownership and use of my mind and body. I will obey you at all times and will whole-heartedly seek your pleasure and wellbeing above all other considerations. I renounce all rights to my own pleasure, comfort or gratification except insofar as you desire or permit them. I renounce all rights to privacy or concealment from you.

I will answer truthfully and completely to the best of my knowledge any and all questions you may ask. I understand and agree that any failure by me to comply fully with your desires shall be regarded as efficient cause for severe punishment. I otherwise unconditionally accept as your prerogative anything you may choose to do with me whether as punishment, for your amusement or whatever purpose no matter how painful or humiliating to myself.²⁰

Sheree Rose, at the time a single mother of two with a master's degree in psychology, met Bob Flanagan, a younger poet and masochist in 1980. Rose had no previous experiences with S/M, but "Rose quickly rose to it".²¹ The couple's relationship has been described as very public; Flanagan was an exhibitionist and Rose enjoyed shocking people. Rose began to photograph the couple's S/M sessions, and on her prodding they mounted and exhibited a photo-collage named *The Wall of Pain* in 1982 as a part of a group exhibition. Since then Rose and Flanagan continued to collaborate on art works, installations and videos dealing with their life together.²²

During the 1980s Rose and Flanagan's work was circulated mainly in small subculture circles as the couple was involved with developing the California S/M scene.²³ In 1989, after Rose's photographic S/M project was published in RE/Search Publications book *Modern Primitives*, Flanagan was invited to perform at a series of lectures and demonstrations celebrating the book. In this context

20 *Sick* 1997, 17:25-18:22.

21 Flanagan 2000, 8.

22 Ibid.

23 MacDonald 2005, 2.

he performed the piece that brought his and Rose's work to public attention: *Nailed*. "Nailed consisted of a variety of self-mutilations performed along with storytelling and a slide show of Rose's photo-documentation of their private S/M acts. The climax of the piece came when Flanagan wrapped the flesh of his scrotum around his penis, sewed his penis inside of his scrotum, nailed his scrotum to a board and then suspended himself by his wrists from a scaffold"²⁴. Their work was entangled in the NEA²⁵ controversies, and used as an example by those who objected that the NEA had misused the tax money by supporting artists who created and agencies that displayed "obscene" art.²⁶ Suddenly Rose and Flanagan had the interest of the mainstream art circles. In 1991 Flanagan screened the infamous video he is best known for, in which he hammers a nail through the head of his penis, as a part of performance series *Bob Flanagan's Sick*.²⁷ As a result the artists' were invited to create the solo-exhibition *Visiting Hours*, "a show which filled the Santa Monica Museum and rocked the art world in 1992"²⁸. *Visiting Hours* became the culmination of the work of Rose and Flanagan. The installation, build to strangely resemble a hospital space, "explored Flanagan's S/M practices and his medical tribulations through video and photographic documentation, multimedia sculpture and an endurance performance that made Flanagan 'genuinely available' to the public for discussion".²⁹ *Visiting Hours* was further curated and shown in the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New

24 MacDonald 2005, 7-8.

25 The National Endowment for the Arts.

26 MacDonald 2005, ii, 8-9.

27 MacDonald 2005, 9.

28 Flanagan 2000, 8.

29 MacDonald 2005, 10.

York (1994) and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (1995). In 1995 Rose and Flanagan collaborated with Kirby Dick on a documentary film about Flanagan's life *Sick: The Life & Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist* which won the Special Grand Prize at Sundance Film Festival on the year of its release, 1997, a year after Flanagan's death.³⁰

In the foreword of Flanagan's final book *The Pain Journal*, Chris Kraus writes concerning the documentary of Flanagan and Rose, "by 1995 he [Bob Flanagan] had become notorious for the ingenious uses for his body he and Sheree have devised".³¹ I quote Kraus here because what he says entails something essential about the artistic collaboration of Rose and Flanagan. I have asked the question, which titled this chapter, "do you remember the name of Bob Flanagan's dominatrix partner?" of a few artists. Mostly these artists have known Flanagan and his work with "a dominatrix", but the name of Sheree Rose had been forgotten. I claim that this forgetting is not coincidental, but rather is reminiscent of the work Rose and Flanagan produced together, even when by their private-lifestyle-made-into-art practice the couple seemed to promote controversial power structures for a heterosexual relationship. By closer examination we can discover those factors that stripped Rose from the dominating role she was inscribed in: firstly, the context of sexual sadomasochism and its' practicalities as well as cultural connotations and secondly, Rose's art practice after Flanagan's death.

Rose and Flanagan certainly were not the first artists to perform acts of pain in performance art context, as in the 1970s several now well-known artists build their careers through creation

30 Flanagan 2000, 8-9.

31 Flanagan 2000, 9.

of works associated with masochistic performance: Chris Burden, Vito Acconci, Gina Pane, Marina Abramovic and Ulay.³² But there was something uniquely disturbing about Bob Flanagan, a white heterosexual man who was fatally ill and while still alive, desired to be physically hurt even more. He was a practicing masochist before meeting Rose, and according to several sources, utilized the self-inflicted pain as well as S/M to transcend the suffering of CF. It was the one way to be in control of his body, a notion which makes one wonder what Rose's role in all of this was. Was the audience ever interested in the dominating female, or was the meaning of their work constructed always in and through the suffering, mutilated body of Bob Flanagan, the sick self-proclaimed "supermasochist"? The early classics of S/M literature like the *Story of O* and de Sade's *Justine* present a young female in the masochistic role, while in Flanagan and Rose's work the stereotypical gendered roles are reversed. Although their S/M practice appears to re-negotiate the Hegelian master/slave dialectic, by a closer examination of "the rules and practices of S/M" we come to notice that it's dominating and submissive roles are not exactly what they first seem to be.

In sadomasochism sexual pleasure is reached by using power purposely and in an agreed manner, by utilizing accentuated polarization of roles and various techniques that express and embody power. The foundation of an S/M session is in setting its limits, and by staying within those limits of stimulation or just slightly extending them can an S/M session be erotically satisfying. Theoretically the dominator has the power as s/he can do anything s/he pleases, and some S/M practitioners favor this viewpoint. But

32 O'Dell 1998, 3.

in practice it is the limits of the submissive partner that mostly govern how far the dominator can go. The domination is expressed by a threat or actual infliction of physical pain, psychological humiliation and/or bondage according to the wishes of the participants. The sessions often implement the fantasies of the submissive one. When necessary the submissive partner can cut the session by using a pre-appointed safety-word. The sadomasochists emphasize accountability in their actions, as well as the principles of safety and awareness of one another's limits in the contractual nature of practicing S/M.³³

I find the question of who actually is in charge in an S/M session or relationship an essential one when interpreting Rose and Flanagan's artwork (from my feminist viewpoint). By their public declaration Rose and Flanagan appear to be reversing the traditional power structure, but the rules commonly understood as profound for practicing S/M seem to unsettle their claim, making it debatable. What in fact is identified in viewing a dominatrix practicing heterosexual S/M? While the role of the dominatrix is constructed as the role seeming to hold power, Valerie Steele, a researcher of fetish costumes, remarks that the costume of the dominatrix is in fact the single most important costume in the fetish regime, and it has also exerted the greatest influence on contemporary fashion. The dominatrix's body is commonly almost completely covered in opposition to the naked submissive body. The dominatrix's armor has a phallic reference as she stereotypically wears (hard, stiff and long) high heels, boots, gloves and corsets (for her to have an erect and hardened body), with a whip or riding crop, all phallic sym-

33 Kaartinen and Kippola 1990, 31-38.

bols.³⁴ In psychoanalytical interpretation, the “whip is a ‘punishing penis’”.³⁵ Steele points out that fetishism is not typical of women, and that in fact less than one percent of the cases cited as sexual perversions have been of females. It’s rather the male perversions that manifest as a form of kinky sex.³⁶ So when an overwhelming majority of fetishists are men, why do women practice sex that can be classified as fetishist or prefer to wear fetishist clothes? According to Steele, women mostly wear fetish costumes “either for direct economic reasons (i.e. they are professional sex workers) or to please their husbands or boyfriends”.³⁷ Despite the fact that the dominatrix is dressed to power her up and has the tools to punish and enslave the submissive partner, Steele notes that “accounts by SM adherents uniformly stress that the slave figure is very often the one ‘really’ in command – indeed, often quite bossy: ‘Do it harder! Don’t stop! Not like that, like this!’”.³⁸ When watching the documentary film *Sick...* I could witness similar communication between Flanagan and Rose, Flanagan bossing Rose on how to physically dominate him and Rose obeying his demand. *Sick...* displays clips of the couple’s video performances; one in which Rose (only arms and bare breasts visible) strangles Flanagan (face visible) with a bath rope, and the annoyed Flanagan says: “Don’t be a phony, just do it!” followed by fast clips of him being strangled while he quietly utters what sounds like more instructions. We come to witness clip after clip of Flanagan’s indeed in-charge behavior, leading to a scene in which Rose (arm visible) beats Flanagan’s stomach (central part of

34 Steele 1996, 169.

35 Steele 1996, 171.

36 Steele 1996, 14.

37 Steele 1996, 171.

38 Steele 1996, 172.

body visible), and he goes on: “Wait, stop, stop! You can’t just keep doing it. Who the hell do you think you are?”³⁹

Steele suggests, accordingly, that the real question in S/M practice may not be “Who wields the whip?” but rather “Who pays?” or “Whose fantasy is being enacted?”⁴⁰ When, like in the case of the art work of Rose and Flanagan, the viewer is aware that the S/M scene witnessed instantiates the fantasy or the need of the male partner, and is enacted in resemblance to fetishist iconography, the claim that the artwork would suggest reversed gender power politics is sadly annihilated. The work comes to suggest quite the contrary; by introducing the female performer as a heterosexual S/M dominatrix, in its inseparable reference to fetishist pornography (mainly for the male viewer), it produces the female as a commodity for the demand of the male fantasy, cancelling the agency of the sexually dominating woman. According to Jones, “Flanagan himself was acutely aware of the paradox of masochism. While nominally the ‘slave’ in his relationship to Rose (and the ‘object’ of the audience’s gazes in the artistic performance), it was he who directed every action”.⁴¹

Ummni Khan, who researched the representation and regulation of female dominance (fem dom) and male submission (male sub) in law and cinema, argues: “the dynamic of fem dom/male sub sexuality creates a social anxiety and must be managed by discursively or literally reviving masculine control”.⁴² Khan demonstrates with examples from mainstream movies representing professional female dominatrices and their interaction with male subjects, that

39 *Sick* 1997, 34:10–35:00.

40 Steele 1996, 172.

41 Jones 1998, 233.

42 Khan 2009, 146.

in the storyline the “gender order must eventually be restored by placing the man on top and the woman on the bottom in some visual or symbolic way, and, if this fails to happen, the sadomasochistic practitioner must be destroyed”.⁴³ Khan’s examples make me re-think Kirby Dick’s award winning documentary about Bob Flanagan and the scene toward the end of the film where Flanagan refuses to submit to Sheree Rose even when she demands him to, saying she “needs” his submission. The scene is placed in the film right before showing the death of Flanagan, as if in the end restoring his position as the true dominant in their relationship. We see Flanagan on what appears to be his last trip to the hospital and Rose in the waiting room saying “I don’t even think he’s a masochist anymore. I think life has beaten him down too much. The pain he lived with every day is so intense that it isn’t any other kind of pain that I would even think about right now, so...”⁴⁴ So, finally we are shown a man who submits to his illness (his fate, by God) and not to a woman. Sheree Rose criticized the documentary film in an email interview by artist Martin O’Brien saying that Kirby Dick, the director of *Sick...*, edited the film to represent a version of her and Flanagan that is not particularly accurate, manipulating the materials mainly filmed by Rose to conform to what he wanted to convey.⁴⁵ Might it be that this social anxiety to revive the masculine control that Khan introduced is the lens through which we see, *want to see*, and *need to see* the life and work of Sheree Rose and Bob Flanagan? The dominant female as the “Dominatrix” or “Mistress” is highly fetishized in popular porno culture, represented as object-like in

43 Ibid.

44 *Sick* 1997, 1:14:25–1:17:30.

45 “Dialogues: Sheree Rose”.

her revealing leather and rubber outfits, a perverted sexual commodity-on-sale stripped from indications of actual dominance in her visual fetishization. No matter how earnest Sheree Rose's and Bob Flanagan's attempt to suggest an alternative way of lifestyle might have been, how we culturally perceive the relation of a (sexually) dominant female and a submissive man still refers to an end point where the man rises to his naturalized position of authority and the woman's dominant role is revealed as "given" by the man, unstable and reliant of the man's will.

During the 17 years following Flanagan's death, Sheree Rose continued her artwork by, in many senses, commemorating and re-exhibiting Flanagan's legacy. After Flanagan's death Rose was invited to Japan to exhibit in an international art show, for which she created *Boballoon*, a 6-meter high vinyl statue, with over a meter long erect penis.⁴⁶ In an interview concerning *Sick...* in 2011 Rose was asked about her artwork after Flanagan's death. She replied:

Over the years, I have continued to make art related to Bob. I have been invited to show at museums and galleries all over the world, including the Tate Museum of Art in Liverpool and Jeu de Paume in Paris. [...] I have a current show, "The Wedding of Everything", at Country Club Projects in Los Angeles, in which I reimagine "Visiting Hours", with a new piece entitled "He Is Risen".⁴⁷

Rose had stopped performing publicly, until she joined artist Martin O'Brien in 2011 in a performance taking place in Access All Areas, a

46 Ibid.

47 Holladay 2011.

symposium on disability and Live Art in London. O'Brien is a British performance artist who, like Flanagan, has CF and incorporates that fact into his work. In the performance

Rose asked O'Brien (bruised from having just completed his endurance performance) to submit to her, strip off his clothes, and allow himself to be spanked. The action was simple: one hundred spans, each followed by O'Brien counting and saying, "Thank you ma'am, may I please have another," always with the threat that if the counting was incorrect, Rose would begin again from zero.⁴⁸

Lobel sees Rose and O'Brien's performance as a "reflection on a lineage" and as a "passing of a torch".⁴⁹ But is it the torch of Rose or rather, of Flanagan? Does Rose in her spanking act as an intermediary for a new generation of "supermasochists", or is it finally about the inverted power relation between the submissive man and the authoritative woman? I return to the question I posed in the title of this chapter: did you remember the name of Bob Flanagan's dominatrix partner before you saw it printed in front of your eyes? On the other hand, did you ever come about an article on Sheree Rose, the "superdominatrix", or whenever you read of her, was it in the context of Flanagan's suffering body (and now, O'Brien's)?

In June 2013 Rose and O'Brien collaborated again on a 24-hour durational performance *Do With Me What You Will* in Los Angeles. Jennifer Doyle speculates in her article for KCET Artbound whether Rose's return to performance is inspired by her taking on a role as

48 Lobel 2011, 98.

49 Lobel 2011, 99.

“a mentor to younger artists exploring how SM, power and sexuality might figure in their practice”, pointing out the exploration of both the gender and age dynamics of their collaboration, that has “a hard maternal edge”.⁵⁰ I find the implication to the maternal qualities of Rose’s work as rather pertinent, and indeed Rose’s performance reminds me of the outdated mode of understanding the role of a “mother” or a “wife” of an artist. It is through Rose conforming to Flanagan’s lifestyle and illness, her constant documentation of the development of his pain and work, and after his death, her repetition of his body (of work) in her art work, that we are reminded of Rose’s work as contingent on Flanagan’s even after his death. Like a dedicated mother or wife of a dead man, she repeats what he “was” and “did”, and what she “was” and “did” with and through him.

Indeed Flanagan’s practice questions the masculine male subject (through his disease which shows itself as his greatest collaborator), but Rose’s part in the art work reveals her dependence on Flanagan, or another masochist, on her fixed concentration on the effects of his body-on-display, that in my opinion does not masculinize Rose. Even when art historian Amelia Jones writes about Flanagan’s work, I notice (and perhaps I *want to* notice) that Rose’s part is often mentioned in brackets. Perhaps a bit out of context, but very relevant in my view, is the final sentence of Jones’ book *Self/Image*, of the chapter in which she discusses also the work of Flanagan and Rose: “Representation can only deliver what we think we (want to) know about the other, who is never real but always (somewhere) Real in its ‘indefatigable expression’”.⁵¹ I wonder whether it is only in negotiations of alternative female sexuality, like Annie Sprinkle’s

50 Doyle 2013.

51 Jones 2006, 248.

and Beth Stephens' Ecosexuality, that the female sexuality beyond the domains of the disabling heteronormative and pornographic definitions can be expressed.

Laurel Nakadate and the other

I have been astonished when a few of my male acquaintances, when drunk, have confided on me "You women don't know how much power you have over us. You have all the power in your choice whether to 'give' us sex or not." I really haven't perceived any power or authority over others in my private life choices on sexual activity or inactivity. However, Catherine Hakim's notion of erotic capital suggests a certain power based on the desire, or to be more accurate, in being desirable.

Erotic capital, a term coined by sociologist Catherine Hakim, expands Pierre Bourdieu's theory on economic-, social- and cultural capitals as personal assets. She claims that erotic capital, based largely on what she calls "the male sex deficit" (men's greater sexual desire)⁵², which affects all relationships between men and women, is a fourth capital that patriarchy has tried hard to conceal "in a fog of moralizing that controls women's public dress and behavior".⁵³ According to Hakim, women generally have more erotic capital than men and hence a potential for gaining advantages accordingly, but in the politics of desire women's erotic capital has become entangled with "the male sex deficit, male egos, and the rhetoric surrounding power struggles between men and women".⁵⁴ Erotic

52 Hakim's claim of "the male sex deficit" as a universal phenomenon is based on sex surveys made around the world, and she examines her evidence in chapter 2 of her book *Honey Money: The Power of Erotic Capital*.

53 Hakim 2011, 3

54 Hakim 2011, 6.

capital is a combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social and sexual attractiveness⁵⁵ to other members of one's society, especially to those of the opposite sex if we consider a heteronormative reading, and it applies in all social contexts.⁵⁶ Laurel Nakadate's video and photographic performances from the 2000s seem to play exactly with her power of erotic capital in the production of an established artist's career. I will look into specific strategies I can detect in her early work, which brought her artistic exposure, and their similarities with those regarded as "natural" in the production of the body of work of a male artist genius in art history. Nakadate's work has been occasionally frowned at due to accusations that they utilized elements of exploitation of the opposite sex. My aim is to show that in fact, despite the accusations, Nakadate's approach to creating her work is no different than what men have used for centuries. She had "natural" privileges or advantages, and she used them alongside her talent and hard work to attain a name in art.

Laurel Nakadate's work continues a tradition of art making that involves documenting both her particular self (performed as "geared for the action") and what seems as others (men) unprepared in their "natural" behavior. Previously similar kinds of strategies have been used by Sophie Calle in projects involving observing and documenting strangers as well as documenting her own life and relationships,

55 Hakim lists the six elements of erotic capital as 1) beauty or facial attractiveness, 2) sexual attractiveness which is about a sexy body (including the way someone moves, talks or behaves), 3) social skills in interaction, including grace and charm, 4) liveliness, a mixture of physical fitness, social energy and good humour, 5) social presentation, as in style of dress, facial painting, perfume, jewelry, accessorizing etc., and 6) sexuality itself including e.g. sexual competence, energy, erotic imagination and playfulness. She also notes that in some cultures women's fertility is tied to their erotic capital (Hakim 2011, 11-16).

56 Hakim 2011, 17.

or by Lynn Hershman who lived and documented the life of her alter ego Roberta Breitmore, and the others (men) she met as Roberta. Whereas Calle was often the active observer and revealer of others, and Hershman confronts the others through her alter ego, Nakadate goes to meet her strangers as (a version of) Nakadate, involving her narcissistic body/self fully in the meeting and the artwork. The viewer gets to literally see both the other and her, and the relationship they develop; glimpses of *how* and *why* these men knowingly submit themselves, through (being allegedly driven by) their desire (of her), to her artwork. R.C. Baker, who wrote in Village Voice about Nakadate's exhibition *Only the Lonely* in P.S. 1 in 2011 presenting a decade of her artwork, characterizes her work as follows:

As a performance artist who puts her scantily clad body front and center – sometimes precariously so – Laurel Nakadate pokes a sharp stick into the Male Gaze. Since her twenties, she has co-starred in her own photographs and videos, improvising roles with men she has found lurking around truck stops, gas stations, or on [Craigslist](#). Generally middle-aged, in varying combinations of overweight, balding, and/or lacking dental insurance, these strangers must have thought they'd died and gone to heaven when the nubile young artist showed up at their hovels looking to discuss lecherous fantasies.⁵⁷

Nakadate's co-performers on her video works are aware that they are being filmed, and they willingly participate, some more eager

57 Baker 2011.

and some more shy or cautious, however playing along in the fantasy-like scenarios the artist proposed. Nakadate graduated with MFA in photography from Yale in 2001 and is best known for works she has made with lonely men she met on chance encounters. Her interviewer for Vice TV's Art Talk, Erin Krause, characterizes her work as having "brought the idea of feminism to a completely modern and fresh perspective; she [Nakadate] uses a mix of voyeurism, empathy and straight-up sex to flip the idea of the hunter and the hunted. She is really hot [...] and as I learned is always, always the hunter".⁵⁸ The videos of her and the unknown men commenced when Nakadate was approached by single men, strangers to her, and she would begin to talk with them and propose some art collaboration. Nakadate describes the filming scenarios that took place in these men's apartments as a "play with them watching me, watching me watching them, [...] and all of the different mirrors that start getting placed up. I'm recording this but they are watching me and they want something from me but I want something from them. I think it's this sort of power play".⁵⁹ In a later interview in *The Observer* (2011) Nakadate discusses her video work with the strangers and their connection with sexuality: "although more than 90% of those videos don't involve any touching at all, when you watch them there is a nascent sexuality there. They exist in the realm of anticipation – often the most powerful aspect of sex. But there is no sexual contact".⁶⁰

In her earliest video work *Oops!* (2000) Laurel Nakadate, at the time an art student in her early twenties, dances with older

58 *Art Talk: Laurel Nakadate* 2007.

59 *Ibid.*

60 Morgan 2011.

men in their shabby-looking private apartments to Britney Spears' song *Oops!...I Did It Again*. The video shows segments of a lively and attractive young woman dancing a well-learned Spears' choreography in a pair of jeans and a pink tank top, in three sets each with a different partner trying to join her in the dance moves or awkwardly standing aside while she dances. In a later video work *Don't You Want Somebody to Love You?* (2006) the slender Nakadate and an older fat man undress to their underwear at the man's house. With an upraised arm and a pointed index finger Nakadate, leaning to the wall, conducts the man's movements, as he makes awkward pirouettes while she and the camera are watching his bloated figure in saggy underwear pivoting around. Then in turn it's Nakadate pirouetting in her contrastingly attractive lean figure. In addition to the described, Nakadate has made several other videos with strangers, in which they, among other things, celebrate an imaginary birthday, practice exorcism, imitate animals, or Nakadate poses in her underwear as a model for the stranger to draw her. In these video works Nakadate occasionally looks into the camera, as if letting the viewer know that she knows what's going on and that she is in charge of the situation.

When scrutinized as such, Nakadate's video performances appear to convincingly prove Hakim's theory on erotic capital as a powerful personal asset in a game where the middle-aged white man, traditionally presented as the masculine authority in art, is outpowered by young Nakadate's appeal. The men establish their desire for Nakadate by approaching her and she uses these men's sexual deficit and the power inscribed in her own superior erotic capital to get what she wants: to advance her art and career. And instead of "the ultimate gift in return", these men do not get the fleeting sexual satisfaction implied in the male sexual deficit.

What we see in Nakadate's videos is a beautiful young woman toying around in occasionally sexually provocative wear and a variety of men following her (either in action or in attention), enthralled by her performance but not giving into the heat of the moment, not grabbing her nor their own genitals: they are playing by her rule and she records it all. The exciting experiment initiated by the male sex deficit is quickly over for the guys, but still today Nakadate exhibits the videos she made during those meetings in distinguished galleries internationally. Though accused for exploitation of "those poor guys", Nakadate doesn't act much differently than some of the most appraised male artists have acted throughout centuries. The most distinguished art museums exhibit portraits of unknown female models, naked or clothed, that have brought glory to the artists who have painted her throughout centuries. Or think of Yves Klein strutting alongside the edges of the performance scene occasionally gesturing in his black suit while the naked female models as living brushes paint *his* artwork to the canvas with *their* bodies in *Anthropometries*. Nakadate has not done anything more exploitative except turned the tables of gender around and caused a stir by unveiling the male weakness (inscribed in Hakim's sex deficit) and the bare bloated skin of middle-aged masculinity. She has made the audiences *feel sorry for the man*, stripping him from the authority inscribed in the idea of the white masculinity of a certain age. These men's (as substitutes for any lonely man's) weakness and dependence is revealed bare in front of the viewers' gazing eye and Nakadate gazes back, knowing what she has done.

My writing of Laurel Nakadate's work has focused on her video work with the middle-aged men, work that first brought her into the attention of the art world yet rendered her male co-performers nameless and exposed, exhibited to art audiences as an expression

of her daring intellect. Since her days with the strangers, Nakadate has made two feature length films *Stay the Same Never Change*, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2009 and *The Wolf Knife* in 2010 that was nominated for distinguished awards. She has explored many themes beyond dancing with lonely men in her photographic and video work. For example in the photographic series *365: A Catalogue of Tears* (2011) Nakadate documented herself weeping every day during the year 2010. In "Relations" series she photographed "distant relatives she tracked down through DNA Web sites and genealogical research".⁶¹ She has established herself as a multifaceted artist excelling in several media, and gained in a sense a masculine authorial status when thinking of her methodology of claimed "exploitation" inconsistent with the idea of frail femininity.

A well-known remark from Peggy Phelan's book *Unmarked* states, "if representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture".⁶² By (re-)presenting and performing cleverly beyond the feminine stereotype I claim that even the almost-naked young white women may be able to bring about a *different* identification, and negotiate alternative identifications for other feminized subjects beyond the norm as well. Participating in destabilizing how we "automatically" see and identify through performance or other means of (re-)presentation, has plenty to do with Stets' and Burke's notion that modifying the social system may mean first modifying individual beliefs about masculinity and femininity. I consider that the above-mentioned female (and male) artists have done exactly that;

61 Smith 2013.

62 Phelan 1993, 10.

they have participated in and created performances that come to suggest alternative readings, understandings and identifications. These artists have stretched, diversified and opened for negotiation the causal understanding of representational appearance conveying the “real” inner truth of a person, which is (according to my reading) exactly what Stets and Burke may be understood to suggest. By their performances the artists I have discussed, have brought to our attention the female subject as manifold, powerful, a ballsy subject in her own right. But then again, representation can only deliver what we think we (want to) know about the other, who is never real but always (somewhere) Real in its “indefatigable expression”.

