

***Kun koen kokeilen – kokeilen kun koen.***

Kokemus ja kokeellisuus taiteellisessa  
työskentelyssä ja tutkimuksessa

***I Experience as I Experiment***

***– I Experiment as I Experience.***

Experience and experimentality in artistic  
work and research

Toim. / Ed. Denise Ziegler

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# Sisältö

Introduction 5

DENISE ZIEGLER

Performing with a Pine Tree 15

ANNETTE ARLANDER

Shangri-La, Paradise under Construction 31

MIRKA DUIJN

An Endless Searching for Substance 39

SUZANNE MOONEY

Valinta 47

MAIJA NÄRHINEN

Omistettu teokselle, jota ei vielä ole – taiteellisen prosessin  
alkuvaiheesta 63

PILVI PORKOLA

Practical Reflections on the Verbalization of Craft  
Experience 73

JAN LÜTJOHANN

An Experiment in Letter-Writing 83

ELINA SALORANTA

Designing *36Q° Blue Hour VR*, a Site-Responsive  
Mixed-Reality Installation for the 36Q° Project at PQ19 101

JORIS WEIJDOM AND PAUL CEGYS

True Colours of Twilight 115

TUULA NÄRHINEN

LAB - O (U) RATORY 135

MIKA ELO

History Is Full of Ruse and Cunning 145

JACK FABER

In the Wrong Place 151

PAUL LANDON

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Choreographic Thinking 159

LAUREN O'NEAL

What is the Product of These Conversations that You Are  
Having as Part of Your Artistic Research? 171

MATTHEW COWAN

Tactile Composition 177

MARLOEKE VAN DER VLUGT

Numbered List on the Infraordinary 195

ANDREA COYOTZI BORJA

Kirjoittajat / Contributors 215

# Introduction

DENISE ZIEGLER

*I Experience as I Experiment – I Experiment as I Experience* brings together thoughts on the origin of an artwork and on the need for making it. In the 17 texts in this collection, the authors discuss how (or why) their artworks relate to their artistic research practice, and what roles experience and experimentality play in their artistic research. The texts address these issues by investigating both momentary experiences (*elämykset, Erlebnisse*) and experience as something accumulated over time (*kokemus, Erfahrung*) in the context of the everyday work of artists involved in art making, artistic research and teaching at the university level.

The artworks associated with the texts are on show in the Exhibition Laboratory gallery (Academy of Fine Arts, Uniarts Helsinki) from 27.11.–11.12.2019 and the texts and the works are both discussed by the artist researchers on 10 December 2019 at the Kuva Research Days conference.

*I Experience as I Experiment – I Experiment as I Experience* is an attempt to elucidate and communicate different strategies of implementing artistic research in 2019. The focus is on research

in experience that is conducted through artistic practice. Experience-related issues are experimentally aggregated, collected, repositioned, restaged, linked and relinked. For example, my own work in the exhibition is a two-meter long slightly elevated wooden path that can be walked on. With this bridge-like construction, I want to relink artistic research to the metaphor of a bridge by referring to the French folksong *Sur le pont d'Avignon* (On the bridge of Avignon). The main focus in my artistic research is on the experience of being on the bridge (“l’on y danse, l’on y danse” / We’re all dancing there, we’re all dancing there) instead of looking at research questions as obstacles to be overcome or as problems to be solved.

The empty pages between the chapters of this book are left there for you, dear reader, to make notes of thoughts or sketches of the artworks in the exhibition. If you get this book only after the exhibition, you can imagine the works and experience perhaps something of them through the texts. In any case, it is you who bring together the artworks and the texts.

### **Detached attachment**

On 13 August 2019 I wrote a reminder to the participants of *I Experience as I Experiment – I Experiment as I Experience* to submit the raw versions of their texts for peer review. In a response to my message and the following conversation with Tanja Kiiveri, some of the clinches, frictions, myths and possibilities of conducting artistic research with and through artworks are verbalized.

16.8.2019, at 8:31:

*Hi Denise,*

*Writing has been difficult for me. I have been thinking, what if my text consisted simply of one loose page put inside the publication? Like the work I'm developing for the exhibition, which will roam among the other works that all have a fixed place. I could slip a page into the finished publication, one that looks the same as the other pages.*

*What do you think?*

*Best Tanja*

16.8.2019, at 14:34:

*Hi Tanja,*

*Thank you for your message. What would be on the loose page? Would it be empty? Or do you mean it would be easier for you to write if the text was not part of the actual publication? The text does not have to be ready now, you are aware of this, right?*

*Best regards*

*Denise*

19. 8. 2019, at 14:47

*Hi Denise,*

*I thought that it could be like a page that has come loose. I would write on it, of course. One or two pages feel somehow more manageable to write.*