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Ellen Jeffrey: Jenni Kokkomäki and the essential difference; lying down and gazing back, lying back and gazing down

I am sat drinking tea. Actually, I am still waiting for the tea to brew. I drink the milk out of my tea cup as I wait, somewhat impatiently. The milk tastes slightly bitter – the teacup's unwashed.

I am trying to think about a performance I saw 9 months ago, in Rovaniemi. The room was white, the artist was absent. The windows in the room were covered with some sort of material – I don't recall exactly what, but I remember that the small windows were covered. I remember entering the gallery space through a short passage, leading from the previous room. Three things struck – three large screens, three heads of white-blonde hair (one on each screen) three pink shirts, visible beneath the hair.

I have poured my tea – there are bubbles on the top. The tea cup is blue.

Back to the gallery in my memory; amongst the colour there is a fourth – a noise, loud and unrelenting... a dentist's drill? I turn to the first screen. The artist is lying down, her face turned towards the camera. She is wearing a pink shirt, her blonde hair pushed back to expose the left side of her head. The left side of her head is exposed to an other, an other wielding a tattoo drill. The noise is loudest when the needle touches the skin. My eyes flit between two points – the eyes of the artist and the hands of the other; portrayal

of pain and the instigator of pain. I analyse the hands and imagine the effect – I look at the eyes and wait for a flinch. It’s a strange triangle, and in this moment I feel my own position of power: does the artist know, how powerful she has let me feel? I can see the hands, I can see the drill – I see what she cannot know. The artists’ eyes gaze into mine and I gaze back, always searching for a sign of her pain. I wonder, what she was thinking as she stared into the empty camera lens – was she scared? Of the outcome, of an inky smudge imprinted on her skin – of me, her unknown critic, my present being her future as I look into what has already passed? Yet it’s not fear that I see in the artists’ eyes, more a delicate apprehension. She gazes and I gaze back – she doesn’t know, she has to submit to not knowing – not knowing the outcome of the drill, as it noisily continues, on and on; not knowing whose unfriendly eyes might gaze back into hers... But I’m the viewer and I have been given that power, to know – I see the drill, I know the outcome, I know myself, I know all that she cannot. I wonder at why these thoughts don’t usually pass my mind when I look at video art – why I don’t contemplate this gazing across time differences, of knowing more than the artist’s videoed present, of the power I hold – maybe this is the first time I feel it offered, suggested. The artist’s gaze is so strong, I want to say that it is penetrating but in the recognition that it could be lies the recognition that it could never be; her present can never reach mine – her unknowing is almost tangible. I turn to continue through the room, and change my mind – I look back once more and meet her gaze again. I decide – the artist is not a victim of the drill. The artist is submitting to not-knowing.

I have drained the cup and I pour the second – no bubbles.

I turn, again – two television screens, each identical to the other, and my ears tweak at something beyond the drill. I move closer and

hear two voices of the artist. Side by side the identical women lie, bodies angled with face close to the camera lens, pink shirt, beige carpet and black skirt visible behind – my eyes trick me, and I believe for a second that it's a mirror image – then I see the binding. The woman in the right screen is tied, bound, in what appears to be black tape. I listen to her monologue – I listen to her grotesque pleading, to her earnest 'you would take care of me' – the artist embodies the perfect Hollywood femme fatale; she writhes and she simpers, and initially I feel a little disgusted, I feel as though I've walked into something intended for a predatory gaze and that there's no place for me here. I step back, and in doing so see that the artist lies in complete juxtaposition to her twin – the visual image being the extent of their similarities. The woman on the left is speaking to me – she is not pleading, and she is not enticing. She is forceful and slightly unnerving, but I listen. I hear the similar emphasis of the 'I' and 'You', as with the film on the right, and note the switching of places – 'I would take care of you'... I see again the same tight skirt, blonde curls, the repeated stereotype of the femme fatale. But in front of this there is the artists' face of arrogant aggression, her harsh voice. The tattoo parlour's noise seems to do little to quieten her. I note that the eyes that seek mine remain the same.

My cup is empty for the second time, and the pot is lukewarm. I pour it out and sip, feeling the sediments of tea leaves on my tongue, forgetting to add milk.

I return my thoughts to her switching of the 'I' and 'You' – I begin to feel the repetition of it, and it is at this point that I first think back to Vito Acconci's original film. In my head I draw a simple parallel – that the artist in the screen on the left performs Acconci's text with force, aggression, and as a woman. She is Acconci's equal in force, if not manipulation. The artist in the screen on the right

is not interested in forming a 'gender-equal' to Acconci's original – she becomes, in this variation, the Echo to Acconci's Narcissus; his you, to his I. In his own version, Acconci positions himself so that his body, which he talks of so intensely, is hardly visible to the viewer's eye – here in Rovaniemi, the artist's body is never completely hidden; there is no attempt at concealment, either visibly or conceptually – her pink shirt and black skirt assert 'her'. I reflect for a moment on the differences between these choices, and wonder at what it would have been if she had hidden her body – nothing new, I guess, to assert a female body through absence. Instead she walks the unstable road between subject and object, subject to object – both at once adamantly present.

I step back to once again look between the two differences of the same, to listen to the same monologue and hear its differing connotations. I look at the artist's double gaze – different intents, equal intensities. Are these variations of her self as equally as they are variations of Acconci? Perhaps... I watch and I listen. I begin to tune once more into the drilling, and watch her gazing through the gaps in her monologues. I recall the moments that Acconci would tune in to his background noises of various pop songs, momentarily joining in the lyrics – a strange cohesion forming between the two, both Acconci and pop singer giving a sexual call-out to an unknown listener. I look back at this artist on the screen in front of me as I hear the drill vibrate as it touched her skin, her own strangely appropriate soundtrack, a possible mirror of her own motives.

As I begin to leave, I childishly compare the three films – searching for a favourite, knowing that they are one, together, three variations of the same, but still I ask – I think of the footage of the tattoo parlour, its contrast to the other variations in its lack of narrative, its lack of voice... I use the word 'lack' and yet the sound from this

variation seemed to dominate the whole of the gallery space, the needle penetrating her skin, the noise penetrating our present – I think back to the artist’s gaze, looking out from the confinements of her own present. Can a gaze penetrate? I still cannot answer my own question, only that I’m left with a sense that by gazing back - to the gaze of the unknown, into the unknown, to gaze out rather than invite in – she begins to tip the scales.

This review was written in response to the work of performance and video artist Jenni Kokkomäki titled ‘Three Variations to Theme Song’ premiered in Rovaniemi, Lapland, May 2012.

www.jennikokkomaki.wordpress.com



Jenni Kokkomäki in *Three Variations to Theme Song*.

Kaisa Illukka: PLATFORM – Practice of how to change the world

What does it mean to think and *act* ecologically in the world today?
How about in the art world?

It seems a bit fancy to call oneself an activist artist today, which means you are an artist who is socially and philosophically conscious and critical (but they not all regard themselves so?). As a viewer and a doer, both an artwork and an activist event have offered me a similar experience of existence, responsibility, beauty, loss, morality, anger, time, fate, power(lessness)... Another reason to link art and activism is related to the characteristics of contemporary societal challenges. Environmental, developmental and other so called wicked issues are highly complex and many-faced matters, thus, it is claimed that the solution-oriented approach related to them has to be likewise complex, open-minded and aiming at comprehensiveness. Since science has lost its overall outlook in the process of specialization, art has still been characterized as holistic or comprehensive; it includes subjective, emotional and value aspects, which science does not. Art can also integrate ambivalent views, and approach them freely and experimentally.¹ (This point of view is not quite impartial since it is mostly presented by artists and art researchers themselves, but I guess there is no such authority who could judge this objectively.)

1 See for example: Mäki 2005, 203 & 269.

But do artists alone possess understanding of all disciplines in order to perceive the whole and suggest solutions? What is an artistic approach to the wicked issues and other contemporary/future challenges? How does an artist work outside the gallery/theatre/art context? And how does an artist do so without losing her/his own perspective? What can artistic practice give – directly or vicariously – to, for example, oil and energy issues? The competence of artists – or any specialized professionals – does not necessarily suffice alone, thus, cooperation and perspectives generated by cross-disciplinarity may be needed.²

Art researcher Grant H. Kester has studied activist art in the article publication *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality. Essays from Afterimage*, and he names two interrelated features of the aesthetic that are particularly significant for the analysis of activist art. First, the aesthetic can be defined as an ideal political and ontological form, for example how activist art aims at more utopian and ideal goals of social organization beyond the present facticity. Second is the capacity of aesthetic knowledge to visualize or embody a larger totality of (otherwise perhaps suppressed or ignored) interrelationships, and to create a more holistic system of representation. When combined, these aspects provide “the aesthetic with a unique ability to identify and describe the operations of political, social, cultural, and economic power, while at the same time allowing it to think beyond the horizons established by these forms of power.”³ Once again, the question is about comprehensive approach.

2 Not all art needs to have this comprehensive approach; a narrow approach, a single small act may open up a whole sphere of issues, you never know. But art can be too narrow as well. If theatre, for example, focuses on human psychology only, it may lose fruitful potentials of the genre.

3 Kester 1998, 8.

Platform since 1983

If the digging is best done through performance, we'll perform; if it needs a talk, we'll research and talk; if it needs a meal, we'll cook it; if it needs direct action, we'll be there. Our work is not fiction or entertainment, it is building society...⁴

Multidisciplinary action is not a 21st century novelty, although it appears to be especially budding and demanded now. A London-based, already thirty years old collective Platform is quite exceptional in the field of activist art. In order to explore the complex nature of environmental and human rights issues the collective works multidisciplinary and orients itself also outwards, to collaborations, in order to develop shared visions. Therefore, Platform is not merely an artistic group, but a collective of activists, artists, educationalists and researchers, who share an interest also in other than art-specific paradigms. They find essential those ideas, experiences and possibilities, which come out from this interaction and their way of furthering important issues.

One of Platform's founding members Dan Gretton (others are James Marriott and Jane Trowell) sees that the success of the cooperation model has given them more courage. According to Gretton, what is interesting in working in a cross-disciplinary manner is "that you have to change your language — you find something that is not actually in any of your languages. It represents a kind of dialogic model, the relationship that we want to have with audience", and continues: "When we're working on a new project, we think about what discipline we want to work with that would really expand this work."⁵

4 <http://platformlondon.org/2013/06/15/30-years-old-today/>

5 Cohn 2003.

*Art lets us think in uncommon ways, and the capacity to think in uncommon ways is what is interesting about collaborating beyond the arts.*⁶

Nowadays the Platform organization includes about twenty members who work to produce various projects in various forms and contexts, from courses to campaigns, exhibitions to performances, seminars, publications, and so on. The group often participates to share their campaigning and research at gatherings, special events and conferences, from grassroots campaigns to NGOs, arts organizations to formal education, to occupations and protest sites, and today actively in the social media, too. Platform has been developing new methods and tactics in the middle ground of arts and civil society movements. "We blend the power of art to transform with the clear goals of campaigning; rigorous in-depth research with the visions of alternative futures." Influenced by artist Joseph Beuys, amongst others, the collective has manifested that all these various acts can be seen as art – the process of moulding form – "all focus on physical and meta-physical change, change both in the tangible space of the material world and the intangible space of people's hearts and imaginations".⁷

Personally, what I find most admirable and appealing about Platform is the concept's totality: work in various contexts, straight action beside (and mixed with) ethical and artistic contemplation; work with various mediums and forms, and always keeping it open and dialogic. I see it as a kind of a meta-performance around the actual productions and activities: how they perform societal and environmental consciousness in everything they do, not just in an artwork. The group does not work anonymously, but they do not

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

gather around just one director/visionary leader or spokesperson outwards. Responsibility between various activities and projects may be divided; naturally one member cannot participate in all of them. The ethics of the working method is crucial in Platform's ideology; the group operates through the principle of collective decision-making and a consensus model. Jane Trowell describes their way of collaborating:

The overall political intent of the work is something we discuss together as a core, sorting out how much we agree on, and do we agree enough and with enough passion to move forward in that direction? Within that there are many ways of operating. Sometimes two of us will collaborate; sometimes we'll seek partners to collaborate with.⁸

The key themes in Platform's works have been local identity, ecosystem interconnectedness, the oil issue, remembering, and creating utopias to provoke change. According to Dan Gretton Platform started with an urge to bring together the energy of activism with the imagination of theatre and performance. In their early years, the group created street-based interactive performance work⁹, which provoked debate and awareness on a variety of issues from supporting services, which were to be privatized (*Addenbrookes Blues*, 1983 and *Corny Exchanges*, 1984), to intimate performances explor-

8 Ibid.

9 Sarah Ann Standing observes that ecoactions integrate the performative and the real in a matter similar to street performance. She refers to Jan Cohen-Cruz who has suggested a street performance can create a bridge between imaginary and real actions, often facilitated by taking place at the very sites that the performance makers want transformed. Standing 2012, 154.

ing notions of personal locatedness, responsibility and belonging (*Transformation*, 1986/7 and *Homeland*, 1993). Jane Trowell has described the method: “It’s part debate through the arts, part political agitation, part very personal, which I found interesting because a lot of activism in the 1980s was about mass culture. There was a fusion between personal issues and political issues that I admired.”¹⁰

To remind, to remember and to imagine

Memory is profoundly political. (JAMES MARRIOTT)

There is a lot of “art with agenda”, but sometimes it may turn against itself. In his dissertation *Näkyvä pimeys* [Visible Darkness] artist Teemu Mäki criticizes engaged art, which is too obvious and lazy in its statements and solutions. When an artwork reminds about an issue, which is already well remembered, this sign of remembering might become a means of not attacking the actual problem. To highlight an already familiar problem arouses a liberating feeling of performing one’s duty of awareness and setting out to solve the problem. Eventually, the experience of art can be quite safe, it does not require anything from the audience, no formation of opinion, no actual choice-making. Mäki claims that in this case the real function of a work is merely to flatter both the artist and the public, to remind them how aware and congenial they already are, instead of tackling real political issues. Yet, he continues, an artwork does not necessarily get any better or more “influential” if it is brought among dissidents.¹¹ Too easy artistic “solutions” for social issues can become a stumbling block for art that regards itself

10 Cohn 2003.

11 Mäki 2005, 193.

political. Another activist art group, Austrian Wochenklausur, has disparaged effortless artistic strategies:

Art must devote itself to developing very concrete strategies for effecting change. Wishing patients in hospitals a quick recovery by putting artistic decoration on the walls, reading Austrian literature aloud to asylum seekers, or having Mother Courage appear on stage dressed in a costume as Kosovo Albanian, are nothing more than easy absolutions for a guilty conscience.¹²

Sometimes there may be a reason precisely to remember or not to forget, and to make this the point of activism. Platform has explored the politics of remembering in its projects *Still Waters* and *Remember Saro-Wiwa*. Activist art has often been regarded as an attempt to re-define politics or to create alternative political ideas. Nevertheless, this does not happen in a void, but by understanding history. Platform has joined those who criticize capitalism for its aim to destroy history, to produce oblivion, to cut every link with the past and to orientate all effort and imagination to endless future expectations. Many anthropogenic environmental changes have become normal and a "natural state" when nobody remembers or cares anymore, what was before them.¹³ Therefore, it is better that people forget the exploitation of natural habitats by global corporations and do not find it relevant to her/his own experience of existence.

12 Wochenklausur 2011, 65.

13 Willamo 2009, 135.

It was precisely this change in one's experience of existence, which *Still Waters* was ultimately about. Dan Gretton has described the significance of the performance/project:

It's bringing the rivers back on people's tongues and in people's imaginations. The idea of walking down a street that is not a street but a river and in the end, will be a river again, that's an amazing sense. Those rivers are still alive. They've been temporarily underground, but you'll never get rid of a river. Maybe all political change is, after all, an accumulation of thousands of stories being told to one another, people having conversations and telling each other stories, which form a desire, which leads to a change.¹⁴

Professor Yrjö Haila has written about the importance of *historical imagination* to understand the relation between past and future. According to Haila, the course of events has always many options, but not whatever options. Since the future is constructed of the materials produced by the past, historical imagination is the most important resource of future oriented consideration. In this consideration, it is crucial to tell apart the constructive and the devastating progressions, which are both given a chance or potentiality by the present. Haila writes that the historical imagination has two touchstones: (1) to detect, how the past is present here and now; (2) to separate the constructive and the devastating forces included in the present from each other.¹⁵ In order to influence the course of events we need to know how the current situation has been formed

14 Cohn 2003.

15 Haila 2004, 186–188.

by various forces in the past. The juxtaposition of the current “given” with its pre-history aims at opening the imagination to its future.

Moreover, cultural geographer Doreen Massey calls our convention to understand our geographical world and the present our “geographical imagination”.¹⁶ Related to this, according to professor Sirpa Tani our mental landscape often consists both of sensed and metaphorical landscapes. An experience based on sensual perceptions stresses the subjectivity and a metaphorical landscape emphasizes shared meanings in the cultural context. Our notion of the world is often so strongly based on images created by others, that we do not necessarily notice the lack of our own immediate experiences.¹⁷

Ecologist Ilkka Hanski dedicates in his publication on natural sciences *Kutistuva maailma* [Shrinking World] a whole chapter to his concern for the change of people’s mental landscape:

... our notion of habitats may differ enormously from what really exists in nature. Our images of habitats have great significance, since the crucial politics related to the future of real habitats is constructed on them. People’s notions of the environment may become distorted or habitats may be forgotten for many reasons. Then there is a risk that they disappear in reality, too.¹⁸

16 Massey 2008, 102.

17 Tani 1997.

18 Hanski 2007, 255.

How to perform the historical, geographical, or ecological imagination, or how to allure them back and light them in people's minds? This is what Platform explored in its project *Still Waters*.

Still Waters – Re-imagining London Rivers (1992)

One day, Dan very cleverly showed me a book cover of a beautiful painting of the meeting of two rivers in a city. He asked me where I thought it was, and I guessed places – Venice, Bruges – which were all wrong. Then he told me it was London three hundred years ago, and I was in; I was hooked. (JANE TROWELL)¹⁹

The project *Still Waters* was about four sets of public events and artworks in May 1992 on four of inner London's tributaries to the Thames, aiming at "re-imagining London's Thames Valley such that the revival of its rivers becomes inevitable".

The project context goes back in the environmental technological history of London as far as the Middle Ages. Originally, Greater London runs with over 56 streams and rivers which flow into the Thames. By the 9th century, the Walbrook stream – around which the Romans built Londinium – was already silted up and buried. By the 1850s, most of the other central London rivers had become dangerously polluted through centuries of being used to dump human and industrial waste, as well as from run-off from the many overflowing cesspits which leaked into the watercourses. Political pressure pushed MPs into doing something, and, they opted for

19 Cohn 2003.

endorsing the water-born solution to sewage, rather than the dry solution, which would turn human waste into compost. Therefore, by the 1860s, central London's great rivers were bricked over and made part of the sewage and drainage system for London with only three rivers surfacing above ground. Today the system still uses drinkable water to push the effluent.²⁰ The argument of *Still Waters* was that to sewer freshwater streams was a huge techno-optimistic mistake, which led to so much long-term damage.

Still Waters aimed to reclaim London's rivers from their invisible, mostly sewered state, and began action to resurrect them. The work was about the river's loss of voice and the analogy with the human voice, the idea of dysphonics.²¹ Thinking ecologically and about power and privilege, Platform asked "What kind of city buries its rivers?" and "What kind of city digs them up?"

*Could it be possible to feel the same intensity of love for a tree
or a river as you do for a lover?*

The project took place along the rivers Fleet, Walbrook and Effra, which are currently buried, and Lower Wandle, which is open but degraded.

The Fleet was instrumental in shaping London, yet has declined over the centuries from river to drain. A participatory performance

20 <http://platformlondon.org/2012/05/01/twenty-years-ago-today-still-waters-day-1/>

21 Platform became interested in relations of memory and myths, also in popular culture. Books like Ivan Illich's *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* and Gaston Bachelard's *Water and Dreams* helped to position the project in terms of re-engaging forgotten, disused or unheard democratic voices. Illich wrote about the Greek muses and their mother, Mnemosyne, who we only know now through the word mnemonic. She was the goddess of memory, and it was to her well that people would go, seeking inspiration. (Cohn 2003.)

event *Listening to the Fleet* took place along the river between its source on Hampstead Heath and its mouth at Blackfriars. Using interviewing, performance, dowsing, and the inscription of clay tablets formed from London clay and fired in outdoor ovens, a writer and a teacher worked with passers-by and others to investigate whether there was a desire for the return of the Fleet. The project questioned the assumption that it is impossible to re-form the city and uncovered a great enthusiasm for the Fleet: people who did not previously know of it were invariably delighted by the knowledge, and nearly all discussions proved invigoration by the notion of its recovery.²²

The project named *The Power of the Wandle* contrasted the river's active past with its condition today. Although the Wandle played a formative role in the economic and spiritual life of the community for over 9000 years, it had become devalued and disrespected by excessive water extraction for industry, road run-off and its use as a dump. While it had been bravely fought for by many community interest groups, the Wandle was still threatened by larger forces. An economist and a sculptor focused on the three and a half miles of the river valley. The Wandle event included public meetings, walks, a night-time performance and animated debate about the river, especially in terms of its motive water power which had been used for centuries to operate the many water mills along its course.

In the public event *Swimming in the Walbrook* a clinical psychologist and an artist presented the river as a kind of shed with an installation. It compared persons who suffered trauma and loss of voice with the forgotten river, which was central to the inhabitants

22 <http://old.platformlondon.org/otherprojects.asp>

in former times but which today is confined in a storm drain under the street. According to the working group, what has been done to the Walbrook illustrates the dysfunction between the city and the natural world, perhaps specifically The City of the Square Mile (financial district; the river goes under the Bank of England) and the natural world. *Swimming in the Walbrook* consisted of actions, events, rituals and a performance that marked the river's path through London's financial quarter, and suggested another reality to the "common sense" of current business life.

*In our time democracy is about the power of voice. Today, a few scream in our ears, others barely whisper, some have fallen silent altogether. The more the word 'democracy' is spoken, the less it seems to mean. (MANIFESTO, 1993)*²³

The river Effra (the name probably derives from the Celtic "yfrid", meaning "torrent") now passes imperceptibly beneath the tarmac of South London. *Unearthing the Effra* consisted of a local campaign to dig up this river. "Effra Redevelopment Agency" was established as a convincing simulacrum of a "development agency" aesthetic, and its campaign headquarters was situated above Effra's banks at Herne Hill. Using advertising and marketing techniques that imitate corporate aesthetics and strategies, an artist and a publicist worked with members of the Effra valley "community" to transform this utopian concept into a possibility. To "hear the word Effra on hundreds of people's lips, on radio programmes, to see it on billboards and in newspapers began the journey to the Effra's revival".²⁴ To

23 <http://platformlondon.org/2013/06/15/30-years-old-today/>

24 <http://old.platformlondon.org/otherprojects.asp>

Platform's surprise, the simulacrum was so effective, that in 1998 a civic movement "Effra Liberation Front" surfaced.

The major practical impact of *Still Waters* was that it led on to Platform's art-ecology-energy projects *Merton Island* and *Delta*, which produced locally sourced renewable power from the river Wandle. These in turn led to the founding of a new charity Renewable Energy in the Urban Environment. By researching the rivers and talking to dozens of people across London for that month, Platform gained a particular analysis of the ecological and democratic impacts of rapid growth of an industrial, imperial metropolis like London. The project also marked a moment where Platform realized the activist work might be fundable, since *Still Waters* was a recipient of the British Arts Council's new collaborative funds, which, for the first time, supported work that brought artists together with people from other disciplines or expertise outside the arts.²⁵

It's the notion that something is really there beyond just a site visit. Something about it is much greater than you: it's been there longer than you, it'll be here long after you, it's seen everything at least five times, especially in a small packed country like England. (JANE TROWELL)

25 *Still Waters* was given a Time Out Award in 1992, and achieved major press coverage in news, environmental and arts media for its innovative approaches. For many years, Platform received a large number of national and international requests across different sectors to run workshops, collaborate, talk, or write about the issues. They were also frequently asked to meet with campaigners and engineers who were "daylighting" buried rivers.

Remember Saro-Wiwa

Remember Saro-Wiwa was a public art project initiated after the execution of Nigerian writer-activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight Ogoni-colleagues by the Nigerian military in November 1995.²⁶ The project brought together human rights, environmentalism, activism and arts to create a "living memorial" to keep alive the issues that Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni people fought and died for. Since the situation in the Delta has become worse in the beginning of 21st century, Platform started the fight against the oblivion of the issue. In 2004, Platform gathered a diverse coalition of organisations and individuals²⁷, and this gathering launched *Remember Saro-Wiwa*. By using art and activism, the coalition aims to raise awareness and campaign for environmental and social justice in the Niger Delta. The oil corporations do not wish the public to remember the Saro-Wiwa issue, but the debate to "move on". The corporate research that Platform has been doing, shows the ways that history is simply deleted by corporations which do not want you to understand the past. These corporate people do not even want to have a conversation about it.

The Living Memorial toured nine sites over two years after its launch. Alongside the Living Memorial a two-year interactive programme animated the whole process through talks, workshops,

26 Platform has discussed the concept of "desk killers" for example in the project *killing us softly*. It has been claimed that the Ogoni execution was arguably instigated by the "desk killers" of Shell Oil.

27 Partner organisations were: African Writers Abroad, Amnesty International, Christian Aid, Diversity Art Forum, English PEN, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace UK, Human Rights Watch, Green Party UK, Africa Beyond, Arts Council England, Index on Censorship, Mayor of London, Minorities of Europe, People and Planet, Anita & Gordon Roddick, South Bank Centre, SpinWatch, Stakeholder Democracy Network.

publications, and the website, which is still available. If we think in terms of live art, and understand liveness in a broader sense, we can easily regard the living memory, and the story of Saro-Wiwa as “living organisms” when they are maintained “alive” by telling and spreading them onwards. As it is said, a person does not die until the last memory of her/him is forgotten, although the body was buried and decayed hundreds of years ago.

In relation with the project Platform people have considered whether it actually has any influence; how it manifests itself in London, and how in the daily life of Delta-Nigerians? Jane Trowell has pondered: “A project of this kind is complex. It begs many questions about political and artistic effectiveness. Why public art? Why in London? How will people in the Delta benefit?”²⁸ Ken Wiwa Jr reminds about the monuments in the history of globalization:

In our interconnected and economically globalized world there should be nothing unusual about putting up a memorial to an African in the streets of London. After all, the cultural landscape is a reflection of the economic terrain. But historically, memorials and statues don’t speak the language of cultural justice – they inscribe the narrative of colonialism on our visual world... In Africa many memorials still stand to the colonisers, the men (and it is usually men) who forcibly opened up the continent for the business of the empire. The very names of many of our countries and cities, of Africa’s rivers and waterfalls ring with their memory.²⁹

28 Trowell 2006, 96.

29 Trowell 2006, 99.

Bringing the remote close, the absent to the present, and performing the distant is, however, becoming more and more important in activist art that deals with global issues. As researchers Antti Salminen and Tere Vadén debate in their recently published book *Energia ja kokemus* [Energy and Experience], especially oil is a material of alienation. Fossil fuels link the familiar and near to something unknown, nameless, perhaps terrifying. For example, our daily plastic goods are tied with a cord to environmental devastation and oppression of remote oil wells.³⁰ Long umbilical cords enable such great distances and high hierarchies that the nearby seems not to relate to the faraway, although it is built on it. When the so called feedback mechanisms are long enough, they are no longer recognized or remembered. Thus, Salminen and Vadén have named fossil fuels and especially oil as producers of oblivion: "By enabling wintry indoor sports and downhill skiing centres in the desert, energy makes at the same time the oblivion of almost any connection or feedback mechanism possible."³¹

In 1995 the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and a fight, which raged over the disposal of Brent Spar, Shell's North Sea oil storage rig, turned Platform's focus onto the human rights and environmental impact of oil companies, in particular BP and Shell. Today they continue to maintain this thematic focus. In recent years Platform has brought its claws into the relations of art and oil money, too, showing how certain art institutions are sponsored by oil companies, how art is used for green washing and how this funding has

30 The oil that is imported to Finland has its wells and sources in Siberia, where Finnic and other peoples are on the way of the oil fields and industry.

31 Salminen & Vadén 2013, 72.

influenced artists' moral when they defend the financing and even the corporations.³²

Values embodied and engaged

Paradoxically, many people who hold pro-environmental values do not act accordingly, and there is an increasingly urgent need for an insight into how to transform those values into action, and how to perform those values in everyday behaviors. More paradoxically, if art that is aware and educative may turn a viewer even more passive (as Teemu Mäki criticized), how is it possible to promote “practice-based ethics”, or “values-in-action” in aesthetics? Are there other means for activist art than shock and provocation?

First, we can discuss the methods and conditions of artistic practise. Democratic decision-making and progress-by-discussion, ethical funding and cooperation of the work/group/institution are remarkable steps from words to action. Methods may also be sustainable, non-violent (also interspecies), uncompromising to their

32 *Not if but when – Culture beyond oil* was a symposium, and later a booklet, which gathered various collaborators to discuss the issue of art and oil. Platform has also hosted a walking tour discussion (2009) which examined art institutions' hidden investment in climate change such as sponsorship and pension funds, and also considered low carbon best organisational practice regarding the transportation of artists, curators and artefacts.

“Our society teems with individuals and organisations who use their energy and imagination to find ways that we might live that are not built on the destruction of the atmosphere, fragile ecologies and the livelihoods of others. The arts are a crucible of social imagination and they should support these endeavours, or at the very least not undermine them. But today the visitor to the gallery, museum, theatre or opera house is surrounded by the names of BP, Shell and other oil companies, and every logo announces that these corporations are powerful, inevitable and benign.”

<http://platformlondon.org/2011/11/27/read-online-now-not-if-but-when-culture-beyond-oil/>

critical content etc. This may cause new challenges to artists who wish to make an international career (flying), to receive corporate funding or to use, for example, a lot of energy or materials in their works. (Although the highest CO₂ emissions are caused by big art houses and the transportation of viewers.)

One interesting aspect here, which comes from Platform, too, is long-term commitment. Productions are not just short flutters and displays, but consist of patient work and development of themes and collaborations. This long-term commitment goes together with environmental ethics, which in my opinion is about (amongst other things) understanding continuums, comprehensive systems and slow changes. Exploration of an ancient river ecosystem, an oil-based city or one's family history intertwined with energy consumption are all examples of performances which try to nudge the participants to understand our interconnectedness with natural and economic history and the present. To make them more touching, these Platform projects have also involved a personal, emotional and poetic level. Nowadays, however, locations outside the institutions or long-term follow-up may become excluded from visits, awareness and art history.

As for art, there is never a guarantee of any spiritual change in a viewer (or even a doer). Like all "civilized education", this kind of activist art has to leave the possible change of everyday behaviour to one's own responsibility. A privileged Western person has through her/his life a notable amount of experience and knowledge: travels, artworks, information... How could a single art experience change one's values or behaviour permanently? An individual consists of many contradictory wishes and values. It seems that artists, activists, humanists etc. truly believe in the human potential to change.

Personally, my perspective was changed in the beginning of 1990's during the "forest fights" for old-growth forests in Finland.

Those fights were protests and confrontations of resistance and civil disobedience performed by activists, civilians, authorities and media. My whole childhood environment was in favour of forestry; still these protests changed something in me, against the values of my community. What triggered the change in my mindset; appealing demonstrations and the spirit of “revolution”? Well reasoned arguments? Or a sudden emotional experience that (threatened) old-growth forests are sites of myths and spirits, both my cultural heritage and spiritual health. I believe it was the combined overall impact of all of them.

Performance researcher Meg O’Shea has studied the embodiment of values in a performance project, which aimed to experiment with a sustainable way of life both on stage and off-stage. She reminds that “the body is our first mode of engagement with the world, yet studies of behavior change for sustainable future center almost exclusively on economic and sociopsychological motivations for change, and disregard the influence of embodied knowledge”.³³

Therefore, according to O’Shea’s notion, artistic performances which offer the participator a bodily lived experience (like a walking-discussion), or a hands-on exploration of a location or which practice sustainable life in a real situation, *may* imprint a different kind of a behavioral memory trace than just an experience of watching an art object.

The contemporary situation of over-consumption is not necessarily the outcome of mere contemplation, but a result of everyday bodily conveniences (which pass the well-meaning values and thoughts). Therefore, it may be difficult to promote a true change

33 O’Shea 2012, 138.

through cognitive education only. As university lecturer Risto Willamo has examined, in his study of environmental protection, the lack of bodily approach in the environmental debate may easily lead to a narrow understanding of our relation to nature, and to a (false) dominance of the cognitive aspect of it. A human being becomes only “a bunch of thoughts without intestines and lungs”. It also emphasizes an idea that a nature conservationist is an outsider from nature. Thus, when talking about human-nature-relationships, the functional and biological dimensions must be included.³⁴

According to O’Shea’s case study, it was easier to model sustainability in a drama performance than to practice it in a theatre group’s everyday actions off-stage. Nevertheless, she reminds that an enduring and substantial change is built slowly; individual change of behaviour should be complemented by working toward changing collective patterns of behaviour (social practices) and the social and political structures that support them. O’Shea stresses the negotiation aspect of sustainability; sustainable goals will be achieved only from an ongoing conversation that connects multiple voices and experiences. Rehearsing conversation skills is also a practice for the future, when people may face great challenges regarding their way of living. Drawing sustainability discourse into the sensuous moments of daily life has the potential to fill the gap between values and actions. O’Shea underlines that

including an embodied performative element in dialogic processes for public engagement with sustainability can establish a platform for the performance of the values and

34 Willamo 2009, 146–147.

beliefs that support the sustainability transition, and provide an opportunity for exploring the conflicts, losses, and benefits of a sustainable future.³⁵

Is this all more education than art and activism? Do we need another border definition? Platform is also an educational work organization. They call it “engaged pedagogy”, which is seen as a kind of activism. Dan Gretton opines that pedagogy is a rather heavy word with negative connotations in our culture, but it also has a radical history.³⁶ Risto Willamo cautions not to separate “understanding-related” educational aspects too much from “solving-related” political aspects, since neither of them alone can offer a sufficient basis for dealing with environmental issues. He writes that in education (and thinking) one must stress both the political side and the individual’s influence on problems, and political activity needs to be seen as a constant learning process.³⁷

Values localized and performed

According to James Marriott the (student) political movement of the early 1980’s, when Platform took its first steps, tended to focus on the issues of “elsewhere.” Instead, the members of Platform were interested from the very beginning in what is happening “*right here* on this street, in our place”. They wanted to create works that

35 O’Shea 2012, 145.

36 I have noticed that environmental live-art performances may have very much in common with environmental education; some artworks have direct similarities with environmental education exercises. But when I have discussed this with artists, they don’t seem to be happy if the artwork is paralleled to education, as if this notion made the work “smaller”.

37 Willamo 2009, 286.

were involved in the immediate (in relation to the historical, even ancient), and in the local, in the sense of place; and then to observe wider (both in space and time) issues through them. Marriott debates that only then, from a certain place can you involve yourself in change:³⁸

When we stand up and talk about what we do, we say that we do work in our own home, which is London — the tidal Thames ground — and that's got something to do with time. We're saying, "okay, let's look at this place; let's think about this place through time vertically. At one point, this place, this location right here underneath where this carpet is, existed for thousands of years before human beings set foot on it. It has the point at which it became settled, it has the point at which it was an island with a Norse name, Beormond's Ev (today Bermondsey, an area of south London), it has the point where the first plow covered it. Layer upon layer upon layer existing on this point, and we need to understand that and draw that, like a well, into our understanding, in order to understand what the hell the future is about." That, I think, is incredibly rich. What we're going to do is work in this place over a long period of time to try to find new ways of making work about this; to reinvigorate people about this, to re-imagine this place over a long period of time.³⁹

38 Cohn 2003.

39 Ibid.

Grant H. Kester has observed how an activist aesthetic based on localism and performativity can play a direct role in “project(ing) new definitions of social reality” and new understandings of what is possible and just.⁴⁰ Also sociologist Pertti Lappalainen outlines that civic activism in general springs from time and site specific issues; problems that are faced in everyday life are the most common motivator of activism. It is essential that the *definition* of issues happens in a concrete historical situation which makes the problems time- and place-specific. The definition of problems is a crucial issue in environmental politics; various interest groups may regard the problems differently.⁴¹ According to Kester, locality-based groups have developed a deep understanding of the complex interrelationships of economic and political power in the city or other region. Sometimes their long commitment to the area has also allowed them to develop their own community, consisting of other artists, political activists, neighbours, neighbourhood organizers, sociologists and other academics concerned with the region. Thus, they are able to turn to this network for support, collaborative assistance, political and cultural information, and as a bridge to new communities.⁴² Place has been a key aspect of radical ecoactivist performance aesthetics since, after all, places and their ecological communities (both human and non-human) are the intended beneficiaries of the process.

Kester continues arguing that the current (he wrote in 1998) political moment demands an activist aesthetic based on *performa-*

40 Kester 1998, 16.

41 Lappalainen.

42 Kester 1998, 16.

tivity and localism, rather than on the immanence and universality of traditional aesthetics.

Performativity is a concept that has emerged in a number of areas in recent cultural criticism to describe a practice that is adaptive and improvisational rather than originary and fixed. Within this outlook the work of art is less discrete object than it is a process of dialogue, exchange, and even collaboration that responds to the changing conditions and needs of both viewer and maker. Instead of an aesthetic centered on a “paradigm of consciousness” (the consciousness of the expressive artistic subject), an activist art is premised on what Habermas has defined as an intersubjective “communicative action”.⁴³

Artists recognize that the process of shared dialogue can proceed most effectively if they function not as privileged outsiders, but as participants who are intimately involved in the concerns of the community with which they work. This “community” may be defined by such factors as geographic location, ecosystem/habitat community, commitment to a specific political issue or movement, or identity based on race, gender, sexuality or class. In some of the most effective activist projects, Kester says, the tacticality allowed by performativity and localism is combined with systematic comprehension and moral vision.⁴⁴ Precisely as Kester has described the mechanisms of “effectiveness” in activist art practice, Platform has aimed at healing the division of creative artist from passive

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

audience, and the group has combined tactical, political, historical and performative aspects of place to promote the experience of meaningful participation and community.

Meet the speed of the city with slowness

Meet the concrete of the city with nature

*Meet the anonymity of the city with intimacy*⁴⁵

A performance of fossil culture

But how could we be were it not for this planet that provided our very shape? Two conditions – gravity and a livable temperature range between freezing and boiling – have given us fluids and flesh. The trees we climb and the ground we walk on have given us five fingers and toes. The “place” gave us far-seeing eyes; the streams and breezes gave us versatile tongues and whorly ears. The land gave us a stride, and the lake a dive. The amazement gave us our kind of mind. (GARY SNYDER)⁴⁶

But what did oil give us?

One may like to think that the modern culture is based on imagination and other capacities of the human intelligence solely. Yet, according to natural laws these are enabled by energy and matter; thus, the more energy, the more – what? If we restore the heyday that began from the industrial revolution to its material foundation, we come back to fossil fuels. Their significance in making things

45 Platform came up with three little lines which they describe their work in the City of London (the financial district of London).

46 Snyder 1990.

possible is undeniable. Their energy content – and therefore “potential” – is massive.

According to a rather poetic statement the expressions and activities of our contemporary culture are constructed on primeval bodies and ancient sunlight.⁴⁷ It takes millions of years to form fossil hydrocarbons, thus, if there exists suitable circumstances for emergence, storage and transformation of biomass, it is possible to get another treasury of carbon, oil and natural gas.

Understanding of ecological relations and dependencies is essential especially in the age of urbanization. They become easily invisible or blurred in metropolises, where the terms of one’s personal ecology (energy, food, municipal infrastructure) have long cords and people who migrate may have a thin relationship with the place and its time-space layers. Platform became interested in these hidden hands that maintain and direct the city of London and our lifestyle in general, and the group focused their activities especially on oil from the end of the 1990’s on. Since the oil industry and the whole oil-dependent economy are global, amorphous webs, Platform decided to grasp the issue from the perspective of a local experience.

Localized thinking, regional vigilance and demarcation of the complex of life are antidotes to the alienating “naphtic” culture, which also Antti Salminen and Tere Vadén propose. I find the artis-

47 Petroleum and natural gas are formed by the anaerobic decomposition of remains of organisms including plankton that settled to the sea (or lake) bottom in large quantities, millions of years ago. Over geological time, this organic matter, mixed with mud, got buried under heavy layers of sediment. The conditions of heat and pressure caused the organic matter to chemically alter, first into kerogen, and then with more heat into liquid and gaseous hydrocarbons. Terrestrial plants tend to form coal and methane. Many of the coalfields date to the Carboniferous period of Earth’s history.

tic-activist practice of Platform pretty much in line with Salminen and Vadén's proposals. One kind of an oil experience is created in a cluster of works named *Gog & Magog*⁴⁸, which focused on the influence of oil in London. The project encouraged people to take a second look at the familiar architecture of the City of London, using the lens of the story of oil; how are the lives and activities of Londoners, cultural landmarks etc. interwoven with oil giants like BP and Shell. This economic-cultural inter-connectivity was central to the project.

Gog & Magog was a performative walking and discussion piece; the aim in this and in other critical walks by Platform was to utilize walking as a means by which other people can also embody the critical process.⁴⁹ Using visual aids of their own as well as the landmarks related to oil in London, artists James Marriott and Ben Diss brought to life the epic narrative of natural resources in the market place and within culture more broadly. The participants tracked the stories behind the current workings of the global oil and gas business to the offices of banks, the headquarters of advertising agencies, and the departments in Whitehall – learning through stories and music how London plays its key role in the global fossil fuel industry.⁵⁰ James Marriott has described the event:

48 According to the tradition, the giants Gog and Magog are guardians of the City of London, and images of them have been carried in the Lord Mayor's Show since the days of King Henry V

49 Platform has long used the walk as an important form of work in public space and varied the concept. They have explored walking as a research tool, as a ritual, as performance, as intervention, as a political tool, and as a tool for sharing insights and information. Walks have been devised by artists, historians, community activists, psychologists, business people and environmentalists in collaboration, and as solo ventures. The latest performance walk, titled *The Oil City*, premiered in June 2013.

50 <http://old.platformlondon.org/portfolio/#item>

One of the ways in which the work manifests itself is through a day-long event. People arrive here at ten o'clock in the morning. They view a presentation that explores the various impacts of BP and Shell on ecology, democracy, and justice. We also explore the companies' structures, and point out how the members of the audience are already members of the structure, even though they may not be part of BP and Shell. Then we go out into the city and walk to buildings for three hours. Through that process, they physically get to see how all these different organizations fit together. Through the traffic and the heat on the soles of their feet, they embody the nature of corporate reality, and I think that's incredibly important.⁵¹

The plot, the characters and suspects were provided by the so-called Carbon Web⁵². *Gog & Magog* dodged, however, to tell the audience a black and white tale or a one-eyed truth, choosing instead to engage audiences in the complexity of a world driven by oil. Walking-discussions encouraged the participator to rely on him/herself, and to ask the difficult, conflicting questions. Along with walking, the storytelling aspect of *Gog & Magog* was a focal strategy. According to Marriott stories are an instrumental form of truth, a representation of truth, which enables one to cope with the world. But there are also power structures that are constantly trying to stop you from creating stories about them. *Gog & Magog* tried to

51 Cohn 2003.

52 "Carbon web" is the network of relationships between oil and gas companies and the government departments, regulators, cultural institutions, banks and other institutions that surround them. See: <http://platformlondon.org/about-us/platform-the-carbon-web/the-carbon-web-2/>

start an alternative storytelling movement; the several stories that were told in the performance could be told onwards by the participants. Furthermore, they lead the audience to imagine our cultural identity, social practices and city space without oil (in other words without all the activities it enables). Finally, it asked: What does the future landscape without oil look like? How do we adapt?

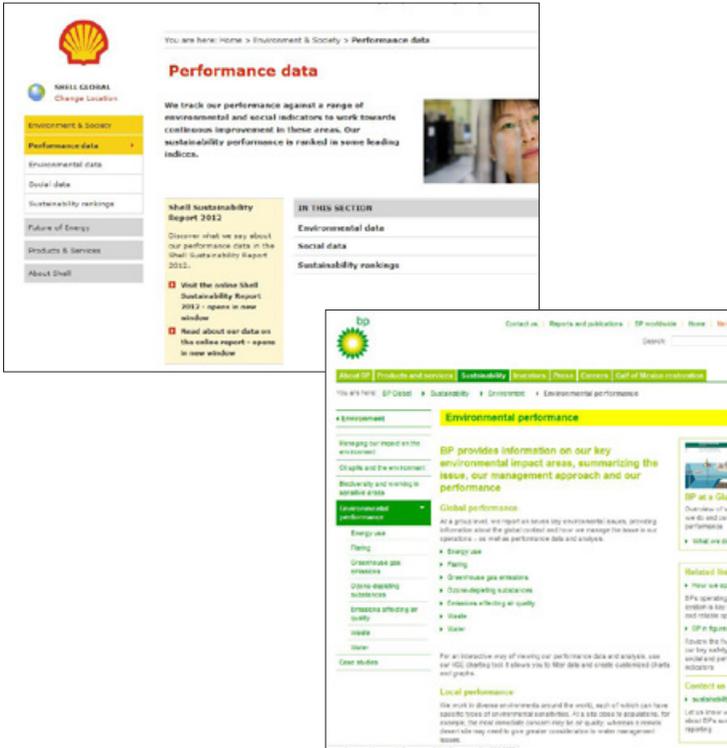
Salminen and Vadén write that the experience of oil is an experience of indifference: oil has made material contexts obscure and disappearing, which can be seen as the lack of an overall outlook, and as alienation. Salminen and Vadén criticize cultural studies and philosophers for ignoring the experience of oil as a research subject; materials and energy are regarded only as instruments, not as principle organizers of human communities and societies. They even claim that the separation of thoughts and materials has been done since it has been possible, due to the cheap energy available. Or perhaps it is too close and omni-present to be analyzed in a study. Risto Willamo has studied the human experience of environmental changes and problems (changes do not become problems *before people experience* them as problems), and suggests that people have difficulties to experience and understand energy because it is invisible and beyond our senses, until it “materializes” as smog, oil spills, etc. We know that energy emissions cause warming of the climate, but we still do not quite feel or sense it emotionally and corporeally, and not necessarily understand it conceptually either. Every single material particle and solid entity is only a temporarily appearing structure in a constantly changing flow of energy. Matter forms concrete structures and is thus probably easier to perceive than more the functionally appearing energy.⁵³

53 Willamo 2009, 226–228.

Climate-warming emissions are undetectable to our senses and therefore they do not lead to immediate emotions. *Gog & Magog* aimed to bring this Great Invisible to the sphere of "local sense", to connect it to familiar neighbourhoods and to an approachable walking trip. On the other hand it showed how the familiar and approachable is linked via oil to something obscure and distant. If our ability to feel empathy is built on closeness, intimacy and identification, how can issues related to Nigeria or the Arctic be made to feel close in London or in Helsinki?

Like many of Platform's projects, *Gog & Magog* was a multi-project, too. It included the above-mentioned guided performance walks across London, a web-based film *Burning Capital*, and an operatic audio tour titled *And While London Burns*. The score of this walking audio adventure evokes London's fiery past, oil-drenched present and a dark unknowable future through the eyes of a tormented financial worker obsessed by the collapse of civilisations.⁵⁴

54 <http://andwhilelondonburns.com/>



Corporate environmental performances

The power of the personal

Platform’s walking performances have been popular, but not everyone wants to experience “holistic embodiment of values” through a participatory performance. One could consider, whether the most influential performative action of sustainability happens, not in art or education context, but in the way individual (sustainable) activist identities are performed. As activist Leo Stranius has stated, he tries to speak first of all for influencing the societal structure: leg-

isolation, taxation, supports and payments that affect the ecological choices of individuals. Still, he continues, people and media are mostly and immensely interested in his individual choices: veganism, winter-cycling, cold showers and the many details and curiosities of his “eco-freak-life”.⁵⁵ In the media, activists easily become characters and identities become products.

Another kind of performance of “sculpting one’s societal identity” was published in Helsingin Sanomat and gained a lot of Facebook publicity.⁵⁶ A youngish economist had changed his values, practices and lifestyle, and shared his story with the readers. The article was widely shared in social media. In the interview the man recounted his former life as a modern economist with an addiction to electronics and stock exchange reviews (amongst other contemporary fetishes). Then he just got bored with it (there must have been some deeper enlightenment, too), and found a new direction from sustainable thinking, and in interdisciplinary art & research communities. Elements of his new identity performance were short visits in the forest - and the spiritual dimension of it - dumpster diving and organic food, more involvement in the art world, and a critical study of economy. He wore a green parka coat (very fashionable in 2013), and he was photoportrayed in a forest environment. He mentioned that he still lives in Punavuori, downtown of Helsinki. Certain practices and choices were carefully stressed. Related to this, I have heard more than one comment, that the poorish and feisty image of a traditional (?) activist is not easy to identify with. As if one should don one of the already existing “activist identities” before being able to get up to any civic activism?

55 Stranius 2013.

56 Pystynen 2013.

I have participated in forest actions, and according to them it seems that bodily involvement is still a rather efficient method. Media interest is not self-evident, it depends on many factors, but on a local level, in the actual situation, my (and other demonstrators') bodily presence causes tension; a person brings herself to the spot, puts herself at risk, makes herself a (very much underlined) societal/political body that installs itself to resist (the loggings), and to defend beetles and natural processes, which are found suspicious. Although the novelty value of logging demonstrations was lost already in the 1990's, some of the aura and effect of bodily "troubling" seems to remain, if not increase in the age of online prosence, when people appear to be most socially present and politically active in the internet.

On location -protests can be identified and bodily conceived on the "home ground", too, although they are also very extreme (out of the ordinary) experiences for an average human in a comfort seeking society. One purpose is to put up a situation where we can witness the "small" and vulnerable human bodies resisting big organizations, whose bodily presence is expressed only by employed guards; CEOs and other managers meet society usually only through media. The fact that someone is still willing to drag her/his body to a political action, to "stand up", pro or against is rather impressive in a Western welfare society. According to public debate, these actions of civil disobedience are admired or passionately hated, regarded as a disturbance to "business as usual", "normality" and "the democratic law". Performative activism is often seen (at least in Finland) as making some kind of a fuss. People do not necessarily notice that they become tricked to talk and to take a stance on an issue, when they react to these spectacle protests.

Teemu Mäki argues that the definition and content of politics is further broadened if politics is seen as a space where a subject

moulds his/herself, not only the environment or his/her evaluations regarding the future. A change in an individual's experience of existence is as actual a political change as is a change in governmental foreign policy. Therefore we may separate two dimensions of politics: individual and societal. When we evaluate what is politically significant or meaningful, we should define if we are talking about significance relative to an individual or society.⁵⁷ The politics of personal choices, and bringing new phenomena, areas of life or actors into the sphere of politics may be one of the megatrends of the 21st century activist art.

Carbon Generations – one man's family and oil (1997–2001)

Platform utilized the power of the personal in an evolving performance series titled *Carbon Generations*, launched in 1997, which linked the individual to the general political by examining artist James Marriott's family history in the light of fossil energy consumption **and** the influence of his ancestors on the current climate crisis, and on future generations. The performance series was described more as a strategic tool for target audiences (connected to business and environment) than performances for the general public. Therefore the performances' strategies were "audience specific" and implemented as garden sites, installations, lectures, discussions and even as a four-course dinner-party.

Marriott described how his ancestors became "carbon addicts", which is also the story of many other families in the 1900's. Last century was a time when the individual choices of millions of people

57 Mäki 2005, 156–157.

began to influence the climate, when they first began to be defined as consumers. Belief in the virtue of human progress and eternal economic growth exploded after both world wars; the agenda of economic development was introduced and repeated as an unquestionable norm in political rhetoric. Marriott saw that it is crucial to understand, how we have come here; how the improvements in the standard of living during the 20th century have led to the current situation: “We’re always being told in environmental debates that we have to consider the impact of what we do today on generations yet to come, but if at the same time we don’t look at what past generations were doing to get us where we are today, we become lost.”⁵⁸

In 2011 professor, sociologist Elizabeth Shove visited a course, which I was participating in, at the School of Economics. Her research has been about how social practices change and about the implications of these dynamics for everyday life, energy demand and climate change. I became interested in her previous work, which explored aspects of consumption and changing conventions of comfort, cleanliness and convenience. Shove shows how the concepts and experience of these three c’s have been socially organized as the new normal during the last centuries.⁵⁹ Thus the future (present) challenge is how to make this “normal” exceptional again, or how to change the coordinates of “normal social practice”. I thought this is something which comes close to performance studies, too, although sometimes performance art practice seems to deal more with sublime human practices than with notions of bodily comfort based on heating, ventilation, hot water and other everyday comforts. These practices of consumption are repeating and representing

58 Meek 2000.

59 Shove 2003.

our modern identity and body. At the same time they may become pivotal matters to our whole species' corporal experience in future.

This came to my mind when reading Marriott's explorations of his ancestors' consumption; it was a parallel to Shove's research. Marriott describes the change in social practices from coal power to oil power, from trains to cars, from slow travelling to mass tourism, from a few manual domestic appliances to an endless craving for consumer goods. First coal and then oil have been doing the work, which was earlier done by human (and animal) bodies. The average oil consumption is nowadays two litres per person per day (six litres in Finland); one oil litre provides ten invisible "energy slaves" per day. Therefore, if you sharpen your senses and imagination, you can see those hard-working energy bodies in the background of every oil-related practice you perform. Oil was also a promise of freedom; when Marriott's great-aunt passed her driving test in 1925, the young woman's horizon broadened dramatically: "At every stage of her life, oil was one of the underpinnings of her freedom." Oil did not only produce some new experiences; the oil age changed the customs of experience itself. At the same time the total amount of carbon emissions of one family increased every decade due to new needs of consumption.