*Tanja*

19.8.2019, at 17:12

*Hi Tanja,*

*Great, write one or two pages. Then we can think about where the pages will go.*

*A loose page in a printed publication often contains a list of corrections of errors discovered after printing. Your text would be like a comment on all the other writings, to the whole book. Is that the role you want to take?*

*I don't see why it couldn't be done. I just want to understand your motivation: why would there be detached pages in the book? Who has detached them, for what purpose?*

*Thank you for this conversation so far.*

*Best regards*

*Denise*

20.8. 2019, at 12:15.01

*Hi Denise,*

*I didn't know about the role of the loose page in books. Hmm... I think about my page as a loose part, as if it didn't belong to the book. And that's what it actually is, as I am not quite a researcher. That's why the pages would not be attached to the rest of the book, and could be removed from one's copy should one wish to do so. I don't want to comment on the other texts in the book, I only want to contribute an alternative approach, maybe. It might happen that the loose page accidentally falls out of the book and someone finds it on the floor. The work I'm making with Regina is made in the same spirit. It is not necessarily meant to be a work of art that is physically present, instead I try to find a gap*

*between the other works. I really don't know yet what it's going to be. But we go on from this.*

*Have a sunny day!  
Best Tanja*

22.8.2019, at 10:45:

*Hi Tanja,  
That's the point, the core! The research is in the work, in the act of making a work of art. Research happen right there. To my mind, research happens in artworks whether or not somebody explicitly calls it research.*

*Your idea of the loose page and my association to errata (error corrections appended to a book) is intriguing, because it also questions the finality of artworks and artistic research. Even within the precision of academic research, there is always a "back door" through which certain corrections can be made after the text goes into print. And of course, the disclosing of different approaches to artistic research is an essential aspect of this project.*

*Denise*

At that point of the conversation we decided to meet and discuss in more detail the technical issues of the implementation and manufacturing of the loose page.

The explicit and demonstratively materialized detachment of the page from the printed publication raises for me a more general question regarding attachment and detachment in artistic research – not only the artistic researcher's attachment or detachment vis-à-vis her or his subject, but also relative to the involvement in and supposed constraints of the research community.

In the above conversation, the struggle of writing a piece for a collection of texts on artistic research develops into speculation and finally planning of an artwork made out of the envisaged text. In this way, the research community becomes a site like any other that can be critiqued and commented with an artwork.

To be aware of these issues is important to any research environment. However, experiential attachment and detachment are especially relevant in artistic research as it deals with subjective approaches. This raises also the question of the skills needed to conduct artistic research. Can we learn and teach to experience and experiment in artistic research, and if so, how? That is an issue well worth considering in future projects.









# Performing with a Pine Tree

ANNETTE ARLANDER

In my artistic research project “Performing with Plants” I have sought to combine my practice of creating rough time-lapse videos with a focus on trees. Prompted by posthumanist and new materialist debates I have asked questions, such as what can one do together with trees; how to perform together with trees for the camera on a tripod; how to appear in the same image space with trees. I have discussed the idea of appearing with trees and the emerging field of critical plant studies elsewhere (Arlander 2019 a, b). A few words about the wider context is perhaps needed to begin with.

By “posthumanist debates” I refer to the critique of the legacy of European humanism as summarized by Rosi Braidotti (2013) and others. They see that legacy as a tradition that separates the so-called civilized Western ‘man’ (male) from other forms of life, and denies such others, including plants, all agency and consciousness. Within the broad spectrum of new materialist thought, I have been particularly interested in the agential realism of physicist and queer theorist Karen Barad (2007), who continues and criticizes the work of Niels Bohr, as well as the ideas of thinkers

like Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. In Barad's account, the differential boundaries between humans and nonhumans, culture and nature, science and the social, are constituted through causal intra-actions. Intra-action is her term for "the mutual constitution of entangled agencies" which, unlike the common term of interaction, stresses the fact that "distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action" (2007, 33). Different intra-actions produce different phenomena, and who or what are excluded through them matters, she notes (2007, 58). I have explored the idea of intra-action in the context of artistic research elsewhere (Arlander 2014). Here it might suffice to note that, in the context of the current climate crisis, it is ever more important to acknowledge our co-constitution with other life forms, including plants.