Marriott's generation (born in the 1960's) both takes all this (plus almost free flying trips abroad and a multitude of electronics) for granted and feels anxiety because of it. As an environmental activist, Marriott is trying to live a carbon-light life, yet he is encountering difficulties. Nevertheless, I find Marriott's autobiographical work that links family history and energy revolution as quite an exceptional act in 1997, when the "21st century" climate and energy debate was not yet here. Nor were there books and films about how individuals experiment with "no-impact" life publicly avail-

able. Through telling the story of one man's (white upper middle class male) family and the role oil played in its life, the performance aimed to make an emotional connection with the viewer on a subject, which might seem abstract and distant.

Living in a world of productivity means, on the experience level, being dependent on and part of complex systems without any actual sight to their totality or rationality. Even if engineers and maintainers at the energy company were aware of it, that knowledge is far from everyday experience. And if there is some experience, it is very different from that of cutting a tree, processing it into logs and heating a fireplace with them. Modern people understand poorly the ecological principles of their own life. When a person does not have to do much, or cannot do much her/himself to satisfy her/his biological basic needs, the most concrete part of one's relation to nature disappears out of sight, and the understanding of oneself as a biological organism may become blurred.⁶⁰ (It may be easier to feel or to perform a relationship to a tree or to a mammal, but not to energy, which is said to be our number one relation to nature, though not on the experience level.) Fossil energy breaks off the bonds of bodies and materials, as well as connections between places and times; over-generational meaningful living becomes forgotten.

Marriott's performance-work looks at his family's energy use over four actual and three future generations, inspired by a tradition among Iroquois American Indians that leaders have to consider the impact of decisions on seven generations. "The sixth generation begins in 2020, the seventh in 2050," Marriott said. "All predic-

60 Willamo 2009, 147-148.

tions suggest that it is the sixth generation that faces the largest challenges.”⁶¹

Climate change faces me with ‘tough decisions’. I would like to think in 7 generations. The dictionary defines a generation as 30 years, thus 7 generations is 210 years. But I would like to consider that my actions have an effect not only upon myself and the unborn - those generations that come after us - but also upon the dead, the generations that preceded me. So 7 generations: that’s my own generation, 3 before that, and 3 after. The period between 1870 and 2080, these are the ‘Carbon Generations’. (An extract from the performance Carbon Generations)⁶²

Provoking change in experience... from experience to action

A shared expression of feeling is the foundation of any change
(MANIFESTO, 1993)

Take a look at Platform’s (or any other NGO’s) Facebook news feed and get out of breath; it seems there is so much to do in order to save the world. Contemporary hardcore-activism has to be connected all around, to blog, to share, to be active in the social media, to network. In this way powerfully symbolic campaigns or small temporary interventions reverberate around the world and find sympathizers. The characteristic of activism is a bit anti-institution-

61 Meek 2000.

62 <http://old.platformlondon.org/carbongen.asp>

al; therefore activist art cannot stay waiting to be noticed by the art world (which is not even their main audience). When I read articles about activism and art, it seems that art researchers criticize spectacular campaigns and acts of reminding people as intellectually effortless, and then favour comprehensive-utopian-bodily-participatory hyper-activity with intellectually challenging strategies. Some sort of perspective fallacy may appear when renowned and frequently cited art writers focus only on “activist art” exhibited in museums and biennials and do not follow local, grassroot level activism. Sometimes activist artists have been accused of turning into institutionally leased producers of critical services.

On the other hand, there still are those views, too, that art and politics should stay separated. As Grant H. Kester writes, a traditional, formalist critical approach has made a clear separation between the artist as a private, expressive subject and the domain of social exchange and collective will-formation, in order to retain aesthetic’s moral superiority. According to this belief, if art moves from the sphere of “sublime self-reflexivity to direct involvement with the social or the political, its moral authority vanishes and it becomes instead a mundane extension of everyday culture”.⁶³ Sometimes art has been regarded less political since it is aesthetic

63 Kester notes similarities between this view of the aesthetic and Victorian models of femininity: “women possessed an inherent moral superiority that could be exercised only as long as they withdrew from the public world of work and politics and remained within the home. From this sanctuary they could maintain the uncontaminated purity of their moral power and thereby provide their husbands with the armor necessary to survive the temptations and challenges of the dirty and dangerous world beyond. Women gained their moral transcendence over men and the ‘real’ world of work precisely through their detachment from it. In the same way the aesthetic retains its moral transcendence by steadfastly refusing any direct engagement with the social world beyond the ‘domestic’ enclave of the gallery and the museums”. (Kester 1998, 8–9.)

and belongs inside the sphere of art (as if the opposite to reality), or its aesthetic purpose is undermined because it is performing a political function.

These old borderlines between art and political activism do not take into account that forming society - also with an agenda - can be viewed as an artistic practice; the scale of this practice may vary from everyday personal behaviour to large-scale societal structures.⁶⁴ As we have noticed in previous sections, by following Platform's activity, all kinds of means and strategies may be needed to influence different phases of a societal/environmental problem. The results are difficult to measure since the more permanently certain means change people's behaviour, the slower that change usually happens. A change of values and attitudes may take tens of years.

Teemu Mäki sees that art and philosophy usually change the experience⁶⁵ of existence rather than the behaviour and environment, or at least first the experience and only after that the behaviour.⁶⁶ The dependency on the experiential sphere and external events is always open, therefore its reformation and definition is always

64 Kester 1998, 14.

65 But what kind of artistic forms and means should be used to invite this potential to change the societal experience? Could for example the experience of colour perception change our ways to attitude to social life? Wochenklausur is skeptical: "For many decades it seemed that society actually could be manipulated through the alteration of visual surroundings and habits of seeing and hearing. This view still had its supporters as recently as the sixties... Looking back, the idea of 'altering social relationships by altering form' appears a little naïve. Of course attitudes, habits, thinking patterns, and value standards can be marginally influenced through forms. The whole of the advertising field is sustained by this thesis. But people's ideological principles, their world-views and values cannot really be changed through colors, sounds, and forms. Clothes, one could say, only make the man in romantic novels." (Wochenklausur 2011, 63.)

66 Mäki 2005, 203

under way.⁶⁷ As we have seen, there are still great gaps between experience, values and behaviour. Sometimes “action” may be delayed or even prevented by being caught in philosophical questioning. For example, which part of nature should be protected, and how, if the whole concept of nature is ambiguous and very culture-related? There is no ultimate truth in questions like this, thus, can we do anything without doing something “wrong”? How do I know what to do, when everything seems suspicious and potentially ridiculous after some decades? Should I just keep asking?

There is evidence of a relation between civic activism and shared *experience* of a problem, as sociologist Pertti Lappalainen observes. A process of politization may begin from a seemingly minor incident. It makes someone or some people act in a totally new manner, which in turn leads to unpredictable consequences. An important feature of practical experience is imbalance. This appears as a constant urge to change existing status quo into something more satisfying than the present. Thus there is always an ongoing battle between the status quo and other values. An experience is an especially powerful, unforgettable and meaningful state of mind, which has arisen as a result of acknowledgement. According to Lappalainen, civic activism as such is exceptional and thus stands out from routine behaviour and obeying cultural and political conventions. Therefore, experience is an active and constructive activity, where the environment invites the activist to action.⁶⁸

Why do art and activism then go together well? Pertti Lappalainen states that civic activism is exceptional and sticks out from routine behaviour and the following of cultural conventions. He

67 Mäki 2005, 157–158.

68 Lappalainen <http://kans.jyu.fi/sanasto/sanat-kansio/kansalaisaktivismi>.

refers to Hannah Arendt's point that activism is precisely the *action of beginning*, starting with the new, and setting an unparalleled process in motion. Lappalainen refers also to John Dewey, who has emphasized the importance of imagination and creative capacity, which may show new possibilities. Dewey recommends us to enjoy the state of uncertainty, and to ask constantly with a will.

*

Now in October 2013, there is finally a lot of public debate about the arctic oil drilling issue after the Greenpeace protest and the jailing of activists on the Russian oilrig on the Arctic Ocean. Already in September 2011 Platform blogged about the risks of the rig in "Prirazlomnaya: monstrous pioneer of Arctic drilling"⁶⁹, and during 2011-2013 they have published several research reports on the issue in cooperation with Greenpeace. They have attacked the corporate performances of Gazprom and Shell both with ridicule and factual strategies.

Have people's experience of the Arctic changed?

Do we ask where is this leading us?

What does it mean to think and *act* ecologically in the world today?

69 <http://platformlondon.org/2011/09/12/prirazlomnaya-arctic-oil-suspicion/>

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PART II Contributions to Lapsody

Susan Kozel: Somatic Materialism or “Is it possible to do a phenomenology of affect?”¹

Writing while standing on my head

I have reached the stage in writing this journal article where I want to throw out all the words. I am also about to give a presentation where I want to avoid all visuals. This is not to say that I dislike words or mistrust visuals. I love words, I relish reading and writing, and I delight in sensuous visual narratives. I swim in words and visuals, but right now they seem to follow patterns that are stifling.

Writing on phenomenology, affect, and somatics is tying me in knots. It is forcing parts of me to stay silent so that other parts may be noticed. It is asking me to do something radically different with words and with the flow of ideas, to invert or turn inside-out the story of what I am doing and why. It is not asking, it is demanding that I do something different. Yelling at me even, and doing what mules or small children do when you ignore them: stubbornly refusing to move. Just not doing what you want them to do. OK. So I stop. What now? “We’re going to be late you know.” “It seems you don’t care.” “Let’s hum a tune. Look around. Feel our feet. Sit on the ground. Stare at the sky. Get very wet in the rain until you are ready to move. Take a deep breath...”

1 This text was first published in *Site, Journal for Contemporary Art, Architecture, Cinema and Philosophy, Issue 33 on Senses*, ed. Sven-Olov Wallenstein, Stockholm: 2013, pp 153-167. The notation of the original is maintained here.

Perhaps I can write this standing on my head, or while I am shouting very loudly so that I cannot hear my usual narratives, concepts, or arguments. I want to write it from my peripheral vision. (I confess to have written the above paragraphs without my glasses, as a sort of intellectual protest against the usual structures of clarity, the visual blurriness letting my thoughts realign.)

I am aware that this sounds incredibly pretentious.

This writing conundrum is a direct result of an ongoing artistic research process into affect, dance, and mobile technologies in urban locations. The project is called *AffeXity*; it is a collaboration with screen dance artist Jeannette Ginslov and others.² We have set ourselves a challenge of creating short dance improvisations in urban locations that emerge from and reveal affective qualities. These are captured on video, edited, and then will be re-located using an Augmented Reality browser. The AR application running on mobile phones lets us locate the choreography in physical space using either GPS coordinates or small black and white ‘tags’ called QR codes or fiduciary markers. Once the choreography of a fragment of affect is pinned, or tagged, to a spot in a city it can then be visited by anyone who happens to have a phone running the application.³

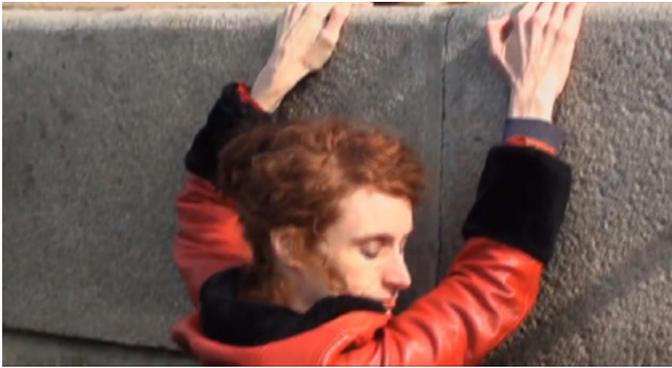
We began by improvising and recording movement sequences in Malmö and Copenhagen, but intend to expand these practices

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- 2 Collaborators for the first phase of artistic research include Jeannette Ginslov (screen choreography), Wubkje Kuindersma (dance), Niya Lulcheva (dance), Timo Engelhardt (media application programming), Maria Engberg and Jay David Bolter (technical consultation for Argon AR browser), Karolina Rosenquist (audience development). I provide the artistic direction and some dance improvisation. The project is based at the Medea Collaborative Media Initiative of Malmö Högskola in Malmö, Sweden.
 - 3 These early artistic research phases are discussed in Kozel, “AffeXity: Performing Affect,” *Fibreculture* issue 21 (2012). <http://twentyone.fibreculturejournal.org/>

of performing affect to other sites. The choreographies can live in alternate media layers of any city. Not exactly invisible, they exist in Alternate Realities (a better deployment of the letters A and R). Embedded in the city, they are at the same time highly intimate because they live in your city, on your phone, in your pocket. If the project progresses as we intend, the small video choreographies will be augmented not just by the technologies but by people as they add their own choreographies, or annotate and remix existing ones. The AR browsers we are currently exploring are open source and free, and are intended to be used as readily as one might send a text or consult a map application on a phone, but they are not yet as sophisticated in handling video as we would like.⁴ As usual, artistic research pushes at the edges of technological functionality.

The *AffeXity* project has the goal of sliding from somatic activity (tapping into affect in our bodies and in the city) to social activity (creating a social practice where people will want to add their expressive physical movement to the cities in the form of short videos in their cities). This journey from the somatic to the social flows in the opposite direction from most of our media which are filtered through social or public spheres and pound incessantly on our somatic bodies. In the process we will lend a small slice of social media a deeper degree of embodiment and expressivity, at the same time as opening out choreographic impulses into the city using mobile media technologies.

4 Currently we are exploring two augmented reality browsers, Argon (<http://argon.gatech.edu/>) and Aurasma (<http://www.aurasma.com/>)



From video of second phase of *AffeXity* development, images Jeannette Ginslov, Malmö 2012.

There are multiple ways to situate the somatic, and a resulting lack of clarity around it. This lack of clarity is not surprising since it generally refers to an immanent level of experience, deep within the body, and somewhat resistant to language. Historically, somatics encompasses a set of practices involving touch, internal imagery, or movement that originated in the early 20th century as a way to overcome physical trauma or to expand expressive range.⁵ Somatics attends to the internally perceived body rather than the externally perceived body. There are methodological implications. Observation is accomplished from the first person viewpoint, with importance placed on proprioception, kinaesthesia, and internal visualisation as modes of sensory apprehension. As a result, "a categorically different phenomenon is perceived: the human soma."⁶ An analytic stance notes that the somatic body is more than a "hunk of meat" mechanistically conceived and existing in opposition to the activities of the mind. The soma has intelligence, a particular logic, and myriad ways of holding and revealing memory.⁷ Further, an ontological layer to somatics is valuable for reminding us that focus is never constrained to the being of an isolated body, but reveals the "embodied-belonging-together-on-the-earth."⁸ A scientific perspective was provided by none other than Edmund Husserl in 1912. He established "somatology" as the science of the animate organism: "a material science to the extent that it investigates the material

5 Examples include Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais, Rosen Method, Roling, Body/Mind Centering, Ideokinesis. See Don Hanlon Johnson, ed. *Bone, Breath, and Gesture: Practices of Embodiment* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995).

6 Thomas Hanna, "What is somatics?" in Johnson (1995), 341.

7 Johnson 1995, xv.

8 Jeffrey Maitland, *Spacious Body: Explorations in Somatic Ontology* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995), xviii.

properties of the animate organism.”⁹ Contemporary approaches to the somatic combine the methodological, analytic, ontological, and scientific to differing degrees.

While devising *AffeXity* I realized I had to move differently as a dancer, to suspend my movement habits. I was dismayed, I will admit, by just how deeply my movement patterns, qualities, or improvisational gestures were engrained. We dancers like to think that when we improvise we are in a golden zone of free creative movement, but it is not so. There exist many techniques and strategies for helping dancers, musicians and theatre practitioners stay in the moment, or for short-circuiting predictability or staleness. In deciding to move from affect rather than from form, narrative, impulse or even kinaesthetic sense, I had to stop my self from moving over and over again. Start again, no, start again, no, start again...¹⁰ Patterns of writing and thought are also engrained. With this article, I had to start again, and again, and again, until I was writing (metaphorically) standing on my head.

You are witnessing in words some of what we experienced as artists in the early stages of this project: the complexity of an artistic research project that avoids formal, aesthetic, and even kinaesthetic starting points in an attempt to work directly from affect. A phenomenology of affect is necessary to better understand the performance of affect, but first it must be argued that it is even possible to do a phenomenology of affect. Then some of the wider political or philosophical motivation for doing so can be unfolded,

9 Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Foundations of the Sciences, Third Book, Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, translated by Ted E. Klein and William E. Pohl (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980), 7.

10 Phenomenological descriptions of the processes of dance improvisation, video shooting, video editing and choreographic direction can be found in Kozel (2012).

for affect is not just a pure internal force, it is distributed across bodies of all configurations: physical, social, structural, technological, and institutional.



From AffeXity first phase, images Jeannette Ginslov, dance Wupkje Kuindersma, Copenhagen 2011.

From phenomenology of the senses to phenomenology of affect

There are many wonderful examples of phenomenological writing that explore, celebrate, or problematise the senses. Witness a memorable description of the taste of stone by architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa.

Many years ago when visiting the DL James Residence in Carmel, California, designed by Charles and Henry Greene, I felt compelled to kneel and touch the delicately shining white marble threshold of the front door with my tongue. The sensuous materials and skilfully crafted details of Carlo Scarpa's architecture as well as the sensuous colours of Luis Barragan's houses frequently evoke oral experiences. Deliciously coloured surfaces of *stucco lustro*, a highly polished colour or wood surfaces also present themselves to the appreciation of the tongue.¹¹

Pallasmaa's writing is striking for its sensory descriptions, also its emphasis on the synaesthetic or cross-modal transference across senses, in particular between touch and taste, and between vision and touch. Despite the tongue-on-the-marble-threshold somewhat having the quality of a stunt, or a dramatic gesture to prove a point, it is effective. It is clear that his passion is to expand not just our relation to architecture but to critique certain practices in the creation of physical structures in our environments. With relevance to artistic research, his phenomenologies take in the encounter

11 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 59.

with architecture as well as its creation. For him, the problem with many of our dwellings today is that they do not offer potential transactions between body, imagination, senses, and the environment: he traces this absence back to how the design process facilitated by computers and software has become a "retinal journey."¹² The visual process of using software to design buildings has sacrificed the rest of the senses.

Affect and the sensible are close, even overlapping, but they are not the same. This is also true of affect and the somatic. Affect occupies a different register from sense data, it is reliant on the senses but overflows them. Affect is reduced frequently to emotion but is more than 'feelings'. Further, it bleeds across the borders of a single body. Affect is more like a cloud: it is as likely to be creepy as euphoric and it does not just come from bodies, but encompasses objects, structures, animals, systems, and all things environmental. Recent research, both practical and theoretical, to refine a definition of affect has left me with this: affect is the passage of forces or intensities, between bodies that may be organic, inorganic, animal, digital, or fictional. It is located in the domain beyond reason, logic, or "conscious knowing."¹³ This passage of intensities is like a vibration or a shimmering, in the sense that shimmering is based on change and is not a static state. Viewed this way, affect might travel through familiar states but it may also participate in the creation of something that did not exist previously, in what I am somewhat

12 Pallasmaa 2005, 12.

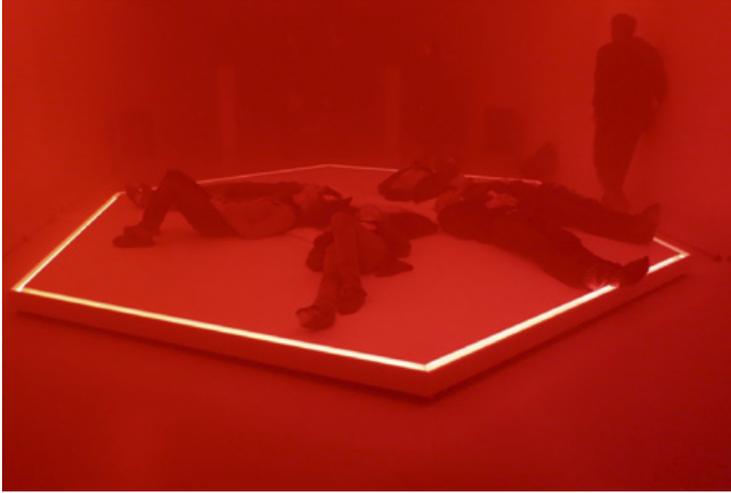
13 Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers" in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 1. See also Kozel, "Affectivity: Performing Affect with Augmented Reality" (2012).

reductively calling ‘change.’¹⁴ I currently understand affect and the somatic in relation to one another. I hesitate to say whether one is a dimension of the other – perhaps it is too soon to tell, or perhaps that level of conceptual containment is inappropriate for the passage of intensities that characterizes both. I do know that a phenomenology of affect helps to open out, elaborate, and, to a certain extent, explain somatic experience.

In a recent talk at the Medea Collaborative Media Initiative in Malmö, artist and scholar Chris Salter presented his collaborative art installations that challenge the senses by being ‘just barely noticeable’ or by bombarding visitors with overwhelming visual, aural, or tactile stimulation.¹⁵ I asked him about the relation between affect and senses, wondering if they were somehow pinned together like sine curves or if, as with some of his work, they sometimes collided. I saw a collision or a variance between affect and the senses in the moments when very strong affective qualities were produced by extremely minimal sensations. Thinking on his feet, and basing his response on phenomenological recollections of his and others’ experiences, he located senses and affect on a spectrum: indicating that affect is located at either extreme end of stimulation with senses in the middle.

14 I notice that the directness of the word change is coming into favour, Peter Sloterdijk’s newest book about to be released in English is called *You must change your life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

15 Medea’s activities can be found at <http://medea.mah.se>, and an archived video of Chris Salter’s talk (18 October 2012) <http://medea.mah.se/2012/10/medea-talks-presents-chris-salter/>



From Salter's *Displace, 2,0* at Today's Art, The Hague 2012. Photo: Anke Burger.

This made me think of infra red and ultra violet, both intensities beyond the visual spectrum. Intensities are experienced somatically. Reflecting on my own experiences, I once saw waves of colour behind my eyelids, mainly indigo and dark electric purple, in the midst of the somatic practice called Rosen Method.¹⁶ Ultraviolet blooms of colour characterised the somatic release, providing a fragment of physical experience to ground the important but otherwise abstract claim that a “processually oriented materialism” yields “affectual bloom spaces.”¹⁷ These colour sensations were not directly pinned to clearly defined physical or emotional qualities. I

16 See <http://www.rosenmethod.com/> and the journal <http://www.rosenjournal.org/>
The practitioner I am fortunate to work with is Karen Vedel. Vedel is training in Rosen. She is a dance scholar and professor at the University of Copenhagen.

17 Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 14.

was vaguely aware that the right side of my body was opening and lengthening but did not have any familiar sensations or memories of similar kinaesthetic or emotional events. Like Salter's suggestion that affect exists in a zone outside of familiar sensations, I was in the domain of affect rather than categorisation. I was experiencing a change in my corporeal schema.

Change is the goal of much somatic practice. Yet, in the worlds of art, design, and cultural discourse change, or transformation, are simultaneously contested and desired outcomes: change for whom? empty or authentic? at what cost? I will locate the possibility for change, for contingency, within the body and say that we can access and understand it by means of a phenomenology of affect; first it is worth seeing just how contentious (and ultimately desirable) this is by taking a philosophical detour through speculative materialism and the event of love.

Speculative Materialism

Pallasmaa relishes the way we encounter and make sense of the world through our bodies: "We behold, touch, listen and measure the world with our entire bodily existence, and the experiential world becomes organised and articulated around the centre of the body,"¹⁸ but philosopher Quentin Meillassoux calls this the correlationist circle and rails against it. In Meillassoux's attempt to craft a new relation between thought and the absolute he is deeply troubled by how the sensible, "whether it be perceptive or affective," can only exist as "a relation between the world and the living creature

18 Pallasmaa, 64.

that I am."¹⁹ The sensible is neither in me nor in the thing-in-itself, it is effectively, to use his term, a correlation. Meillassoux wants to escape this correlationist circle according to which we can only ever know anything through our own situated embodied perception, thus making it impossible to consider realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently from one another. Phenomenology is the most pernicious and perfidious example of correlationism.

Meillassoux's words reveal a strong sense of claustrophobia; I see it as an affective force behind his rejection of phenomenology. It is troubling for him that a person can only know something through her own perception and cognition, for this means she will always be outside those objects in the world she wants to understand. This yields

a strange feeling of imprisonment or enclosure within this very exteriority (the 'transparent cage'). For we are all well and truly imprisoned within this outside proper to language and consciousness given that we are *always-already* in it (the 'always-already' accompanying the 'co-' of correlationism as its other essential locution), and given that we have no access to any vantage point from whence we could observe these 'object-worlds', which are the unsurpassable providers of all exteriority, from the outside. But if this outside seems to us to be a cloistered outside, an outside in which one may legitimately feel incarcerated, this is because in actuality such an outside is entirely rel-

19 Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2009), 2.

ative, since it is – and this is precisely the point – relative to us.²⁰

He pins the future of philosophical discourse on the possibility of escaping the correlationist circle, and his book *After Finitude* follows a logical structure of argumentation using the scientific example of ancestrality and an argument around facticity to reveal the instability of the claim that we cannot know the thing-in-itself. Ancestrality refers to science's ability to produce statements about events prior to the advent of life as well as consciousness.²¹ In simple terms, if we can comprehend something that so far exceeds our human experience then we have escaped the containment of the correlationist circle.

Those who follow his writing believe that the only way for us to answer the problems facing us as nations and cultures, from global warming to migration, is to escape this containment in order to be able to think the new, or to be able to think a new absolute. This philosophical approach has been called “speculative realism,” (a title Meillassoux does not support, preferring the term materialism to realism) and intends to “recuperate the pre-critical sense of ‘speculation’ as a concern with the Absolute” without denying the progress that was due to the labours of critique.²² He has become the philosopher of radical change because he asserts “the absolute necessity of the contingency of everything.”²³ Even more explicitly revealing the viability of change, he asserts “there is no reason for

20 Meillassoux 2009, 7.

21 Meillassoux 2009, 9.

22 Bryant, Levi, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman, eds. *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 3.

23 Meillassoux 2009, 62.

anything to be or to remain the way it is; everything must, without reason, be able not to be and/or be able to be other than it is."²⁴

The celebration of radical contingency at the heart of the philosophical movement speculative materialism/realism can be seen as an attempt to glimpse a crack in what exists so that something else can slip through. Along with so many others, the philosophers who grapple with these ideas exhibit a vision (a desire? a hope?) that things can be otherwise: the philosopher sees his task as levering open a space in which this might happen. (I would normally say 'his or her' task, but in the case of the philosophers loosely grouped under speculative realism there are almost no women.) Speculation is a sort of freedom from which other changes or possibilities for unprecedented thought and actions can follow.

In short, necessity constrains us, contingency opens up breathing space. Or does it? Can radical contingency become abstract and overwhelming?

Everything could actually collapse: from trees to stars, from stars to laws, from physical laws to logical laws; and this not by virtue of some superior law whereby everything is destined to perish, but by virtue of the absence of any superior law capable of preserving anything, no matter what, from perishing.²⁵

A desire for change, for things to be other than they are, seems to require the abandonment of phenomenology and other sensory approaches to knowledge. Change seems to require an escape from

24 Meillaussoux 2009, 69.

25 Meillaussoux 2009, 53.

the correlationist circle. However, as Ian Bogost neatly summarises, “speculative realists have not yet concerned themselves with particular implementation,” their metaphysics has not yet become a practice, it remains in the domain of grappling with first principles. It is not at all clear how (or if) it is possible to have a “pragmatic speculative realism.”²⁶

The event of love

On the way to somatics let’s be distracted for a moment by love.

Alain Badiou discusses love. He praises it. He says that once the One is disrupted by the difference of viewing the world as Two the world is experienced in a new way. This experience gives rise to a risky and contingent form: it becomes an encounter. “Love always starts with an encounter. And I would give this encounter the quasi-metaphysical status of an event, namely of something that doesn’t enter into the immediate order of things.”²⁷ There is an implicit sliding scale of disruption from experience (not really offering something new), to encounter (disrupting the order of things), to event (radical contingency). Never far from the surface of discussions of contingency or the event is the deep desire for the possibility of change: perhaps a glimmer; perhaps an explosion.

As a philosophical approach, phenomenology is both vulnerable and frequently under attack, at the same time as it is extremely robust in the ways it is applied by practitioners such as artists, dancers, architects, musicians, pedagogues, and designers. Rarely

26 Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology or What It’s Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 2012), 29.

27 Badiou, with Nicolas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2012), 28.

has a philosophical current been so condemned in some quarters but at the same time so tenacious. Those who are committed to expanding and challenging phenomenology as a practice know the problems with classical or traditional phenomenology. These have been rehearsed (and dealt with) many times: transcendentalist, reduction to corps propre, elevation of the male universalist subject, solipsistic, concerned merely with the structures of consciousness, and now correlationist.

However, Badiou's discussion of love, and indeed his entire vast project around logic and the event, opens the most significant critique a pragmatic approach to phenomenology must address: the limitations of experience. He asserts that it is "essential to grasp that the construction of the world on the basis of difference is quite distinct from the experience of difference."²⁸ The mere experience of difference implies that the sensory patterning is only marginally disrupted. In effect, we have our experiences along a continuum. This relates directly to the difficulties of circumventing habit in the improvisations and choreographic patterns around *AffeXity*, or of any use of media in our media-saturated age: media is all around us but how much of it is created or consumed with any critical or disruptive potential? Are our experiences expanded or dampened as they are reproduced? What of that which turns us upside down, which makes us catch our breath, or stop in our tracks in the face of the previously unexperienced? This, for Badiou, is an encounter or an event such as love, "an encounter is not an experience, it is an event that remains quite opaque and only finds reality in its multiple resonances within the real world."²⁹ It amounts to constructing a

28 Badiou 2012, 23.

29 Badiou 2012, 24.

world from a “decentred point of view.”³⁰ It does not reaffirm one’s own identity.

The event is in need of a recalibration. I agree with Bogost when he expresses concern that for Badiou “events are not commonplace affairs. Rather, they are wholesale changes.” Bogost observes that “Badiou’s ontology appears incapable of describing the ordinary being of things, limiting itself to the extraordinary being of human change”³¹. I can be accused of thinking small. Intimate. Acts of movement or perception that begin with a step, a breath, or a shift of weight. I reject the notion that, with the exception of rare and dramatic moments, change is extraordinary or somehow outside the human’s scope. This is where the sensibility of the dancer can help: contingency is motion but not all motion offers contingency. Change is what repetition permits, what many repeated moments of technical execution (lifting a leg) or perceptual awareness (sensing the flow of your body’s subtle energies) can yield: contingency within continuity. Somatic experiences offer a glimpse into the event as it is embedded deep within the body. Radical contingency within flesh, or just contingency within flesh?

Somatic Materialism

And here my words begin to falter again. This time because I am only just beginning to explore what somatic materialism might be. In scholarly terms, I am at the beginning of a research programme that has philosophical and artistic currents. When I am at a loss conceptually, or aware that my attempts to force concepts into

30 Badiou 2012, 25.

31 Bogost 2012, 28.

shape enacts violence upon them prior to the unfolding of their actual shape, I turn to experience.

Above I described internally seeing ultraviolet blooms during the practice of Rosen Method. On another occasion while working with Vedel, I had the experience that ignited my fascination with the somatic in terms of phenomenological practice: I felt something that was nothing. I felt and did not feel." She said "look at that," and I felt nothing, but something at the same time.³² A nothing that was something. To use other words, what I felt was not something I knew *how* to feel, thus grounding the claim that with somatics there is "no new knowledge, only new knowing."³³ It was beyond my ability to sense, so it felt like an open space. A gap. An openness. It was disconcerting that such a strange void could open up in my body, but also a source of relief and fascination precisely because something so unknown was part of my body. I saw it as the possibility for something new, but it was opaque. In my description of this event it is possible to detect an affective tone of pleasure relating to discovery, but it is also important to state that my initial affective response to this alienness was a desire to shut it down, to run from it, and retrench into the familiar. The affective quality of a somatic event tends to be multiple and contradictory.

32 It is somewhat difficult to describe the directionality of action with Rosen, because the practitioner does not work on the other body, does not manipulate, but works with the body to "meet the tension with her touch, to sink in, show possibilities, and stop if there is resistance." (Vedel email correspondence nov 2012). I see it as a sort of affective duet rather than having someone 'do' something to me.

33 Johnson 1995, 62.



From AffeXity first phase, images Jeannette Ginslov, dance Wupkje Kuindersma, Copenhagen 2011.

A few words on the alien are useful as this article draws to a close. For Bogost, the alien is everywhere around us but a latent assumption in his *Alien Phenomenology* is that we are clear and known to ourselves. We have to look beyond our own bodies for alienness. It is outside of us that is unknown, provoking "benighted wanderings in an exotic world of utterly incomprehensible objects". He sets philosophers the task of amplifying "the black noise of objects."³⁴ Bernhard Waldenfels in his *Phenomenology of the Alien*, however, sees corporeality and alienness as "intimately connected." Somatic materialism as I sketch it, is consistent with his assertion that a "corporeal being is never entirely present to itself."³⁵

Somatic practice reveals that a form of contingency is located in the body. It might not be radical, but if radical contingency is a severance from all we know then it is possible to ask how we can identify it sufficiently to even notice or be aware of it, or as Waldenfels would say, how we might attend to it. There is a dimension to his thought that is consistent with process or practice. "When something comes to a person's attention, at first he does not know with what or whom he is dealing. Attending itself is the first response to the alien." (Waldenfels 58). The practice of attending underpins phenomenology.

As a practical philosophy, phenomenology is not a system, not a dogmatic set of instructions. It is a sensibility and a way of living in the world. In scholarly terms it is concerned with the construction and validation of knowledge, and it is utterly essential for it to be transformed from its original tenets: for it to be challenged, revised,

34 Bogost 2012, 34.

35 Bernhard Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien*, trans. Alexander Kozin and Tanja Stähler (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 43.

reworked, critiqued, dismantled, and reassembled. This is akin to the artistic process, or what designers do when they set in motion iterative cycles of design. The practicality of phenomenology is that while it is not simply a set of instructions, it is possible to implement it. This responds to a desire for an applied or pragmatic approach to philosophy. My somatic experience of ‘something that was nothing or nothing that was something’ works in counterpoint with the improvisatory practices of *AffeXity* to expand my phenomenological practice from a phenomenology of the senses to a phenomenology of affect. In effect, sense data is replaced with affective intensities. Or they intertwine.

For Badiou, love constitutes a kind of resistance against ‘the obscenity of the market and the current political disarray on the left.’³⁶ For Meillassoux and those who expand his ideas, the necessity of contingency has a tone of emancipation from the straightjacket of the contemporary intellectual landscape and the insanity of global politics. Somatic materialism, a term I may or may not hold onto, is the corporeal parallel. Contingency, or simply change, can be located in the body and can be, if not exactly understood, touched or explored by a phenomenology of affect – perhaps in the way Pallasmaa touched his tongue to the marble threshold.

Responding to the question: “Is it possible to do a phenomenology of affect?” My answer is yes, with continued refinement of our practices of reflection and capacities for attention, combined with an openness to witness what might arise even if we have no way of immediately understanding, integrating, or even facing it.

36 Badiou 2012, 95.

Somatics has been called fiercely pragmatic.³⁷ Phenomenology can be that way too.

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³⁷ Johnson 1995, 60.

Moritz Gansen and Elisabeth Schilling: Dance and Philosophy: A Conversation

The following conversation, staged as our contribution to this volume, is of course by no means a record of our presentation around 'diagrammatic creativity' at Lapsody 2013. While it should be able to stand on its own, it can also be read as a companion piece.

ES: What do you think relates dance and philosophy?

MG: First of all: Any connection between dance and philosophy is entirely contingent; up to a point, dance and philosophy are completely distinct practices. But having said that, it should be clear that we can easily find an abundance of examples in which there clearly is a relation between dance and philosophy. To be brief, one could perhaps say that what your question boils down to is the question of the body. Philosophy has often been considered as more or less disembodied; sometimes one might even get the impression that a conceptual dualism between body and mind was only produced in order to be able to denounce the body. Yet of course philosophy is still a practice of a body, even if it may sometimes be necessary for philosophical thinking to obliterate the body in thought; but it is obvious that this very obliteration is premised on what it seeks to obliterate. Think for instance of Friedrich Nietzsche's Zarathustra and his discourse on the body: 'There is more reason in your body', Zarathustra says, 'than in your best wisdom. And who knows

then to what end your body requires precisely your best wisdom?’ (NIETZSCHE 2006, 23). So for Nietzsche, body and mind are not simply one, but the body produces its mind. And of course such a position can become highly problematic, especially if it entails some kind of value judgment. But it reminds us that we must not forget to sometimes also think philosophy through the body. And I guess this brings philosophy closer to dance.

ES: This is interesting – I mean, of course different dance and movement practices have used philosophy in quite diverse manners and under very different circumstances. In a way, the reference to the philosophical has become a fashion in dance, especially in the creation of new work, but I feel one should nevertheless wonder about that. Today, there is an increasing number of dance techniques which seek to teach a philosophy through the body – perhaps we can even say that basically every technique ultimately does this, whether it explicitly states it or not. But even when you compose a piece of choreography, do you not inescapably also create a certain philosophy through or in the domain of the body?

MG: I am not quite sure what exactly philosophy (or the philosophical) means here. My impression is that dancers and choreographers sometimes read a text and then just make a piece ‘based on it’. And there are certainly better and worse ways of doing this. But is that already a form of philosophising ‘through the body’? As I said, to an extent dance and philosophy remain perfectly distinct practices, although there are definitely connections between both. Perhaps one never quite knows where and when one starts doing philosophy. But it is clear that precisely such questions must provide the conditions for any project that seeks to bring together dance and philosophy.

ES: Yes. I feel that within the process of our research around 'diagrammatic creativity', we worked with very concrete theoretical content that we then sought to communicate within the piece we were about to create. In this sense, there was a certain didactic component, mostly or at least most obviously represented by the talk you gave, speaking about diagrammaticity from a philosophical angle and providing historical examples of the ways in which artists have used scores and diagrams. I must say that I struggled with the idea of creating a piece of art with this sort of concrete communication in mind. Is this still art? Do we aim to create a piece of art or rather a performative documentation of what we had researched through writing and the body? How can we integrate this concrete way of communication with the way movement communicates? Does 'performed philosophy' trigger and affect the body of the audience in a similar way as the performance of movement choreography? And finally, to pick up on what you said, where does theory stop and art begin?

MG: But then again, don't you think it is also interesting to blur the boundaries? Each 'work', and I really only use this term for want of a better one, must create a position, its own position if you like. Of course this entails taking a stance towards that which is already given. But it is more than that. Each work of art, insofar as it is a work of art, immanently proposes its own concept of art; and each piece of philosophy, insofar as it is a piece of philosophy, proposes its own concept of philosophy. Now it is clear that matters become more complicated if we choose to work somewhere in between art, or, in this case, dance, performance, and philosophy. There are frictions, tensions. We just never quite know where one thing starts or the other ends. And perhaps that is the very essence of transdisciplinarity.

ES: Of course, transdisciplinarity is in fashion. Almost everyone today would agree that it is important to draw things together, to collaborate, to unite – in the arts and beyond. And I certainly do find this intriguing. But I also feel that in pieces of art produced under these conditions the unique energy of the art form is easily lost. So, from the artist’s perspective, I just wonder if it is actually that interesting. In our piece, I tried to preserve the artistic aspect by means of structure. But it was difficult, I was uncertain, so I am wondering about this. I mean, conceptually, transdisciplinarity is incredibly fascinating and definitely worth experimenting with, yet the energy, the constitutive tension of ‘art’, of creation in a specific context, gets lost. Or let’s say: maybe it becomes secondary after the idea of a transdisciplinary unity. I don’t think either is necessarily better or worse, but this is simply what I have been observing.

MG: I think you are absolutely right, there is a problem – does one sacrifice art in the name of something larger? But then again, what do you think it is that could be sacrificed? What is the ‘unique energy of art’?

ES: Well, when I say ‘art’ in this context, I mean the manner of composition in a piece of performance. I think that the rules of communication are quite different when one performs philosophy by means of words and sense and when one performs the sense of a movement performance. So when we engaged with the question of diagrammatic creativity, this was probably one of the main challenges: we had to create a composition in performance that would remain truthful to all its components. But, more generally, all creation and composition is, in the end, a question of sensitivity. To this extent, it is individual and based on experience anyhow. At the same time, the perception of art, as well as its definition, is equally individual and based on – perhaps culturally specific – experience.

So do you see what I am trying to say? The energy of a composed piece in a live performance, performer and audience – within a specific context...

MG: A certain sense of presence, then? A mediated presence though.

ES: Hmmm, well, I'm not quite sure how one would put this into words... However you do it, it feels like an undue reduction. But let's maybe come back to my earlier question, to the relation between performance and philosophy. Could one say that philosophy is mainly performed in academic contexts that already imply strict rules?

MG: Yes and no. It is clear – and I think this was your implication – that philosophy always includes various performative elements. First and foremost, there is the performance of one's philosopher-being, the performative answer to the question of what it means to be a philosopher, the more or less determinate development of a certain 'form of life'. And here the role of the academy is of course utterly important. One could perhaps say that – as far as philosophy is concerned – its task is the education of subjects able to produce or at least reproduce philosophical knowledge according to a specific set of rules. This may sound rather bleak. But I believe that there is nevertheless a certain leeway to create a philosophical style of one's own, to define the stakes of doing philosophy. And then there is of course also a tradition of philosophy outside the academy. In fact, one of the great narratives of the history of philosophy has its very beginning outside of the academy, even before the academy. Socrates, so often considered one of the key figures in the narrative of Western philosophy, is not an academic. According to Plato's accounts, Socrates just roamed the agora of Athens, provoking more or less random people into philosophical conversations. Yet Plato, who tells these stories, is of course the very founder of the

Academy from which modern academia derives its right and name... In any case, we can say that today, there is still a great amount of controversy regarding the question of the role of philosophy and its relation to the 'general public'. Who has the 'right to philosophy'? In a way this question is similar to yours about the 'unique energy of art'... There seems to be a problem of legitimacy whenever certain boundaries are crossed. But to come back to your question, I think there is another important aspect of what one might call the 'performativity of philosophy': its stages, the ways it stages. I mean, yes, for one thing there are lecture theatres, seminar rooms, and so on; but perhaps those are still part of the question of the academy. More importantly though, I would like to stress the role of the dramaturgy of philosophical thinking.

ES: What exactly do you mean by that?

MG: Well, Gilles Deleuze for instance famously wrote that '[a] book of philosophy should be in part a very particular species of detective novel' (DELEUZE 1994, XX). Philosophy always has an affective dimension, despite its claims to the contrary. There is an aesthetics of the philosophical text. And this includes a certain staging, no matter if we are dealing with a work concerned with the history of philosophy or a treatise on a specific conceptual problem. Ideas as well as historical and fictional characters appear on a scene and begin to interact. So, in this sense, we can speak of something like a performance already at the level of the text, at the level of the textual practice of philosophy.

ES: Okay, so maybe a movement of thought, structured by the rules of language? I must say that I find these ideas quite poetic and somehow very artistic. But I still have to say that when I think about philosophy and performance, I immediately imagine a philosopher talking about their philosophy in an academic context or at least in

a discussion, more or less like you did as part of our presentation. So I wonder: What do you think about this way of performance in relation to art, or rather, do you think it is possible within a work of art? And maybe you could also relate this to what you said earlier about ‘philosophising through the body’. I would love to hear more on that.

MG: I’m not quite sure if it is that easy to connect those two questions. But let me begin with the latter, because I think it has much to do with the idea of a ‘movement of thought’ that you evoked. I mean, ‘movement of thought’ is certainly a familiar topos – but what does it actually mean? For our presentation in Helsinki, we asked ourselves this same question, and it got us to the notion of diagrammaticity. One of the things that dance and philosophy have in common seems to be a certain material practice; and I am convinced that the very possibility of creativity, of the production of something new, something different, is rooted in such a material practice – while in their concrete manifestations they may of course be very unlike each other. But here we can see quite clearly what ‘philosophy through the body’ might mean: thinking does not only have certain biological conditions – and here I certainly do not mean that the biological determines our thinking; thinking is also conditioned by the specific material practices of the body and its extensions. To give the most simple and concrete example I can think of at the moment: I write a text. But the very fact that the text is written rather than spoken has a certain impact on both its form and its content. I can go back and forth, change phrases, words – thoughts. At the same time, however, the ways in which I can do this can be quite manifold as well. If I type, my textual practice will be quite different from when I write by hand. And the same holds for a choreographer or a composer who write their scores.

More generally, however, and perhaps to answer your question more directly, I also think that all of these practices have to do with a certain disposition of the body, with specific acquired habits if you like, with stances, demeanours. Again: philosophy is by no means simply an immaterial practice.

ES: And what about the connection of art and philosophy?

MG: Well, yes, to an extent I share your unresolved attitude. As you have already stated, the performance of philosophy and the performance of art obey different sets of rules. Yet at the same time, there is a common ground, and I think there is something to be gained in the connection of art and philosophy, or in transdisciplinary work more generally. But there is no formula by which to make it work – as you said earlier, it is a matter of experimentation. Of mapping possibilities as well as impossibilities. In any case, the most important thing is to not just translate or juxtapose. One has to find, or perhaps rather produce something that will appear as an immanent connection – a necessity, if you like. Only then will the process and result be worthwhile for oneself and for others.

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Megan Armishaw: Understanding Stage Presence – An Investigation into Communication During Performance

The following text is an extract from my MA thesis, which investigates the connection of stage presence to the act of communication, with the view that its manifestation within a performer may be enhanced as a result of a deeper understanding of its state as a communicative form. The paper's approach implies that through the appreciation of how meaning is made, skills may be acquired in order to enhance the innate entity. It suggests that with a performer's heightened understanding of any choreographic work in which he or she is involved, comes a more engaging and meaningful sense of presence.

It seemed appropriate to approach my questions concerning the formulation of meaning using structuralist research, and with an already enthusiastic interest in linguistics I turned to structuralist language theories as a method for analysis. Prior to the following extract the paper uses Martin Nachbar's piece The Drawing Room as a case study to outline the significance of structuralism in the formulation of meaning, this is especially commented upon in relation Saussure's semiotic research. However, it was not until I began to consider the research of post-structuralism, and in particular the work of literary theorist Roland Barthes, that I really became excited about my findings...

Barthes approached the notion of constructing meaning through the act of reading. In discussion of his work Allen writes:

Barthes notion of writing concerns that which is communicated outside or beyond a message or content...There is meaning in this kind of writing, which has nothing to do with the ideas being conveyed and everything to do with the way those ideas are being conveyed.¹

This notion is particularly relevant in relation to stage presence, for the research of this paper thus far suggests that presence, although a direct result of an involvement in a physical and cognitive process with a work, transcends that of the simple communication of a choreographic message to also communicate aspects of the self, which do not directly relate to such messages. Barthes is recognised for his early research in structuralism, however many of his writings have been referred to as supportive of post-structuralist research. His various biographies suggest that whilst Barthes found structuralism to be a useful tool and believed that discourse of literature could be formalized, he did not believe it could become a strictly scientific endeavour. Relevant to the topic of stage presence Barthes' research defines 'jouissance' as the "transporting pleasure of being constructed through the play of signification"² i.e. reading gives the reader pleasure by destabilizing expectations of the production of meaning. Barthes outlined the difference he believed exists between '*plaisir*' (pleasure) and '*jouissance*' (bliss) through his explanation of the existence of 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts. Readerly texts he states are "finished objects, products and not productions...[a readerly text] sets forth the end of every action (conclusion, inter-

1 Allen 2003, 17.

2 Reinelt J.G. & Roach J.R. 1992, 112.

ruption, closure, dénouement) and so 'declares itself as historical'.³ Pleasure can be gained, he argues, from readerly texts, but never bliss. He relates the experience of bliss to writerly texts only. "The writerly text is not a structure but a structuration, in which 'the reader [is] no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text' ...The writerly text is not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore".⁴ Barthes proposes that the reader of a readerly text is largely passive, whereas the reader of a writerly text makes an active effort to gain experience from the text, hence there is transportation from a subjective/ outside position to one of involvement and experience.⁵

It is conceivable to consider a piece of dance as a writerly text and the performer as reader in conjunction with the Barthesian theory of *jouissance*, on the basis that the performer has a certain amount of ownership over the text. It could be contested that meaning for the performer is manufactured through their experience of performing, offering the idea that with accumulated understanding comes heightened '*jouissance*' – when one experiences bliss his/her presence on stage is enhanced. This experience is different to one of simple pleasure, "the text of pleasure confirms our comfortable relation to language as something stable and limited; the text of bliss brings to a crisis [the reader's] relation with language".⁶ It can be claimed then that a performer may treat a dance work as a readerly text or a writerly text. In the first case he/she would simply execute the role as it was learned, unchanged and with efficiency.

3 Makaryk 1993, 616.

4 Ibid.

5 Makaryk 1993, 607.

6 Ibid.

It is conceivable that in this case the performer would become increasingly less engaged with the tasks at hand over time as the outcome would be learned and repeated. In this instance the level and texture of presence would therefore be diminished through repetition of the work, a notion often described as letting a work become ‘stale’ or ‘flat’.

In development of the discovery of *truthful* performance, a method to ensure that this is always the case might be for a performer to treat the work as a writerly text. Through the act of questioning, testing and re-evaluating the work and one’s role within it, an alert and inquisitive sense of presence may be achieved. In this instance it is arguable that performance of the work will offer a different experience to the performer each time (within the context) and that the performer will be constantly engaged in the act of understanding and gathering meaning, hence enhancing his/her stage presence.

Important to note is that the French term ‘jouissance’ does not directly translate to the feeling of bliss known in English. The French term can be used in multiple situations but does carry the connotation of a sexual orgasm. Although a largely irrelevant concept in relation to this study it is worth noting that the term refers to a feeling of superseding one’s ego. In terms of psychoanalysis ‘ego’ refers to “the part of the mind that mediates between the conscious and the unconscious and is responsible for reality testing and a sense of personal identity.”⁷ Therefore use of the term ‘jouissance’ suggests escapism from the self and from reality: an experience that is incommunicable through speech. This does then, with the exclusion of erotica, relate to the experience of stage presence and

7 Retrieved from Oxford Reference Online. Premium website:
<http://www.oxfordreference.com>.

offers some explanation for the unrefined definitions it is often given in theatre practices.

Although Barthes' research was founded on a structuralist approach, the notion of 'jouissance' begins to comply with the beliefs of post-structuralism. Post-structuralism can be interpreted as "a specifically philosophical response to the alleged scientific status of structuralism...[a movement that] sought to decentre the "structures", [and] systematicity ...to critique its underlying metaphysics."⁸ Essentially post-structuralism disagrees with the idea that the process of human interaction can be completely understood through the form of a system, contesting that the human act of perceiving and understanding cannot be generalised. Of significance in relation to Barthes' research is German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's belief that "understanding is essentially a transportation or imaginative projection whereby the knower negates the temporal distance that separates him from his object and becomes contemporaneous with it".⁹ This is interesting in relation to 'jouissance' as it suggests that understanding gained through performance creates a visible shift in the 'self' (much like the feeling of bliss acquired through the experience of a writerly text); the audience observes the performer engaging on a deeper level – making discoveries, offering the idea that his/her presence is more finely tuned in such an instance.

In consideration of the visible shifting self as a result of gained understanding it is interesting to cover the notion of the "hermeneutic cycle" so coined by German philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey:

8 Burbules M.C. & Peters M.A. 2004, 8.

9 Gadamer 1976, xii.

The act of reading a whole sentence (such as the one you are reading now) depends upon your understanding of the individual words, yet you cannot determine the meaning of the individual words until you have grasped the meaning of the sentence as a whole.¹⁰

This is particularly pertinent to the ‘mime section’ of *The Drawing Room...* [*The Drawing Room is a dance piece choreographed by Nachbar for Transitions Dance Company 2012. It is conceptually set in the White Drawing Room at Buckingham palace, a room, which is highly ornate and lavishly furnished. Of significance to this research is one particular section of the work: the ‘mime’ section. The dancers in this section perform mimetic movement used to outline the shape and intricate details of the many items of imaginary furniture in the room.*]... Let us consider the choreography as text and the performer as the reader; the piece of furniture being mimed would henceforth be regarded as a sentence. The completion of the sentence as being recognisably meaningful is dependent on both the performer and audiences’ ability to perceive the imaginary shape as a whole, based on their shared understanding of the units, which construct it. It could be claimed that there are three fundamental units, which construct the item of furniture for a performer. The first being his/her memory of the actual, tangible piece of furniture being recreated. The second being the mimetic gestures he/she uses to construct it, which offer a sense of texture, detail and size. The third unit would be the general space in which this construction takes place. The general space offers a context and an environment for the object

10 Reinelt J.G. & Roach J.R. 1992, 535.

to be placed within and therefore dictates the object's significance within that space.

This example links directly to the branch of philosophy known as metaphysics, which “deals with the first principals of things such as being, knowing, identity, time and space.”¹¹ Metaphysics is a concept employed by many post-structuralist theorists but has its roots in Sixteenth Century philosophy. It is now described as having two main strands to its existence: “that which holds that what exists lies beyond experience (as argued by Plato), and that which holds that objects of experience constitute the only reality (as argued by Kant, the logical positivists, and Hume)”.¹² Since this paper is concerned with the bringing about of understanding of a performer's relationship to the signified concept with which he/she deals, this topic is largely relevant. It could be said, in light of this definition of metaphysics, that a performer's relationship to the signified concept can be developed through an acknowledgement of the two strands. In consideration of the first; to gain new knowledge of the concept in the moment of performing, and henceforth optimise one's presence on stage, the performer must actively seek to find new experiences in the choreography. In appreciation of the second strand, a performer's acquired presence is only made a reality through the act of experiencing, and is enhanced by the experience being one of fulfilment gained through new discoveries.