In this text, however, I want to indulge in speaking of my own work and the practical aspect of experimentation in it, although the experimental dimension is rather subdued in my fairly documentary and even diarist practice. I want to use this opportunity to try to articulate my standard work process and to extract possible moments of experimentation in it. It seems that experimentation is more foregrounded in the editing phase, although one could find some experimental aspects in the performing and recording phase, too, such as the possibility of chance occurrences entering the work. There is an experimental aspect in the installing phase as well, when I am trying out different solutions to find the one that would fit best the specific exhibition site or context. In this text I will nevertheless focus on a phase that is normally left invisible, namely editing, which is necessary in order to create the specific effect of time-lapse videos.

In some sense, experimentation is minimized in editing, as is the use of imagination. In another sense, there is a family relationship between my work process and experimentation: after I have made some initial decisions, such as setting up a framing for an image and an action to repeat, what happens next, during the repetition, remains open. Merleau-Ponty begins his short text

*Eye and Mind* by discussing science and the notion of gradient, which was fashionable at the time. “The gradient is a net we throw out to sea, without knowing what we will haul back in it. It is the slender twig upon which unforeseeable crystalizations [sic] will form.” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 1) My initial choices resemble such a net.

Experimentation is often understood as the foundational activity of scientific research. One interesting example of classical experimentation is Monica Gagliano’s work with plant learning. For instance, she has conducted experiments which show that the plant *Mimosa Pudica*, which is famous for reacting to touch by folding together its leaves, reacts not only through instinctive reflexes or a more or less automated habituation process, which is a simple form of learning, but it also actually makes decisions of a kind, when to close her leaves and when not. The experimental setup consisted of a machine that would suddenly drop mimosa plants and cause them to react by closing their leaves. After this was repeated for a while, the plants learned that the action was not dangerous and stopped folding their leaves. They could even remember what they had learned for several days. For a full description of the experiment, see Gagliano’s book *Thus Spoke the Plant* (Gagliano 2018, 56–71).

In art, especially in performance art, there is another kind of experimentation, one that does not involve control groups or the need for others to repeat the same experiment. Often the main ingredient is possibility of the unknown, of an unexpected result. In classical endurance pieces, the performance is set up as a task, and the question is whether the artist is able to accomplish it or not, or how long he or she will last. The performance will end when the artist can no longer continue the action. In the early work of Abramovic and Ulay, for example, there were “no rehearsals, no repetitions and predicted endings”; they did not know beforehand what was going to happen, which made unedited video recordings of the performances crucial as documents. (Ulay/Abramovic 1997, 17).

This is quite different from the way I use video recordings. My videos are edited, and the editing produces an “artificial” action in the video, which is quite different from the real-life performances in front of the camera that is their material. Whereas experimentation in traditional performance art is about the experience (of enduring, risk, danger, pain and so on), in my practice experience and experimentation are linked in a different way. Because I use repetition as a tool – visiting the same trees repeatedly – I experience not only the trees and the shifting seasons in the environment together with them, which may include surprises, but also the act of repetition *as repetition*, both as a routine or duty and as a kind of comfort.

\*

What about artistic research? The kind of experimentation I do – trial and error – is not usually considered research but rather part of the craft, the practice of doing, which of course involves lots of decision making. The works that are discussed below were created as part of an artistic research project called “Performing with Plants”, funded by the Swedish Research Council (which has a special committee for artistic research). The English abstract of the research proposal summarizes the aims as follows:

“Performing with plants” is an artistic research project aiming to investigate the question “how to perform landscape today?” A post-humanist perspective prompts us to rethink the notion of landscape, and to realize that the surrounding world consists of life forms and material phenomena with differing degrees of volition, needs and agency. What forms of performing landscape could be relevant in this situation? One possibility is to approach individual elements, like singular trees, and explore what could be done together with them. The most important inquiries to be explored are: 1) How to collaborate with nonhuman entities like plants? 2) How to further develop experiences from previous attempts

at performing landscape? 3) How to create actions with plants, in which humans can be invited to participate? An overarching research topic is: How to perform landscape today by collaborating with trees and other plants, with an awareness of the insights generated by post-humanist and new materialist research?

The aim of the project is to develop techniques generated during previous work by the applicant, i.e. the twelve-year project *Animal Years* (2002–2014), where focus was on showing changes in the landscape over time, rather than collaboration with the trees. By collaborating with plants more sensitively and ecologically, sustainable modes of performing can be developed, in order to serve as inspiration and provocation regarding ways of understanding our surrounding world. (Arlander 2016, 2)