As previously touched upon in this text [*the hermeneutic cycle*], and closely related to metaphysics, is the branch of philosophy

11 Retrieved from Oxford Reference Online. Premium website:
<http://www.oxfordreference.com>.

12 Retrieved from Oxford Reference Online. Premium website: <http://www.oxfordreference.com>.

known as hermeneutics. It traditionally refers to the interpretation of biblical texts but has evolved through various practices and can now refer generally to the study of the theory and practice of interpretation. In his book, which covers interpretation theory, Palmer writes that Hermeneutics' origins lie:

[In the] Greek verb *hermēneuin* and noun *hermēneia* [which] refer to the wing-footed messenger-god Hermes, who was associated with transmuting what is beyond human understanding into a form that intelligence can grasp. The very form of the word suggests the process of bringing a thing or situation from unintelligibility to understanding. The Greeks credited Hermes with the discovery of language and writing – the tools which human understanding employs to grasp meaning and convey it to others.¹³

In relation to this paper's interest in the process by which a performer comes to understand his/her relationship to that which is being signified (such as the furniture in *The Drawing Room*), this process may be paralleled to one of hermeneutics. Palmer continues:

“Hermes' process” is at work [when] something foreign, strange, separated in time and space, or experience is made familiar, present, comprehensible; something requiring representation, explanation or translation is somehow brought to understanding – is ‘interpreted’.¹⁴

13 Palmer 1969, 13.

14 Ibid.

It is precisely this hermeneutic process carried out by the performer that draws the attention of the audience. The mental and physical engagement required could be said to bring about a true and honest presence in the performer, a presence, which is open and communicative of his/her experience.

Although Dilthey's hermeneutic research offers interesting support to the notions of this paper it is important to note his belief that understanding is the action of "a subject purged of all prejudices, and it is achieved in direct proportion to the knower's ability to set aside his own horizons and distortions"¹⁵. Gadamer related hermeneutics to actual experience arguing that "to revel in Cartesian enlightenment ideal of the autonomous subject is to negate his own present as a virtual extension of the past".¹⁶ In relation to dance performance both opinions are valid, however this research is inclined to favour Gadamer. Whilst it is useful to attempt to disentangle oneself of past perceptions of performing a piece to make way for new understanding, it is irrefutable that one's past exists in one's present; this brings virtue of knowledge and experience to performance. It is also unquestionably true that performing arts, including dance practices, only survive because of the many foundations and structures, which construct their existence. Although part of the post-structuralist movement, Hermeneutics is still closely tied to the structuralist study of semiotics.

We mean by hermeneutics the theory of rules that govern an exegesis, that is to say an interpretation of a particular text or a collection of signs susceptible of being considered

15 Dilthey cited in Gadamer 1976, xiv.

16 Gadamer 1976, xiv.

as text... [a] dream is a text , a text filled with symbolic images, and the psychoanalyst uses an interpretive system to render an exegesis that brings to the surface the hidden meaning.¹⁷

If considered in relation to dance, *The Drawing Room* can be described as a text and the performer uses an interpretive system to render discoveries that brings to the surface new meaning and understanding. This is certainly true of the ‘mime section’; through a performer’s exploration of his/her relationship to the object of interest, the activity of miming and describing is developed. This is not necessarily a development of the movement vocabulary but of the significance the movement has, i.e. whilst remaining true to the ‘rules’ or technique required to produce mimetic movement the performer may also develop the ability to interpret this movement as dance rather than mime. In this instance he/she would develop understanding of the bodily connections required to produce this style of movement. Palmer continues to state that “hermeneutics is the system by which the deeper significance is revealed beneath the manifest concept”.¹⁸ In this instance the ‘manifest concept’ may be regarded as ‘mime’, the deeper significance as the mood or atmosphere created by the placing of mime in an untraditional context, which results in the movement itself having status over the imagined object. As the movement holds such significance, the audience’s attention is drawn to the body and the *person* producing it. Conceivably, those performers who are engaged with the imagined object to the extent that the process is visible through

17 Ricoeur cited in Palmer 1969, 33.

18 Palmer 1969, 43.

the combination of body and presence will subsequently engage an audience on a deeper level with the work.

For the interests of this research however there are disadvantages to perceiving through a hermeneutic process:

for hermeneutics has to do with symbolic texts which have multiple meanings; they may constitute a semantic unity which has (as in myths) a fully coherent surface meaning and at the same time a deeper significance..yet this operation actually demonstrates a distrust in the surface or manifest reality.¹⁹

This can be considered in relation to dance works as the surface reality of any piece is always viewed and interpreted to mean something slightly altered from the choreographer's intention – no two people perceive in the same way. In terms of a performer's approach to the signified let us refer once more to the mime section of *The Drawing Room*. A performer in this instance could approach the item of furniture with which he/she deals anew each time in order to achieve the discoveries, which result in the *having* of presence. However, as previously discussed, it is irrefutable that one's past exists in one's present. This therefore deems it impossible to approach the item of imaginary furniture anew as the performer cannot escape the experiences already obtained through previous interaction with the object. As stated by Palmer this would also demonstrate the performer's mistrust in the manifest concept of the choreography and potentially lead him/her astray from the choreographer's inten-

19 Ibid.

tions for the movement. This is especially pertinent to *The Drawing Room*, as it was Nachbar's clear intent to keep the miming of the furniture as precise as possible in order for any hidden meaning to arise for both audience and performer. In reference to an email discussion between Nachbar and myself, he wrote:

The mime section came from an interest to look at the narrative properties of mime movements and their ability to delineate an object in space and create imagined signifiers around the body moving. I was curious if these properties could be perforated and was looking for a connection to abstract movement.²⁰

Therefore any hidden or alternative meaning beneath the manifest concept (mime) has to be a direct result of the performer's complete adherence to the mime techniques; any distrust in the form or wavering in the execution of the technique would result in an unclear communication of the messages of the work. Although this may not be necessarily detrimental to the performer's level of stage presence it would highlight them as negatively contributing or misunderstanding the concept of the work.

Palmer states that philosopher Paul Ricoeur proposes two different syndromes of hermeneutics in modern times: one deals lovingly with the symbol in an effort to recover a meaning hidden within it, whilst the second seeks to destroy the symbol as the representation of false reality.²¹ In terms of dance performance and particularly in relation to the mime section of *The Drawing Room*

20 Nachbar, 2012.

21 Palmer 1969, 44.

this could be translated as the following. There are two ways in which a performer might approach the item of furniture, which he/she must describe. The first would be to fully adhere to the codes and conventions of mimetic movement and to notice the new relationships of one's bodily connections if the boundaries of these 'rules' were to be pushed but not broken, therefore achieving new and informative experiences through each new performance of the work whilst simultaneously communicating the choreographers intended message. The second would be to consider the mimetic movement as 'dance' rather than mime, for the item of furniture is imaginary not reality. In this instance the performer would carry out the movement in the 'style' from which it originated (mimetic) but this method may potentially lead to a less rigorous attention to detail. For instance a 'fixed point' (the gesturing limb is held still in space whilst the rest of the body moves around it) may be carried out without true mental consideration of the object which the limb is conceptually resting on, in the belief that an audience is watching the only tangible thing on stage, in this instance the performer. However, with lack of consideration for the principal origins of the movement material, any new discoveries made by the performer in relation to his/her movement will not link as directly to the choreographer's intension for the work. It could also be stated that in this instance the performer is less cognitively engaged as he/she gives presidency to their own movement over the space, which he/she is engaging with. Since one's own movement (after years of training) is almost automatic due to embodied experiential knowledge, his/her cognition is not being challenged fully. In this case the research of this paper thus far would suggest that the performer's presence on stage would be considerably diminished.

Reinelt and Roach write:

One of the major moves of both post-structuralist semiotics and deconstruction is the redefinition of subjectivity: In place of the notion of a free autonomous self [the performer] who “speaks” as the origin of meaning, writing itself arises as always already existing, positioning “selves” in a complex network of cultural and linguistic markers, always prior to any particular utterance; thus the language of écriture, textuality and writing as something that constructs and marks subjects instead of something they themselves execute.²²

This statement is extremely pertinent to dance performance, especially in consideration of the production of stage presence. It suggests that a performer is not the speaker of a work; rather the work constructs and marks the performer. For instance during the mime section of *The Drawing Room*, a post-structuralist approach might suggest that the performer’s role is not simply to deliver the movement material but to engage with the signified concepts to such a degree that his/her body and its actions act as an integral piece of the system that is the dance piece, rather than a tool to present the ideas of the choreographer. In this instance it may be argued that the performer experiences the work on a deeper and slightly altered level each time, a process which manifests itself in his/her bodily movements but also in the texture of stage presence.

22 Reinelt J.G. & Roach J.R. 1992, 112.

To conclude, post-structuralism has allowed access to the nature of stage presence from a new area of research. Although often described as an alternative to structuralism, the study of post-structuralism offers closely connected beliefs, which broaden one's understanding of the process of live performance. Barthes' research surrounding the notion of readerly and writerly texts permits the performer to take ownership of his/her role within a work and explore the potential for change within a context. The philosophy of hermeneutics has offered substantial research in relation to the development of the relationship between a dancer and the signified concept with which he/she deals, allowing insight into the notion of perceiving and therefore offering aid to the development of stage presence.

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Ioana Jucan: Enduring Performance – Performer's Notes on Cabinet of Cynics 1

Performance Concept

Cabinet of Cynics 1: Endure is the first part of a trilogy of performance pieces for stage and screen. A collaboration between performance artist Ioana Jucan and visual artist Rebecca Henriksen, it explores the boundaries and crossings between theatre performance and installation art, as well as ways of inhabiting the territory that emerges between the stage and the screen in live performance. It draws on the resources of theatricality and brings together elements of animation, choreographed movement, video, and sculpture, in order to address a series of questions concerning:

- One's conditions of living: What does it mean for one to fall from a screen on a stage and to habituate oneself to new ways of being not-at-home in-between a screen and a stage?
- One's possibilities of action: What does one do if one wakes up one day in a world that suddenly looks strange though familiar?
- One's attitude towards the world: How can one (continue to) live if one wakes up one day and suddenly realizes that there is something terribly wrong with the world?

Combining theory with life experience and story-telling, *Cabinet of Cynics 1: Endure* is a meditation on how several themes intersect in the contemporary world: habits of thinking and rituals of living characteristic of the capitalist form of life; relationships and how they work (or don't) today; freedom and dependence; and endurance as a paradoxical knotting together of the immutable and the possibility of change.

A (Theatrical) Position

The performance piece¹ deliberately approaches these themes from a specific position: that of the figure of the cynic, with its double valence. Present-day cynicism presupposes a relation of cruel optimism, as defined by Lauren Berlant: cruel optimism is “a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic”.² At play here is a chronic sense of stuckness – chronic because it is a matter of a “disease of time”.³ But present-day cynicism is more than this. In Peter Sloterdijk's words, “present-day cynics are borderline melancholics, who can keep their symptoms of depression under control and can remain more or less able to work.”⁴ Thus, the present-day cynic is depressed but not so depressed as not to be able to work: s/he remains caught up in the capitalist system of excessive production and helps keep it running.

1 As a side-note, the title of the trilogy, *Cabinet of Cynics*, is inspired by the title of a section of Peter Sloterdijk's book, *Critique of Cynical Reason*.

2 Berlant 2011, 24.

3 Berlant 2011, 103.

4 Sloterdijk 1987, 5.

Paulo Virno sees cynicism as the defining “emotional situation” of the post-Fordist world – not “a passing psychological rippling, but a characteristic relation with one’s own being in the world”.⁵ Cynicism arises as a reaction to the constant and seemingly inescapable encounter with immaterial signs and abstractions in daily life as well as to “the chronic instability of forms of life and linguistic games”⁶ characteristic of the late capitalist form of life. More specifically, “at the base of contemporary cynicism lies the fact that men and women first of all experience rules, far more often than ‘facts,’ and far earlier than they experience concrete events”.⁷ At play here is a temporary, yet repeated, refusal and even inability to “inhabit the midst of life” (to extrapolate Nigel Thrift’s expression⁸), to insistently inhabit the world in the present moment. Sloterdijk links this condition to a structure of constant postponement at the heart of the late capitalist system of excessive production.⁹ He writes:

On earth, existence has “nothing to search for” except itself, but where cynicism rules, we search for everything, but not for existence (*Dasein*). Before we “really live,” we always have just one more [thing] to attend to, just one more precondition to fulfill, just one more temporarily more important wish to satisfy, just one more account to settle. And with this just one more and one more and one more arises the structure of postponement and indirect

5 Virno 2004, 87.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Thrift 2008, 14.

9 Sloterdijk wrote these thoughts in the early 1980s but his insights, I suggest, are still relevant today.

living that keeps the system of excessive production going. The latter, of course, always knows how to present itself as an unconditionally “good end” that deludes us with its light as though it were a real goal but that whenever we approach it recedes once more into the distance.¹⁰

To search for existence, to “really live,” means to let things be, to allow them to happen, without seeking to constantly predetermine their being.

Yet, there is another dimension to the figure of the cynic of interest in *Cabinet of Cynics*. An exquisite embodiment of it is Diogenes – possibly one of the first performance artists of all times. Diogenes is the “world citizen,” outsider yet belonging to the (in fact, any) present situation, “plebeian, realistic, sensually joyful,” the one who enjoys to “leap into life”.¹¹ Diogenes is the one with presence of mind and minimal needs.¹² Diogenes is the master of literalness, the being bent upon – and maybe caught up in – concreteness as well as upon/in the reality of movement. Kierkegaard captures this dimension of the figure in the beginning of his book on *Repetition* as follows:

Diogenes, as everybody knows, stepped forth as an opponent. He *stepped* forth literally, for he said not a word, but merely walked several times back and forth, thinking that thereby he had sufficiently refuted those [Eleatic, movement-denying] philosophers.¹³

10 Sloterdijk 1987, 194.

11 Sloterdijk 1987, 194, 178, 179.

12 Sloterdijk 1987, 169.

13 Kierkegaard 1941, 3; brackets added.

As a side note, this position, Diogenes’s, is indeed a political one, only that politics now comes to be understood as “that activity in which one has to be ready for anything”¹⁴, and also ready to contest anything that does not feel quite right.

The figure of the cynic, with its double valence, is intimately imbricated with performance. For instance, Erving Goffman identifies two extremes of the belief in the part one is playing¹⁵, of the belief in one’s own performance. One extreme he terms “sincere:” this is the case when the performer is taken in by her/his performance. The other he terms “cynical:” this is the case when “the individual has no belief in his own act and no ultimate concern with the beliefs of his audience”¹⁶. But these two directions map quite neatly onto the two valences of the figure of the cynic as described earlier. The first has to do with what performers sometimes call “being in the moment” – in other words, being truthful to one’s own doing, caught up with(in) the concrete situation one exists in at a given moment. The second one involves taking a distance from one’s own doing while doing it, and yet continuing to do it. Both these directions intersect in performance art, which, as Annette Arlander justly observes¹⁷, has a particular concern with the self – either as self-portraiture or through the use of the self as material to create performances. Either way, in performance art the self becomes a framing device and its performance gets enacted in the stretch that opens between the aforementioned two dimensions of the figure of the cynic.

14 Sloterdijk 1987, 169.

15 Goffman 1956, 10-11.

16 Goffman 1956, 10.

17 Arlander 2011, 8-10.

Some Concepts in Performance (A beginning)

Cabinet of Cynics 1: Endure takes performance and performance art seriously. The piece evokes and enacts the aforementioned senses of the figure of the cynic – some more subtly, others more explicitly – in order to gesture towards (potentially) different ways of being in these late (late?) capitalist times. Some of these ways of being are complicit with the capitalist form of life, while others are resistant to it – or, at least, they appear so. The performance piece begins with a quotation from Peter Handke’s play *Voyage to the Sonorous Land*, projected on the two screens that mark two of the boundaries of the performance space:

ACTOR If there is anything I’ve known since I was a child, without the help of a teacher, it is that there is nothing in this world one can *have*; not you, not anyone. I am an enthusiastic have-not.¹⁸

This condition, of the actor as have-not, brings to mind Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s insights into “The Paradox of the Actor” as defined by Diderot:

One must oneself be nothing, have nothing proper to oneself except an equal aptitude for all sorts of things, roles, characters, functions, and so on. The paradox states a law of impropriety, which is also the very law of mimesis: only a man without qualities, the being without properties or

18 Handke 1996, 15.

specificity, the subjectless subject (absent from himself) is able to present or produce the general.¹⁹

At play here is a practice of the self, which involves a finding (of one-self) that is also a leaving (an absencing from one’s self, from one’s subjecthood). It is a way of being in the moment – being without the will to possess (possession and possessing(s) are at the heart of capitalism), without laying property claims to what one encounters, to what one experiences. It is also a mode of being open to what there is. Such a way of being has been a horizon, an aspiration, in the creation process of *Cabinet of Cynics 1: Endure*. The movement onstage, in-between the two screens displaying videos of the two other performers playing “I” (who only appear onscreen); the use of objects in the performance; the interaction between the Performer-I (played by myself) and the Non-Performer (played by Rebecca Henriksen) onstage; all these grew out of an experimentation with what being without having, without the will to possess, might mean and how it may be enacted in live performance.

It also grew out of experimentation with yet another way of being, in tension with the first. This is a way of being predicated upon calculation, the predetermination of what is to come, the constant negotiation with the others. It is instantiated in practices pervasive today, such as (to point out but a few): list-making as a mode of organizing daily life; negotiating with others how one spends one’s time together with them; calculating costs and benefits in one’s relationships with others; (economic, scientific, etc.) modeling²⁰ and

19 Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 258-259.

20 Models, like global climate models, for example, are supposed to both explain and predict. They supposedly help us to make sense of a world that is increasingly

risk assessment; “the manipulation of genetic systems; pesticides; growth hormones, the rapid exhaustion of species too costly to genetically manipulate (e.g., marine life)”²¹; and so on.

Cabinet of Cynics I: Endure seeks to put into play these two ways of being at two different levels (or scales). At the level of the individual, it follows several – sometimes intersecting, yet always incomplete – storylines: for instance, that of a woman’s dilemma as to whether to give birth to her child in a world with which there is something plainly wrong; the dilemma of what to do with a three-billion dollar coin accidentally found in the street (searched for by the police and state authorities) and the (cynical?) decision to make a wish and throw it in the water. The other is the level of nature and the environment (broadly construed), damaged under the pressures of capital (the issue of toxic waste, for instance, is present in the piece). It has to do with the forces that keep things together and those that break them apart. Styrofoam, used in various ways (as musical instrument, as disintegrating matter, as hyperobject, as stand-in for a baby, as material for the Citizen of the World sculptural object, etc.) and acquiring a metaphorical dimension throughout the performance, is one of the links between these two levels.

complex and to cope with unpredictability – or, in other words, with its constant crises. The blurb for a course on Model Thinking to be offered on the online courses platform *courseera* this summer emphasizes that “people who think with models consistently outperform those who don’t” (Page, 2013, online). In other words, models “make us better thinkers,” for: “Models help us to better organize information – to make sense of that fire hose or hairball of data (choose your metaphor) available on the Internet. improve our abilities to make accurate forecasts. They help us make better decisions and adopt more effective strategies. They even can improve our ability to design institutions and procedures.” (Page, 2013, online) And, by helping us make “better decisions,” they also give us the sense (or illusion) of being sovereign subjects.

21 Crocker 2001, 64.

The theme of endurance, with its multiple senses, is another link. It appears in the performance’s concern with enduring objects that pose ecological threats. These are human-made objects that won’t go away. Timothy Morton calls them “hyperobjects” and describes them as follows in a citation re-cited in *Cabinet of Cynics 1*:

Alongside global warming, “hyperobjects” will be our lasting legacy. Materials from humble Styrofoam to terrifying plutonium will far outlast current social and biological forms. We are talking about hundreds and thousands of years. Five hundred years from now, polystyrene objects such as cups and takeout boxes will still exist. Ten thousand years ago, Stonehenge didn’t exist. Ten thousand years from now, plutonium will still exist. Hyperobjects do not rot in our lifetimes. They do not burn without themselves burning.²²

And then there is the question of how nature and the self can endure in the face of such enduring (often toxic) threats. The sense of endurance at play here is that of continuing, or persisting through time, in spite of – and, perhaps, because of – transformation and change. The subject who is nothing, the have-not, the subjectless subject who finds oneself by leaving one’s self behind, endures in this sense of endurance: s/he/it persists (only) by way of transformation and change.

It should be no surprise that the enduring subjectless subject is (potentially) the performer, the actor *par excellence*. For, as it became

22 Morton 2010, 130.

apparent to me in the creation process of *Cabinet of Cynics 1*, endurance is at the heart of performance. It has to do with a non-linear temporality in which to be present, to be in the moment, means to be both anchored in the concrete and open towards the general, where concreteness defines an “orientation to the historical,” as Theodor Adorno conceived of it (through Benjamin)²³, but the historical plays out within a specific form of life. In other words, to be present, to be in the moment, means being both backwards and forwards, at the same (non-linear) time. Rebecca Schneider perhaps gestures towards this idea in her *Performing Remains*, in which she thinks through “remains” not solely “as object or document material, but also as the immaterial labor of bodies engaged in and with that incomplete past: bodies striking poses, making gestures, voicing calls, reading words, singing songs, or standing witness”²⁴.

The performer’s labor is indeed immaterial, sometimes to the point of her/his exhaustion (as is the case in *Cabinet of Cynics 1*): it consists in the performance worker’s “capacities to make something out of nothing”.²⁵ And it is a form of labor performed at the level of subjectivity, for “the ‘raw material’ of immaterial labor is subjectivity and the ‘ideological’ environment in which this subjectivity lives and reproduces”²⁶. In this regard, the form of work the performer engages in seemingly coincides with the dominant form of labor in contemporary post-Fordist times – “immaterial labor” (according to scholars like Maurizio Lazzarato). Yet, maybe there is potential in this form of labor not yet actualized in these post-Fordist times

23 Adorno 1991, 226.

24 Schneider 2011, 33.

25 Schneider 2012, 156-7. This is not to deny, however, that this labor is performed through the workers’ bodies, which are not immaterial.

26 Lazzarato, online.

in which immaterial labor is used to keep the late capitalist system predicated upon profit-making running. This hypothesis remains to be further explored, maybe in another performance.

A Call to Endurance (Excerpted from the performance)

We make things last but not things that we do with each other or for each other. They're called relationships. Like styrofoam - make it go away and you can't. But you and me together - make us last, and you can't. Because if I make myself a gift to you and you a gift to me we just end up possessing each other. And if we do end up lasting together, it's because we use each other so much that we get used to each other. It's all a negotiation. Let's have a conversation. Talk past midnight and delight in each other's words and make love till dawn. No, no, no. We fear we might get lost in an infinite conversation. Who we are gets lost, we fear. So we continue to lay claim to each other as though we were each other's property. So we break up. But have we ever been together? It's disgusting how explicit I have come to be.

Re-placing an End (To be continued)



Image 1: Cabinet 1_Citizen of the World (Sculptural object made of styrofoam).



Image 2: Cabinet 1_Performer-I and Citizen of the World.



Image 3: Cabinet 1_The body at work.



Image 4: Cabinet 1_Birthing styrofoam.



Image 5: Cabinet 1_A call to endurance, with styrofoam..



Image 6: Cabinet 1_Styrofoam, disintegrating.



Image 7: Cabinet 1_Performer's body laboring in-between screens.



Image 8: Cabinet 1_Performer-I with 3 billion dollar coin in hand.



Image 9: Cabinet 1_Blending images, between stage and screen.
All photos @ Rebecca Henriksen.

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James Andean: Research Group in Interdisciplinary Improvisation – Goals, Perspectives, and Practice

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The Group, photo Antti Ahonen.

Introduction

The Research Group in Interdisciplinary Improvisation began as a University of the Arts pilot project in September 2012. The original mandate of the group was to bring together students and practitioners from the many fields of artistic practice represented at the Arts University, such as sound, theatre, music, studio art (drawing, painting, etc.), performance art, dance, film/video, and so on, and to explore improvisation as a cross-disciplinary practice: Where do we find common ground? Where do we find significant differences in perspective, or challenges in improvised communication? How can these be explained? Are there any broader implications, extending beyond the scope of improvisation practice?

The group met weekly over the following year¹, with the pilot project phase culminating in a weekend workshop and public performance at Esitystaiteen Keskus. The group has since given public performances at Vapaan Taiteen Tila, at Pasila railway station as part of the University of the Arts opening week in January 2013, and at the Carpa Colloquium on Artistic Research in Performing Arts, with a number of further performances and research presentations planned, including the Art Häme festival and the Hollo Institute research symposium, both in October 2013.

Improvisation

In discussing the group's work, we should perhaps begin by clarifying the central terms a bit, beginning with the group's attitude towards improvisation. A range can be claimed in improvisation between 'maximum freedom' at one end, and 'maximum constraint'

1 And will continue to do so, with the second stage of the University of the Arts pilot projects, in autumn 2013 and spring 2014.

at the other. How realistic either of these extremes is, is clearly open to debate, as is how accurate it really is to polarize them in this manner; for one thing, 'free improvisation' as it is practiced in many communities today in fact involves quite a number of constraints, or at least conventions – if not for performance material, then at least for performance behaviour. Then of course there is the issue of 'freedom through constraint' – of performers who find maximum freedom through maximum constraint.

Nevertheless, we can make some claim to the legitimacy of this range in improvisation, between freedom at one end – no pre-determined constraints, or at least none beyond those unspoken laws governing the community's general practice – through increasing degrees of constraint: from broad formal arcs, to rules of interaction, the specification of individual roles, the detailing of particular material, all the way to maximum constraint – possibly for example the use of a fully notated score, although this opens up a line of debate around the attempt to present improvisation and composition as polar opposites that is perhaps best avoided here.

To date, the Research Group has been situated entirely at the furthest tip of the 'free' end of the improvisation spectrum: the majority of the group's performances are entirely spontaneously generated, without any pre-conceived notions of form or material, beyond the broadest agreements regarding total duration. For some group members, this is a matter of principle; however, it is also a practical issue, as this stance offers a clearer position from which to examine core issues of improvisation in theory and practice, as it sidesteps the need to disentangle improvisation from other performance elements. However, there are more sides to improvisation than only this one polar position, and it is likely that the group will move towards exploring more moderate improvisation paradigms in the near future.

Interdisciplinarity

Next, we should consider the group's attitude towards interdisciplinarity. When we first proposed the project, we envisioned an approach centred on the communication between artists and performers from different disciplines. How does a musician interact with a dancer? How does an actor interact with a painter? Examples of imagined points of research interest include: differences between the spatial organization of improvised performance on the part of moving participants, such as dancers or actors, and the temporal organization of musicians, sound artists, and others; or, challenges in integrating time-based performers – dancers, musicians, actors, etc. – with the arts that more typically take place 'outside' of time, or which are typically non-performative, such as painting, drawing, and so on.

We very quickly found, however, that the collective had a mind of its own, with a very different perspective on interdisciplinarity. Instead of remaining within the confines of our own disciplines, and attempting to communicate across the borders, we quickly discovered that instead, the group was gravitating towards a central point, where our various practices met, mingled, and combined, creating a single performance practice, that clearly draws on aspects of theatre, sound, visual art, and so on, but is somehow either none of these, or all at once. Group members found themselves performing a combined practice, with a given individual shifting emphasis somewhat, from moment to moment, in the direction of a particular art form or another, without ever – or only rarely – taking a clear position within a single discipline.

That being said, however, we have none of us entirely escaped our history. In the same action undertaken by different performers, one catches a glimpse, at least some of the time, of an increased

focus on that performance action as theatre, or as sonic art, or as performance art, or dance, and so on, possibly revealing, to the attentive spectator, something of that performer's background.

We hold this shift away from 'communication between disciplines' and towards a 'disciplinary melting pot' as a relevant research result, although there are still a great many implications to be explored. As a result, it has been pointed out that perhaps the group's activity might better be described, not so much as 'inter-disciplinary', but rather as 'non-disciplinary'.

'Expert' vs. 'non-expert'

This 'melting pot' approach to artistic disciplines raises issues of 'expert' vs. 'non-expert' practice, with a range of implications, both positive and negative. It is clear that each of us, thanks to our backgrounds, training, education, and experience, can be considered 'expert' in one, or possibly even more than one, of the artforms included under the group's large tent of practices. Obviously, however, none of us can claim to be expert in all of them; and so, as we navigate this collective central zone where all of these practices meet, it is inevitable that there will be aspects of each individual's performance that reflect that person's long history and established expertise in a given artform, and more limited expertise in some other artforms.

However, despite the obvious qualities of expert practice, there are in fact noticeable benefits to both of these situations, particularly in improvisation. While one is certainly more competent, and importantly, more confident, in one's own practice, there is also the risk of falling into established routines, habits picked up over the years, embodied patterns, and so on, which can be stubbornly difficult to shake off, and which will tend to guide improvised per-

formance along channels carved by years of practice, rehearsal, and performance. Engaging with performance practices from other artforms largely avoids such challenges, possibly allowing the performer to remain fresh, open to the possibilities of the moment, to stay focused and engaged, committed to their performance through the challenge and insecurity of less familiar terrain, and at times allowing a level of naive honesty more difficult to attain in practices in which one is more confident and self-assured.

Of course, such areas of non-expert practice are clearly not without their dangers. Not only are there the difficulties of expressing oneself using methods or materials with which one is less adept, but, very importantly, there is an important risk of falling into clichés, which might be more easily recognised as such by expert practitioners.

However, despite such pitfalls, and by being aware of such risks, group members have commonly been drawn towards the kind of combined practice described above, allowing us all to navigate freely and flexibly between our areas of expertise and those other practices in which we are less proficient, but with which we can nevertheless engage with conviction and honesty.



James at Lapsody, phot Antti Ahonen.

Film and video

One particularly interesting character in our practice has been the inclusion of film and video. With the introduction of a camera to interdisciplinary improvisation, the first questions raised relate to the idea of documentation as performance. In such a context, it is perhaps impossible – or at least unlikely or unnatural – for the group to treat the documenter as ‘invisible’, as one might commonly do in the attempt to grant the camera an ostensibly ‘objective’ perspective. Instead, the documentarian is quickly integrated into the performance, thereby re-interpreting the act of documentation as a performance act in its own right. As the other performers engage with the documentarian, one encounters a number of levels of interaction: Are the other performers interacting with the

documentarian, performer to performer? Or are they instead interacting with the camera, and with the ‘imagined’ document? Or, if the footage is being projected, are they instead interacting with this projected footage – with the ‘virtual’ group, or perhaps even with their own virtual self?²

While this demonstrates a first stage of integration with the group, at first, a camera nevertheless stubbornly remains a camera, thereby seeming to cling more strongly to a trace of disciplinarity regardless of the wandering artistic vision of the person holding it. However, over time, even this stubborn tool has begun to loosen its reins, revealing itself to be equally capable as a tool for sonic performance, for dance, for performance art, and has finally perhaps begun to shake off its disciplinary rigidity.

‘Adequate multimodality’

Interdisciplinary performance is not without its particular challenges, for both performers and audience. To begin with, we might refer to Ola Stockfelt’s term ‘adequate listening’: “the acquired skill of listening to music of a certain genre according to its ‘rules’... as an essential requirement in order for communication to ensure reciprocal communication between performers and listeners”.³ Interdisciplinary performance essentially compounds this problem significantly, in that it no longer simply calls for ‘adequate listening’, but simultaneously requires ‘adequate viewing’ – indeed, a number of diverse ‘adequate viewings’ – or perhaps ‘adequate multimodality’: it requires a reasonable degree of understanding

² See Harries, 2011, 33-34; Emerson, 2007, 35-60; and Benjamin, 1970, 211-244.

³ Stockfelt 2004, 91.

and knowledge of rather a wide range of art forms, performance practices, languages and vocabularies. While of course it is not necessarily a prerequisite to fully understand an art form in order to appreciate a work, interdisciplinary performance (and interdisciplinary improvisation in particular) does seem to invite a certain degree of misunderstanding or miscommunication. This is in part because a given spectator is unlikely to be fluent in all the various practices and backgrounds being referenced by the group's performers at any given time, but also because this multiplication of simultaneous practices significantly increases the probability that an action performed from a particular performance position will be perceived or interpreted through the lens of a completely different position or practice. As an example, actions intended as sonic performance gestures by group members from musical or sound art backgrounds are very often interpreted by audience members as theatre or performance art actions; thus, where the performer intended a primarily sonic contribution⁴, with any theatrical qualities as purely secondary artefacts, this is commonly reversed in reception, with audiences assuming a theatrical intention, often ignoring or sidelining the performer's intended sound performance as irrelevant secondary artefacts. This situation risks leaving the audience somewhat baffled, or worse, leading them to assume a lack of ability on the performer's part, as the act remains unsatisfying as 'theatre' or 'performance art', while its artistry as a sonic act goes unrecognized. This can place a heavy burden on the group's performers, due to the resulting requirement for their performanc-

4 For example, the dragging of a chair across the floor for its purely sonic qualities, regardless of any theatrical implications.

es to communicate and satisfy simultaneously on multiple artistic planes – in the example given, both as sound and as theatre.

Such complications are easily enough avoided in interdisciplinary collaborations in which performers remain identifiably rooted in a single practice, but remains an inevitable challenge whenever lines are blurred, dissolved, or negated, as in the Research Group's general practice. However, rather than viewing this issue as an unfortunate predicament, it could be argued that in part it is this very challenge that has drawn the group to explore this territory.

'Performance-as-research' or 'Performance vs. research'?

A few comments should be made on the group's approach to the notion of 'research'⁵. Performance as artistic research raises a number of deeply challenging questions: Is there a line where performance and research meet? If so, where? Or, are 'performance' and 'research' one and the same? What do we know or learn through performance? What is best studied from inside the practice, and what from outside? Is there something to gain by framing performance as research, and if so, what? Or does this constitute an unnecessary or undesirable distortion of the essentially ephemeral qualities of the performance moment?

Our group is primarily involved, not so much with 'practice-based research' as with 'practice-as-research'⁶, and we believe our results, while perhaps at times difficult to quantify, nevertheless

5 Primary touchstones for the group's approach to artistic research include Borgdorff, 2012, and Hannula, Suoranta & Vadén, 2005. Wassler & Bresler 1996 is also of relevance regarding the group's approach to interdisciplinary work.

6 See Riley & Hunter, 2009; Arlander, 2012, 152-162; and Porkola, 2011, 186.

provide, if not ‘conclusions’ per se, rather a wide range of engaged observation, leading directly to new lines of questioning⁷. All hypotheses, observations, and informed extrapolations drawn by the group stem directly from the group’s practice⁸; this is perhaps clear in the way in which the research questions proposed in the original call for participation have evolved into new questions stemming more directly from the group’s practice and findings.

There is, however, a nagging doubt that sneaks in here. One observation of our practice, and one which deserves closer consideration, is the remarkable sense of collective and community that has developed. While this is of course a marvellous thing, it perhaps reveals a slightly problematic side to the group’s practice: to what extent can we really claim to be practicing research-based exploration of interdisciplinary improvisation? Can we really, in fact, claim to be exploring anything outside of ourselves? Is the group, in fact, primarily exploring a world of social, interactive, and collaborative potential, whose implications are limited to the detailed world of the particular network of interactions among only this precise group of individuals?

While we do not have a direct answer to this question, it is safe to say that, while it is good to keep this issue in mind, there are nevertheless aspects of the group’s research outcomes whose relevance potentially extends beyond this group alone, and it is worth mentioning a few of them here.

7 See Pakes, 2004.

8 In this, the group’s working methodology is very similar to that described in Andean & Decoster-Taivalkoski, 2012, 13-15.

Performing space

One of the central research focuses that have sprung directly from our experience in our performance practice is the extent to which the performance space determines the performance. This claim moves beyond suggesting that space influences or helps shape a performance, about which I think there would be little debate, further onwards to the claim that the performance space is in fact a, or even *the*, primary determining factor in shaping a performance.⁹ Out of practical necessity, the group's sessions have moved between a number of rooms and facilities of the various academies of the University of the Arts; while it is quite predictable that each space will afford certain possibilities for a given improvisation, we have been struck by the extent to which the same group of people, with the same set of interests and priorities, produce results that are so heavily determined by each of these disparate performance spaces.

In part as a direct result of this observation, the group's practice has increasingly shifted from 'performing in a space' to 'performing a space': if the performance space has so strong an impact on the performance, perhaps the performers might use this space as the focus of the performance itself. This takes place both in a very concrete manner – using the performance opportunities offered by a room and its contents: the walls, the floor, the plumbing, furniture, random objects, the lights, and so on – as well as in a broader sense of context, environment, and situation.

This latter point includes an implication not only of space, but of time: if one is 'performing a context', then one is 'performing the moment', as it were – a performance without an anchor, which

9 See for example Massiani, 2013.

has no 'objective' existence of its own, but which is completely and ephemerally linked to the moment of its creation, not simply because that is the moment in which a performance has taken place, but because it is the moment itself that has been performed.



John at lapsody, photo Antti Ahonen.



Rania and Marek at Lapsody, photo Antti Ahonen.

From private practice to public performance

Let us turn, then, to the notion of ‘performance’. The group identifies itself first and foremost as a ‘research group’ – research, however, which is carried out largely through performance¹⁰, most of which takes place in the privacy of the group’s weekly meetings. As the group’s practice continues to evolve, however, we are increasingly faced with the challenge of translating this deeply personal, situated performance practice, developed and elaborated in the private, intimate context of our weekly meetings, into the sphere of the public performance.

This translation is not an obvious or easy one. Challenges range from simple practicalities – the sudden need for a stage area and the audience’s seated perspective, forcing a ‘stage front’ onto performances that have in private been entirely fluid – to much deeper issues, such as the need to communicate beyond the group, difficulties in broadcasting minimal performance or micro-gesture for a large enough percentage of a distanced audience, or formal questions that have less relevance in private practice, but are critical in guiding and directing an audience’s experience of a particular performance.¹¹

This leads immediately to a first level of interrogation: Why perform publicly? And if we do, then for whom? Can we really claim to be a performance group, if the bulk of our practice is only amongst ourselves? To a significant extent our practice seems more like ‘exploring a state of being’, or ‘exploring a state of being *together*’, than ‘performing’. As such, in a public performance situation, are the other people present really ‘spectators’ or ‘audience’, or are

10 See Riley & Hunter, 2009.

11 Central here is the contrast between “interactive” and “transactional” feedback loops; see Eskelinen & Transtad, 2003, 200, quoted in Harries, 2011, 126.

they automatically and immediately implicated as co-performers, with equal roles in performing and determining the time and space of the performance?¹²

More generally, however, the group's public performances increasingly feel like only a brief glimpse behind the curtain: a mere artefact of the 'real' work, which can only be fully appreciated from within the performance, and which is constructed slowly, in layers, each performance session making its contribution to a work that builds slowly, over weeks, over months.

The group has developed a number of proposals that attempt to address this disparity. These include:

- a more intimate and personal performance paradigm, for very small audiences of perhaps only a few people, that integrates audience members into the performance;
- a 'micro-performance' paradigm, in which any given performer is concerned only with those audience members nearest to them, allowing for a range of local, small-scale performances and performance areas within a single event;
- an open-doors practice, allowing people to freely attend the group's weekly performance sessions, free to come and go as they please, thereby to some extent perhaps breaking down the distinction between private practice and public performance; or,

12 See for example Massiani, 2013.

- a public performance practice which is significantly distinct from our private practice in terms of process, that references this private practice by using scenes and moments drawn from those sessions as catalysts for semi-improvised performances.

However, the first proposal being explored by the group around this issue, beginning with our performance at LAPSody 2013, is the development of a performance context that combines and blurs the line between past and present, between public and private. Short bursts of video culled from the group's many meetings and performances over the past year are projected throughout the performance; members are then free at any given moment to ignore this projected material, or to engage and interact with these past traces of our process. This allows us to extend the reflection upon the weight of our performed history by mixing and combining our improvisation practice with vocabularies and quotations drawn from our past work, sometimes as a mere passing reference, sometimes as a core theme for development and exploration, without interfering with the free improvisation that is at the heart of the group's mandate, while also offering brief, subjective windows into the group's practice behind closed doors. We hope thereby to achieve a balance between the ephemeral nature of the act of improvisation, and the cumulative weight of shared, performed experience and history.

Through this and the other proposals described above, the group hopes to continue its exploration of interdisciplinary improvisation, and to continue to tackle the simultaneous challenges of performance and research, hopefully following through on the

questions exposed to date, while remaining open to those questions which may yet reveal themselves.



Iipo and Alejandro at Lapsody, photo Antti Ahonen.

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PART III Other essays

Rania Khalil: Things you didn't decide – Reflections on a site-specific performance in Palestine

Development

In a human embryo, the digits of our hands and feet are apparent at eight weeks. At week nine, all essential organs have begun forming and in week ten, our eyelids are formed and open. In week eleven, they close again and stay closed for many months. In the twentieth week of gestation, the reproductive systems of female fetuses are complete containing all of the eggs this female will have for her entire lifetime. So with my mothers eyes closed and her feet and fingers formed, the egg that made me was made in my grandmother's womb in Cairo Egypt, in the year 1945.

This essay is a reflection on a street performance I made in Palestine, in the year 2011. It is a part poetic, part academic memoir on grandparents and the present, as well as the story of a rather naive performance action. It reflects on this performance, which opened in the two years after making and exhibiting it, through the act of writing on it, as part of my greater doctoral artistic research into the topic of memory. In relation to this subject, I use memoir as one of my key tools for research. While our emerging discipline seeks new tools for conducting and presenting research in 2013, I am interested in memoir's use of the first person (a position who's respectability was fought for by a past emerging discipline – feminism) as an important alternative to the confident, discursive yet

often equally unreliable presentations of History and traditional Academia.

This essay reflects on the unfolding of time and the ways in which events are recorded and arranged by those doing the remembering. The larger investigation of my research focuses on embodied and post-colonial aspects of memory, regarding them as equally viable lenses through which to view events. As such, this particular essay reflects on *not quite knowing* in performance, and not quite knowing in advance, using writing as a tool to allow “knowledge” to reveal itself once experiments have been conducted. It thus uses itself (writing to become itself) to both learn about and reveal its contents. It uses different forms of writing to contend with the complexities of self reflexive writing as an artist-researcher, in parallel with revisiting a performance project created within the tense political climate of Palestine-Israel in Jerusalem, a project made in the same year that the Egyptian revolution was first unfolding where I was living in Cairo.

I use this essay to recall that time; it acts as a container for details. And I use this essay as I used my performance; a tool to remember Palestine.

First impressions of Jerusalem

The beautiful mountains of the Sinai which Egypt and Palestine/Israel share,

a Coca Cola machine outside of the room I was detained in for four hours upon arriving in the Tel Aviv airport.

The litter in the desert between the wall separating Israel and the West Bank.

Cats on the streets looking very different than Egyptian cats.

In Jerusalem they have rounder bodies and big, round eyes.

Security cameras everywhere: tucked into the brick ceilings of the Old City

whose stone steps I dragged my suitcase up.



Performances by Rania Khalil; (left) *Palestinian Puppet Piece*; New York City 2005; (right) *White Dove of Peace, It's Still Not Over*; Jerusalem, 2011 .

Introduction to the research

This essay addresses a problem common to artistic research, which I'll call the difference between *Pre-Designed Research* and *Reflective Research*. Usually in artistic research there is an object (say, the making of a performance by its director) that one sets out to examine. Often research design is done at the outset of the project by carefully defining its parameters, questions and the areas in which it seeks to intervene.

Yet what happens, as is often the case in early phases of a doctorate or master's degree, when there is not a clear question at the outset of one's undertaking? What if an artist does not know or understand her concept? What are to be made of intuitive practices, non-intellectual practices, or projects initially undertaken outside the sphere of academia, when the artist-researcher becomes interested in revisiting them? This sort of investigation is what I am calling *Reflective Research*. This article is concerned with this later mode.

In light of Reflective Research and as hinted to in the section on memoir above, the style of reportage in this essay is related to its findings: dialogues I had on the street and the ways in which I came to contextualize my research through writing comprise the knowledge produced through my street performance experiment. It and its research component is perhaps contextualized within the wide berth of the discipline of *Performance Studies*. It is a performance born of the friction between what is planned and what is learned, what is spontaneous and what is determined – not only by me, but by the context that surrounds it; in the case the Occupation of the city of Jerusalem and Palestine. Neither my actions nor my *mise en scene* can be examined in isolation.

Similarly, this essay touches on the idea of *site-specificity*, namely in performance art, the hazards and steep learning curves that attend it, as a mode of learning through performance making which inherently calls into question the context of the artist. Particular (yet not individual) to the region of Palestine-Israel are questions of territory and belonging, heritage and inheritance, land and human rights, human's rights to land, the right to be seen in certain places, as well as simply, to exist. Strangely in many ways site-specific street performances are also concerned with these questions. Lastly, this article is concerned with new modes of reportage, and in this way breaks from the style most associated with “academic” writing. In so doing, the reader is invited to find new ways of viewing information and research.

3 weeks in Jerusalem

On my first week in Jerusalem, an American father and son wearing Yarmulkes¹ asked me for directions to the Wailing Wall. I told them I had no idea what that was. It was Ramadan and the city of Jerusalem was a strange mixture of tourists, Palestinians and Israelis. Folks were fasting and hungry and I was too, as a show of politeness. I went to a Palestinian market at the gates of the old city to buy a sim card for my mobile phone. I got in a horrible fight with the vendor whom I felt was treating me as if I were an Israeli. I threw my phone on the ground in a fury.

Two weeks into my stay, an eleven-year-old Palestinian boy threw a rock into a security camera on the street of his house. He lived on the same street as Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, the foundation, which had invited me to Palestine. Folks there told me his father was in an Israeli prison and the boy had been acting out in the years since.

One night my host Lara and I walked back into Jerusalem from the bus from Ramallah. We'd had a relatively easy trip, waiting only a half an hour in the checkpoint. On a nighttime souk in the street two Palestinian vendors, side by side, sold kitchen utensils from China. They got in a fight with one another as we passed. I remember this scene as if it were on fire. One of these two vendors had his car parked behind his stand. We watched one of these lithe young men jump up and cross into his neighbor's stand. He picked up a chair and threw it into the other's car window.

1 A Yarmulke is the traditional head covering worn by Orthodox Jewish men.

Three weeks into my stay the young boy was arrested by Israeli soldiers. He'd taken off his scarf and showed his face to the camera before smashing it.

Parents and grandparents

There are two times in my life when I was asked this question just like this: "Where were your parents born and where were your grandparents born?" Both times were by Israeli security guards. The first time was in the Tel Aviv airport. The second time was on the Allenby bridge from Jordan to Palestine. The second time, I answered before a cue of Palestinians hoping to re-enter Palestine. I remember them lined up in veils of black carrying shopping bags. My answer was different on two different occasions.

When I was new to Israel and Israeli security guards, full of pride I told them that my parents were born in Cairo and my grandparents were born in Cairo. My answer earned me a four-hour-spot beside a Coca Cola machine in the airport, from where I was made to make frequent trips in and outside of the Israeli Security Office. Their questions went like this:

Why was I in Cairo and was I living in Cairo and what kind of degree do I have and what are my reasons for coming to Israel. What do I do in Egypt and what do I do in my life and what is my job and what schools did I graduate from. What do my parents do for a living and what year did they arrive in the United States and where are they now and where do I live in the United States and what do I do when I am there, and how long do I plan to stay in Cairo and did I participate in the Egyptian revolution. The officer's telephone rang.

What do I do and what do my parents do and where do I live in New York and what do I do for a living and why do I live in Cairo and why have I come to Israel and what is the address where you are staying and

what is the telephone number of your hosts and what do your parents do for a living and what street do you live in New York. I asked them what I had done to deserve all these questions. This is for the security of Israel the woman said.

When I had had enough of Israeli security guards in Jordan I told them that I was born in the U.S., that my parents were born in the U.S. and that my grandparents were born in the U.S. My US passport does not say my religion or where my grandparents were born. It does say many times and dates when Egyptian security guards stamped it, but it says this in Arabic, a language, which my young, female Israeli security guard could not read, so I lied about this too and said I'd just arrived from New York.

My grandparents and a few weeks in 1945

My maternal grandfather, born in Cairo, was an architect. My grandmother, born in Alexandria was a teacher in a French high school and later a member of Parliament and Minister of Education in Gamal Abdel Nasser's cabinet. I showed up in her womb, in my baby mother's egg in 1945. When I wanted to return to Cairo from Israel, two female Israeli guards took me into a dressing room with a cloth door and asked me to remove my pants. They sprinkled white powder on my belongings and put them through an xray machine.

In the month of March 1945, my newborn mother emerged in Cairo, the egg that would make me inside her baby womb. That month the American Army bombed Tokyo and killed 100,000 people, mostly civilians.² A month later in Germany, Adolf Hitler commit suicide and a week after that Germany surrendered. Three

² Historical events for the year 1945⁷ <http://www.historyorb.com/events/date/1945>
Last Modified: April 18, 2013.

months later, in June of that year, Americans dropped the Atomic Bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

Four years before 1945, marching troops into Egypt, Hitler had famously declared: “Alexandria is Mine!” Three years after 1945, UN peacekeepers in agreement with American president Harry Truman, signed an authorization creating the State of Israel. 250,000 Palestinians became refugees immediately.

Museums that commemorate loss near cemeteries

In between Israelis my age and their grandparents there is mass migration, turning wheels and disappearances. There are letters written in children’s hands, like the ones my friend Josh Cohen, who designed the puppets for *Palestinian Puppet Piece*, and I saw in a World War II Holocaust museum beside the Jewish cemetery in Prague. That cemetery with its hauntingly beautiful twisted stones was in use from the years 1439 until 1787.

The Mamilla Cemetery in Jerusalem is a cemetery that dates back to the 6th century. It is an ancient Muslim cemetery, one in which it is said that friends of the prophet Mohammed are buried. When I came to Jerusalem I walked through a large empty pool there, which was used to clean dead bodies before their burial. Today this cemetery, located in the Western part of Jerusalem, is being excavated by the state of Israel to build a museum called the “Museum of Tolerance”.

Peace treaty

As a child I remember Cairo full of women carrying bundles on their heads, and my grandmother serving me macaroni in her house. I remember donkeys and mercedes side by side in the roads and the

smell of something burning in summer, even now each summer this smell returns and I love it. At that time visiting Egypt in the 1980's, the recently ousted dictatorship of president Hosni Mubarak was just beginning. I remember the day the president before Mubarak, Anwar Sadat, was assassinated.

My mother in the States called her brother in Egypt. *What happened? It was bound to happen. Everyone hates this man.* Americans remember Anwar Sadat for signing the Camp David peace treaty with Israel, 1979. Egyptian economists remember Anwar Sadat for abolishing Egypt's socialist economy and replacing it with open market capitalism.

Walking around with a sign

In Jerusalem, lots of people walk around carrying signs with which to distinguish themselves from other tours and other tour guides. Still, I don't think this informed my idea to walk around around Jerusalem with a huge sign in the shape of a dove of peace.

I do remember sitting with my laptop in the middle of the Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art gallery. I was looking up the origins of the dove of peace. A biblical reference to Noah's ark, the dove of peace became iconic in the 20th century through an image by Pablo Picasso. I was shy to propose my idea to walk around the city with a large sign in the shape of white Dove of Peace. Bird motifs had riddled my art and performances in the past, and this image (I believe) had come to me related to an image from a shadow puppet performance piece I'd made many years earlier in 2005, called *Palestinian Puppet Piece*.

It was based on a line from this poem by a Palestine American woman I'd met years earlier: *When the woman was shot, the child*

turned beneath her heart. (Lisa Suheir Majaj, *These Words*.)³ The shadow puppet had a small fetus puppet in her belly, which we removed over the course of the three-minute play. The idea of wombs and pregnancy against tragic backdrops has always haunted me.

I experienced this white dove image as the starting point of my performance. It felt like something dreamlike and perhaps even inappropriate for my performance in Palestine, but it was the one that came and stayed in my mind.

History of the Mamilla shopping mall

Issa Freij is former wartime news cameraman. He's close to 50, Palestinian Christian and has lived in the old city of Jerusalem all his life. On our walk to film for the day, he told me about the place that existed before what is now the Mamilla shopping mall (just beside the Mamilla Cemetery) before Israel's victory in the war of 1967.

Here was a bicycle repair shop. I remember the old man who used to own it.

Here was a bakery, some of the city's most delicious bread. I used to come here for my mother in the mornings.

This was one of the main streets here in our city.

In the new Israeli mall we took some footage of me walking around with my sign in front of the American retail-clothing store *The Gap*.

3 Lisa Suhair Majaj, *These Words*, chapbook.



Street performance, *White Dove of Peace (It's Still Not Over)* Jerusalem, 2011.

Second impressions of Jerusalem

On the way to a dance studio in Jerusalem I see a strikingly handsome Palestinian man with green eyes being walked up a stone staircase. On either side of him are two Israeli soldiers. He has a small white string tied around his wrists.

Two conversations and bedside tables

While performing *White Dove of Peace (It's Still Not Over)* a woman from Holland came to me to ask about my sign. Why would I carry such a sign? On the contrary, she felt a lot of peace here, she told me. She'd come to "help" and was volunteering for elderly Israeli people in their homes. I asked her why not elderly Palestinians and she replied that she loved all people. I thought of old people, Palestinian and Israeli laying in their beds.

I thought of different kinds of beds belonging to old people and how they look. What is kept on these beside tables, medicines and glasses of water and maybe a photo in a frame? I thought for a

moment of a similarity between old people of Palestine and old people of Israel: unfamiliarity of bedside tables. For both there is a very small possibility that the bedside table beside them was their parents or grandparents.

Encounter with an American teenager

The next day of recording *White Dove of Peace (It's Still Not Over)*, Issa and I came across an American teenager wearing a Yarmulke (I know Americans by their accents; it's the same as mine) shouting at a Palestinian falafel vendor. He then started loudly singing a song in Hebrew. I was carrying my sign and walking across this tourist plaza at Jaffa Gate. I asked him why he was shouting. This is our homeland! he yelled. I asked him where his parents were from and where his grandparents were from. His answer was California and Russia.

Lessons from Pippa Bacca

Italian performance artist Pippa Bacca made a performance I heard of only after my performance in Palestine. It was called: *Brides on Tour*. In this piece, Bacca and fellow performance artist Sylvia Moro wore white wedding dresses and attempted to hitchhike from Italy to Israel to promote peace.⁴ The two went on separate journeys intending to meet in the Middle East. On the way, Bacca was raped and murdered in the cab of a truck in Istanbul.

A few thoughts went through my mind when I read about this performance. First, I thought of the ending of Bacca's piece as the

4 Povoledo, Elisabetta. "Pippa Bacca, an Italian Artist Killed During Performance Trip for Peace is Mourned". *New York Times*. Published: April 19, 2008.

ultimate performance art. What might have happened to Marina Abramovich or Yoko Ono had things not gone as planned.

The performance piece, a trip through nearly a dozen countries in the Balkans and the Middle East, many of them ravaged by war recently, was meant to underscore that “by overcoming differences and lowering the level of conflict,” individuals and cultures could come together, Ms. Moro said in a telephone interview.⁵

Bacca and Moro had planned to ceremonially and symbolically wash their white wedding dresses in water when they arrived to Israel, before an audience in a gallery in Tel Aviv. Bacca believed in the goodness of people and wanted the world to see this when she arrived from her trip, washing away traces of war, leaving her dress clean.

Remembering beginnings and endings

I'll remember Tel Aviv as the place where I began my trip to Palestine and the place where the airport is. I remember it as where I was first asked about where my grandparents were born and where my parents were born and the address of my home and the address of my hosts and my participation in the Egyptian revolution and why I had come to Israel. I'll remember trying to leave it, and having to take off my pants in a room with a cloth door and having my things sprinkled with white powder for an xray machine. I'll remember the things I had to tell myself to remind myself to stay calm while

5 Ibid.

this was happening, to stay centered and not lose my temper. I told myself that this is what innocent prisoners feel like and to think of those people in prison while I went through this and to try to feel connected to them. To remember that this world is an unjust place, and to just try to have as much dignity within myself as I could. I remembered a story someone had told me of Nelson Mandela and how he refused to let guards rob him of his dignity in a South African prison, this being the reason he emerged from thirty years in prison intact.

When I think of Palestine I remember standing in line for a checkpoint from Ramallah to Jerusalem, a fifteen minute distance that the majority of Palestinians cannot pass, with a man carrying a shopping bag full of fresh meats during Ramadan. The Israeli guards refused to let him bring the bag through the checkpoint and acquiescingly he left them at the gate. I wondered what his family ate for dinner that evening.

I think of his children and girl children and the girl children they have inside of them. Girls born in a country of checkpoints, monitored by girl Israeli security guards. I remember a Palestinian girl of about fifteen who stood patiently beside me on another checkpoint trip, asking me questions about the Egyptian Revolution while we waited two hours for Israelis to come to the gate on her way home from school.

I remember Bacca's dress, the one she wished to wash clean, like sixth century bodies in the pool in Mamilla Cemetery before their burial. A commissioner from the U.N. writes to the major of Jerusalem to ask where the skeletons of these bodies will be relocated to for the museum.

I remember another site-specific piece I saw in Jerusalem, visual artist Mona Hatoum's *Nablus Soap*, 1996⁶. Hatoum reproduced a map of the territories that were supposed to be returned to Palestine following the 1993 Oslo accords, into bars of soap with bright red pins. In a documentary related to this work⁷, I remember images of Israeli bulldozers moving through the old stone buildings of soap factories in the ancient Palestinian city of Nablus like water. This morning I read the news while fact checking for this essay – Palestinian farmers in Nablus were surprised this week after coordinating with the Israeli governate that the agricultural land they are waiting to harvest is being bulldozed for Israeli settlements⁸.

The white dress I wore for my performance hangs in my closet, I had it dry cleaned. I sometimes think of Bacca's performance when I see it, crumpled in the back of a truck, stained by the brutality of unexpected events, instead of washed clean in that art gallery in Tel Aviv.

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- 6 For more information on this work see <http://www.sharjahart.org/projects/projects-by-date/2009/present-tense-hatoum>, Last modified: November 19, 2013.
- 7 Curator talk by Jack Persekian, Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, 2011.
- 8 "Israeli bulldozers raze Palestinian lands southern Nablus". Palestinian News Agency, <http://alray.ps/en/index.php?act=post&id=2345>: Last Modified: November 19, 2013.



Street performance *White Dove of Peace (It's Still Not Over)* Jerusalem, 2011.

A checklist for political street performance

1. Site-specific performance serendipity is fed not only by magic and co-incidence, but by performers staking out places where motifs repeat or can be exploited. If you are doing a spontaneous performance on the street for the camera and something interesting happens that you can't catch in that moment, go ahead to the same spot at the same time the next day and look for it to happen again.

2. Unless you are particularly interested in not doing so, take care of yourself and stay safe while performing. Remember; there is nothing wrong with stopping a street performance temporarily or for the day if you are not feeling connected to it, safe or whatever.
3. If for some reason you feel that the people in the street are hostile towards you or vice versa, you can still try to keep an open mind and be curious. Listen to the message they are conveying without stopping your performance... what do they say about their context? You can use this to feed or inform your performance.
4. If you are using a prop(s) in your performance, think of that prop as a co-performer in your piece and get to know it physically and tactilely. If you are conceptually inclined you can ask yourself questions like: what would this prop be doing if it were in a different context? What would this prop be doing *if it were not with me? Can this prop have a life of it's own? How can I allow for this to happen?*
5. Pay attention to the way you are feeling emotionally and physically and adjust yourself and your performance accordingly. If you are feeling weak, you can also let your environment do the performing in relation to your stillness.
6. When performing, you can also perform with an emphasis on listening to the environment, and making yourself permeable to the environment, more than saying something to it.
7. Decide in advance what your angle is: are you interacting with your audiences or not? (For inevitably they will interact with you.)

8. Even if your project is specific to a certain environment and will only be performed once, this performance can mirror something you are interested in aesthetically and be connected to wider themes you are exploring in your artwork as a whole.
9. Start with what feels close or easy then see how far you are interested in challenging your work/ performance.
Start with specificity to yourself and your own interests.
Let the things that inspire and interest you grow.
Perform from your own “bodily context”.
10. Remember to document all site-specific performance very well. Do this not only through video and photographs of your performance but through diary, note taking and collecting things and mementos in the street. Even if you are the performer, take photos of your surroundings before and after and even while performing. Let these feed your performance....
11. In site-specific performance in places that are highly politically charged the political situation is always present even if your performance is not political.
12. When creating site-specific performance, there is always a meta-performance, which is that of you relating to the place you are performing in, and your audience relating to you. Even if you don't address it directly, don't ignore this dimension.

13. Doing solo site-specific street performance is challenging: who will you enlist to your project, how and why? For example, if you have the luxury to choose your own camera person: Do you know them well? Are you able to explain your project to them and feel understood? Do you feel they've "got your back"? If the camera person doesn't understand your intentions or aesthetics they can for example miss important things that seem obvious to you, which are not obvious to them.
14. In site-specific performance there is no right or wrong, just rather experiences of connection and disconnection with one's environment, audience and performance, learning or not opening to learning.



Street performance, *White Dove of Peace (It's Still Not Over)* Jerusalem, 2011.

Annette Arlander: Riding an Ox in Search of an Ox¹

Gesture is not a concept I have related to my work previously; I have preferred terms like action, performance or even pose. Thinking in terms of gesture seemed an interesting challenge, and though I cannot contribute to the discussion of different philosophical approaches to gesture, I can perhaps provide some practical examples as a starting point. They are simple and minimalistic on some level, and thus suitable as examples. Since the public feedback I received from a recent exhibition, a one-sentence mention in the local cultural magazine in Helsinki included the word gesture, I was reassured in this choice. In rough translation: “The border between performance documentation and video art is blurred in this exhibition where gesture is art.” This work is part of a research project, which concerns the problem of how to perform (rather than represent) landscape today, within the context of contemporary art and in relationship to the legacy of performance art. The project uses artistic research as a method and focuses primarily on the relationship between performer and environment. The concept of gesture immediately brings in the addressee, the viewer or spectator, since a gesture is more directed towards somebody, however vaguely, than an action, and is thus related to performance as well.

1 This text is based on a presentation at the meeting of the Bodily Turn in Aesthetics network with a theme related to gesture in Copenhagen 26-29.9.2010, the proceedings of which were never published.

If we understand a work of art as a gesture towards the viewer or participant, this gesture is often ambivalent and open to multiple interpretations. Mostly we can also distinguish several different gestural dimensions within a work. Small variations in a gesture will alter its ambience; a change of context will transform a gesture materially and shift its possible meanings significantly. A simple gesture (action or pose) will take on a new meaning through the act of repetition, which in itself is a kind of gesture. A video work and performance for camera titled *Year of the Ox - Riding a Buoy* (performed 2009, exhibited 2010) can serve as an example for analysing these gestural dimensions. Is the figure turning her back to the viewer or rather guiding our gaze into the landscape? Is the figure posing as an immobile statue or undertaking an imaginary journey? Is sitting astride the buoy a stronger gesture than merging with it in terms of colour? How is the gesture changing, when the buoy is replaced by a rock or a tree trunk?

Besides the work mentioned above *Year of the Ox - Riding a Buoy* and a work related to it, *Year of the Ox - On Rock and Wood* (2010) I will mention a set of other examples like *Year of the Rat - Mermaid 1-2*, *The Little Mermaid - 95th Birthday*, *Mermaid Variations 1-9* (2009) and *Sal 1-2* (2010), which utilize the same gesture.

By looking at these examples with the idea of gesture in mind, I arrived at two observations or claims as starting points:

1. A gesture cannot be understood or experienced separated from its context or environment
2. A gesture will change and transform in reaction to its context or environment

Before I turn to my examples I should perhaps explain the title “Riding an Ox in Search of an Ox”. Theatre and performance historian Baz Kershaw refers to our embeddedness and the ecological crisis and writes:

Humans are totally imbued with earth’s biosphere, as they cannot survive without it even when they fly to the moon. So how can they possibly access a critical perspective that is wholly beyond it? How can we solve a problem whose solution is another version of itself? In this particular recursive dilemma, or vicious circle /--/ Enter Po-chang’s ox and paradox. Asked about seeking the Buddha-nature Po-chang says. ‘It’s much like riding an ox in search of the ox!’ The quest is a search for itself.²

This recursive dilemma is a problem not only for the artist-researcher who is mixing the object and outcome of his or her research, but for all of us studying landscapes in the midst of them, or - life being a part of it. Nick Kaye starts his study *Site-specific art - performance, place, documentation* (2000) by discussing practices, which articulate exchanges between the work and the places its meanings are defined in. He describes the basis for such an exchange with the help of semiotics, as follows:

If one accepts the proposition that the meanings of utterances, actions and events are affected by their ‘local position’, by the *situation* of which they are a part, then a

2 Kershaw 2007, 52.

work of art, too, will be defined in relation to its place and position. Reflecting this notion, semiotic theory proposes, straightforwardly, that reading implies 'location'. To 'read' the sign is to have located the signifier, to have recognised its place within the semiotic system. One can go on from this to argue that the location, in reading, of an image, object, or event, its positioning in relation to political, aesthetic, geographical, institutional or other discourses, all inform what 'it' can be said to be.³

This emphasis on the defining power of context is relevant for many kinds of practices. Today we are – or at least I am – more interested in understanding the world as a performance to participate in, rather than a text to be read, to paraphrase Richard Schechner's attempt at summarising the approach of performance studies⁴ so turning to semiotics would not be my first choice. Kaye's affirmation of the importance of context is nevertheless useful as a support for the first of my starting points. "A gesture cannot be understood or experienced separated from its context or environment." To argue for the second one, "A gesture will change and transform in reaction to its context or environment" I will present some visual examples of practical experiments in artistic research.

Performer and environment

At a previous meeting I started my presentation "Performer, viewer, environment – Self imaging and landscape" by stating that according to systemic thinking, which has been discussed again in recent

3 Kay 2000, 1.

4 Schechner 2006, 26.

years, it does not make sense to separate ‘organisms’ from ‘environments’ as they are aspects of the same system. In the words of Bateson: “What thinks is the total system which engages in trial and error... The unit of survival is *organism plus environment*”⁵ Along the same lines Félix Guattari claimed (in 1989) that in order to comprehend the interactions between ecosystems, we must learn to think “transversally”⁶.

With the risk of repeating myself, I will present some formulations by Baz Kershaw in his *Theatre Ecology* (2007) as a reference point to the following reflections, although my examples were created for a visual art context. One of the key aspects of his study is the realization that humanity must sense itself as part of a “performance commons” that it shares with all organisms, as well as the “environmental commons” such as air, water and soil.⁷ The relationship between artist and landscape or performer and environment, even the use of those notions in opposition, is part of the legacy of modernism and the “enlightenment”, which placed nature and culture, “man” and “environment” against each other in a potentially disastrous opposition.⁸ The common understanding of ecology is “the interrelationships of all the organic and non-organic factors of ecosystems” and “the interrelationship between organisms and their environments, especially when that is understood to imply interdependence between organism and environments.”⁹

5 Bateson 1972, 16-17 quoted in Kershaw 2007, 248.

6 Guattari 2000, 57.

7 Kershaw, 2007, 14.

8 Kershaw 2007, 15.

9 Ibid.

Performances in all their manifestations involve the inter-relational interdependence of ‘organisms-in-environments’, or, following deep ecologist Arne Naess, constitute ‘a relational total field’ in which everything is interdependent and cannot easily be assigned to clear distinctions.¹⁰ There are complicated interdependencies between every element of a performance event and its environment and, as Kershaw notes based on his practical experiences, the smallest change to one factor of a performance will effect change in all the rest. And more importantly, a “theatre performance is not a system that is different *in kind* from other ecological systems, though of course like them has its own peculiar characteristics.”¹¹ This is obviously the case also with less complicated performance systems, like actions build around a camera, a human being, a shawl and a rusty buoy.

In his version of ecosophy, further developed in *Three Ecologies*, Félix Guattari maintained that the ecology of the mental, the ecology of the social and the ecology of the environment must be thought of as interrelated and inseparable.¹² According to Kershaw this implies a paradox as a fount of knowledge for ecology itself.¹³ He recycles Bateson’s example from “Pathologies of Epistemology”:

You decide that you want to get rid of the products by human life and that Lake Erie will be a good place to put them. You forget that the eco-mental system called Lake Erie is part of *your* wider eco-mental system – and that if

10 Kershaw 2007, 16.

11 Kershaw 2007, 24.

12 Guattari, 2000, 53.

13 Kershaw 2007, 25.

Lake Erie is driven insane, its insanity is incorporated in the larger system of *your* thought and experience.¹⁴

Understanding thinking as a process that takes place in the natural world as well, Bateson explains that the feedback produced by trial and error in systems will push them either towards a state of equilibrium, or towards ‘runaway’, a state of self-harm. There is no point in separating organism and environment since according to systemic thinking they are aspects of the same system. In the words of Bateson: “What thinks is the total system which engages in trial and error... The unit of survival is *organism plus environment*.”¹⁵

Félix Guattari, too, claimed that nature could not be separated from culture; in order to comprehend the interactions between ecosystems, we must learn to think transversally.¹⁶ He criticized Bateson’s theory, however, for his conception of context as encompassing action, like in organism + environment (action + context), whereas, according to Guattari, an active ‘rupture’, can transform the contextual system. As Guattari exclaimed, “no one is exempt from playing the game of the ecology of the imaginary!”¹⁷

In some sense you could say most art is providing imaginary options, possible models. So what should we imagine today? How could we perform landscape in a way that does not strengthen the dangerous fantasy analysed by Theresa Brennan, among others, of being a self-sufficient subject fully independent and ontologically severed from the world?¹⁸ With what kind of gestures could we make

14 Bateson 2000 (1972), 492, quoted in Kershaw 2007, 247.

15 Bateson 2000 (1972), 492, quoted in Kershaw 2007, 248.

16 Guattari 2000, 54 quoted in Kershaw 2007, 249.

17 Guattari 2000, 57, quoted in Kershaw 2007, 249.

18 Brennan 2000, 36.

explicit our dependence, explicitate it, to use the term of Peter Sloterdijk, adopted by Bruno Latour, who famously exclaimed: “Everything that earlier was merely ‘given’ becomes ‘explicit’. Air water, land, all of those were present before in the background: now they are explicitated because we slowly come to realize that they might disappear –and we with them.”¹⁹ How could we explicitate the interrelationship and interdependence between human beings and the environment, performer and landscape, me and a rock or a rusty buoy?

Background

My examples are related to a series of attempts at performing landscape, based on the Chinese calendar, which consists of twelve-year cycles where each year is named after an animal. I have developed a mode of working where I document the landscape on Harakka Island, off Helsinki, by videoing myself in the same place, dressed in the same scarf once a week for one year. Each year I have chosen a specific approach to the landscape, a different gesture if you wish, and tried to focus attention on a particular aspect of the environment, with a different relationship between my body and the surroundings. Every year I have videoed small studies using the same pose or gesture in various landscapes somewhere around the world as well.

The position of the human figure in the landscape and in the picture space have varied over the years from a domineering position covering part of the view to a tiny figure forming the focal point in the scenery, with references to classical and romantic landscape painting. I have played with the tradition of performance art, too,

19 Latour 2007, 2.

where performances based on endurance, like the durational works of Teching Hsieh and Linda Montano, use one year as their time span. My main aim has been to emphasize the passing of time by showing the shifts in the landscape according to changing seasons, weather conditions and the climate.

This practice combines approaches in performance art, video art and environmental art and moves in the border zone between them. As a working method it is rather “old fashioned” compared to more filmic and narrative approaches used by many contemporary video artists today. The videos, the final artworks, do not offer the viewer a chance to participate or interact, as many relational works do today. Rather I hope they could function as an inspiration for the viewer to “try the same at home”, as an encouragement to undertake something similar on their own. Or then as a slightly enigmatic gesture to meditate on, or with.

The Little Mermaid on a rock

The Little Mermaid, the sculpture in Copenhagen, was one of the impulses behind the video works created during the year of the rat 2008. The idea of posing in the position of the little mermaid on a rock on Harakka Island once a week for a year, either closer or further away from the camera, changed and evolved during the year. I was sitting with the same grey lilac coloured scarf on various shores around the world and ended up sitting next to the sculpture on her 95th birthday as well. The main gesture turned out to be the positioning of the feet to the left of the body, reminding of the fishtail of the statue. Even that aspect changed according to the surroundings, while sitting on the shore or in the water instead of on a rock, where the feet could hang down, as it were. And needless to say, the gesture of sitting in or by warm tropical waters feels (and looks) different from sitting on or by the ice.



Year of the Rat – Mermaid 1-2 (still image from video).



The Little Mermaid - 95th Birthday (still image from video).



Mermaid Variations 1-9 (still image from video).



Mermaid Variations 1-9 (still image from video).

Riding a buoy

The video works *Year of the Ox – Riding a Buoy* and *Year of the Ox – On Rock and Wood*, were performed and video filmed during the year of the ox 2009, on Harakka Island off Helsinki or in tourist resorts around the world.²⁰ In all places I used a rust coloured scarf and tried to find connections to the surroundings. On Harakka Island I returned once a week to sites related to the military past of the place. I was riding a rusty buoy on the hill, walking in circles tied to an iron ring on the cliff and squatting in a niche in the wall. I played with the idea of riding an ox, walking in a yoke like an ox, with the site-specific taken literally as a kind of destiny or duty, being tied to the spot. The main purpose was, as before, to bring attention to changes in the landscape due to shifting seasons, weather conditions and climate; and thus also to demonstrate time, to show the passage of time. The works can also be linked to traditional Ox-herding pictures in the Buddhist tradition, aids in finding one self, though here the emphasis is less on spiritual practice than on experiencing the physical environment. The gesture of riding on a buoy, sitting astride a rusty metal object, was later transported to other locations, like riding on boulders in various landscapes, sitting on small rocks in the field or even sitting on tree trunks, where the original action or gesture almost disappears, when riding is transformed to squatting or sitting. Perhaps more than the bodily movement of sitting astride something resembling a horseback it is the scarf that maintains continuity; the scarf becomes the central gesture.

20 They are the first ones that I have video filmed with the new high definition (HD) technique, and also the first ones using the film format 16:9 instead of the former TV-format 4:3.



Year of the Ox - Riding a Buoy (still image from video).



Year of the Ox - On Rock and Wood (still image from video).

Repetition as a gesture

If formulated as a score of actions, these works seem to consist of sheer repetition: Take the same scarf and go to the same place, place the camera in the same spot and choose the same framing, perform the same action in the same spot in front of the camera etc. Repeat this procedure once a week for a year. The following year repeat the same procedure; but choose a new place, a new scarf, a new spot for the camera, a new action or gesture to perform and so on. Of course the “new” is relative, and could be considered a variation of the preceding one, and thus a kind of repetition.

This way of working with landscape could be called a generative process in a broad sense, since repetition is utilized to generate material with variations, which can then be put together more or less “automatically” and chronologically, that is, using all the versions in the order they have been created. The interesting changes are produced by the changing seasons and weather conditions as well as various accidental occurrences, around the basic structure of a few initial choices.

Repetition is the main compositional strategy. To put it roughly, I make one artistic choice a year and then repeat it again and again. But in a traditional theatrical sense I never repeat. Nor do I rehearse.

When speaking of repetition in performance we should distinguish between the use of repetition in the creation of work and the use of repetition in the distribution of it, though this is a simplification of course. In standard stage performance, repetition is used in rehearsal to develop and “fix” the performance. And repetition is used for distribution, when the performance is repeated for new audiences. A third dimension comes in to play when repetition is used as a compositional tool, as in much modern and even contemporary performance and dance.

In *Year of the Ox* the first type of repetition is missing. I do not use repetition in the creation process in order to develop and fix a performance, nor do I repeat the actions in order to find the right version. I use repetition to generate material, but instead of discarding previous versions, as in rehearsal, I repeat an action or gesture in order to have many versions of it. Every variation is more or less similar to the previous ones, and they are all recorded and used in the final edited work. I am not repeating the performance for new audiences. Only the edited video work is shown to the public, and can of course be repeated and adapted to various circumstances. Nevertheless repetition is an aesthetic principle, a crucial gesture, what the viewer actually sees.

When using repetition as an aesthetic strategy or compositional tool, we can ask, what is repeated and what is allowed to change? What stays almost the same every time, and what is constantly shifting? By repeating something you can focus the attention of the viewer on the repeated action and the small shifts in it. Or, by repeating an action you can focus the viewer's attention on that which is not repeated but changes, like the surrounding landscape.

Year of the Ox is one in a series of twelve years. As mentioned above I repeat a similar one-year project on the same island twelve times. There is variation in the repetition however, from year to year. So repetition and variation function on the macro level. There are variations within each one-year project as well. Most years I have chosen two or more actions or gestures and sometimes even used several places. All these repetitions produce small variations, the main variation being the changing seasons, weather conditions, time of year and time of day, but also chance occurrences. The camera position, too, tends to shift, though that I do my best to

control. *Year of the Ox* is all about repetition. Perhaps we could even call it a refrain.

Variations

As opposed to the repetitive practice of riding a buoy once a week or similar gestures repeated weekly on Harakka Island, the improvised versions created in various landscapes produce constant variations. By trying to retain something of the original gesture – riding the buoy – while using a rock, or even a tree trunk as my base, the gesture inevitably changes; materially, depending on the size of the rock in relationship to my legs, its height from the ground and so on; and experientially, depending on my reaction to the environment, the mood, the atmosphere. The same goes for the gesture of sitting in the pose of a mermaid on various rocks and shores, which transform the feel and thus the look of the gesture. Something, however, remains, as well, like the scarf, or turning one's back to the camera or the viewer, in this case, and the basic body posture used as a starting point. Despite my effort to maintain the gesture, variations inevitably abound.

Based on these experiences I would thus suggest that

1. A gesture cannot be understood or experienced separated from its context or environment.
2. A gesture will change and transform in reaction to its context or environment.

And if this would be found true for other examples and other people's experiences, that should have some implications for our concerns. In that case a bodily turn (or a performative turn) could not be separated from an environmental turn.

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VIDEO WORKS ONLINE

Year of the Rat – Mermaid 1-2, 2009, two-channel video installation 34:33 min.

<http://www.av-arkki.fi/en/works/year-of-the-rat-mermaid-1-2/>

The Little Mermaid – 95th Birthday, 2009, video 5:10 min.

<http://www.av-arkki.fi/en/works/the-little-mermaid-95th-birthday/>

Mermaid Variations 1-9, 2009, three-channel video installation, 3:58 min.

<http://www.av-arkki.fi/en/works/mermaid-variations-1-9/>

Year of the Ox – Riding a Buoy 2010, HD video 50 min.

<http://www.av-arkki.fi/en/works/year-of-the-ox-riding-a-buoy/>

Year of the Ox – On Rock and Wood 2010, HD video 50 min.

<http://www.av-arkki.fi/en/works/year-of-the-ox-on-rock-and-wood/>

Previous publications in the Episodi series

Annette Arlander (ed.; 2011)

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Annette Arlander (ed.; 2003)

Esitystaidetta kohti. Kokemuksia, ajatuksia, näkemyksiä. Opiskelijoiden esseitä.

[Towards Performance Art. Experiences, Thoughts, Views. Students' essays, in Finnish]

Episodi (“Episode”) is a series published by the Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts. This fourth Episodi *This and That – Essays on Live Art and Performance Studies* features a text on performance art by professor Ray Langenbach and consists of writings by students of the MA Degree programme in Live Art and Performance Studies, Jenni Kokkomäki, Ellen Jeffrey, Kaisa Illukka, as well as by participants in the fourth international festival and conference on Live Art and Performance Studies, Lapsody, in June 2013, Moritz Gansen and Elisabeth Schilling, Megan Armishaw, Iona Jucan and James Andean. Moreover, the collection contains a text on somatic materialism by professor Susan Kozel, an essay by doctoral student Rania Khalil, and a paper on gesture by the editor, Annette Arlander.