As part of this project, I made repeated visits to a small wood in the centre of Stockholm, performing for a camera on tripod with spruce stumps and pine trees. The performances took place during the Chinese year of the dog, between 16 February 2018 and 3 February 2019, in Lill-Jansskogen (“Little Jan’s Wood”) between the campuses of the Royal Institute of Technology and Stockholm University. The area looks like a small forest, but is in fact part of a park, northern Djurgården. I visited four sites repeatedly, two spruce stumps and two pine trees, sometimes three times a week (100 times in all). The performances were recorded by a video camera on tripod and later edited into rough time-lapse videos. In all performances I wore a pale pink woollen scarf, and in three of them I had my back towards the camera, as I usually do, to make the human figure more impersonal. At the first site I sat on an old spruce stump with the felled trunk still attached to it, relatively close to the camera. At the second site I sat on a small spruce stump on the ground among tall spruce trees, this time further away from the camera. At the third site I first swung and then just hung from the branch of an old pine

tree, with the aim of exploring continuous movement (which I had previously explored by sitting in a swing). At the fourth site I sat in a small pine tree on the slope next to a path, almost hidden between its branches. Although my principal aim was to perform for the camera in order to produce time-lapse videos, I was inevitably performing for passers-by as well, because the wood is frequented quite often by people running, jogging and walking their dogs. Especially the dogs were interested in my unusual behaviour.

The purpose of these repeated attempts at performing, posing or appearing with trees was to explore how one might perform with plants while respecting their own sense of time, visiting them in their own place. Whether this can be called collaboration in a strict sense of the word is questionable, though, because the trees or stumps had no option but to collaborate. Through the act of repetition, however, a specific type of bonding occurred, which hints at the possibility of developing another kind of relationship with trees and with vegetation more generally.

The project is now nearing the end, although work continues with some of the articles written about it. The video installation in the exhibition is one of its main results or outputs, and I hope to show it in other exhibitions in the future. On another level, the work and its various versions also serve as research data, material for my written reflections on performing with plants on a more conceptual level. Although my own experience of the work is quite prosaic (“this is what I did and what you see is what you get”), even somewhat technical, I am aware and actually hope that the final result can have other dimensions for the viewer. On some level I hope to share with the viewers something of the experience of hanging or swinging from a pine tree repeatedly for a year. On another level, however, I realize that the compressed and edited versions create an illusion or an impression of a completely different kind of action, and that the experience of it will vary depending on the viewer’s own previous experiences of hanging, swinging, pine trees or trees more generally. There is

no need for the viewer to know about my personal experiences during the making of the video. In this context a more detailed discussion of the actual working method might nevertheless be appropriate.

\*

In this working method I make one decision at a time, and leave all the other options open. But once the first decision is made, it is fixed. This might seem obvious in many mediums, but digital video makes other options possible, including almost endless postproduction. Experimentation in this case is not about something unknown, but about trying things out, experimenting with variations. All the variations are also created in practice, rather than being planned and chosen in advance based on thought experiments. There is an element of the unknown, but that emerges from the environment, from shifting circumstances that bring surprises.

Whereas traditional cinema – which many artists working with moving image media today want to engage with – mostly begins with a script (or synopsis and treatment or the like, I am not familiar with the exact terminology) which is then used as a basis for filming and also editing, my work has no script. However, I am not “improvising” with the camera, either, gathering material and then creating a structure in the editing room. My method is very simple and fairly systematic. Although I sometimes employ other strategies, the following is my standard procedure for making rough time-lapse videos.

In the first stage, I choose the site and the partner, such as the pine tree, and an action or position to repeat with it. Then I choose the place for the camera and the framing that I try to maintain throughout the repetitions. I fix the framing and my position, while leaving the duration fairly open, although I do count my breaths to keep track of time. Sometimes I also choose a time schedule, such as approximately three times a week, as in this case. And then I do the repetitions. Choosing the site or a part-

ner, choosing a framing, choosing a position or action, is almost like creating an experimental setup. Variation in the images is the result of chance occurrences or seasonal changes during the repetitions. Some of the changes could be anticipated, others not. There are also mistakes, like when in the beginning of this particular case I experimented with different white balance settings manually, or accidentally changed the frame rate in the middle of the process, or made simple shifts in the framing, if the landmarks were not clear enough.

There have been times when I enjoyed a more hazardous process in creating an image, such as not checking my position within the frame in advance, thereby playing with the uncertainty of what the final image would look like. But after some crazy experiences – like when I sat next to a geyser waiting for it to erupt only to find out that I had placed myself outside the frame – I have begun to check the image more carefully. I adjust the camera, enter the image, and then return and play it back to see what it looks like, before beginning the actual performance. The automatic functions of the camera sometimes produce strange results, as when the lighting conditions change abruptly, but using them also gives the camera more agency. Ideally, once the initial choices are made, the “experimental set up” stays the same, and the changing environmental circumstances are then recorded without any unnecessary human interference.

The second stage, editing, is more interesting in terms of experimentation, and it is here that the “added value” or “magic” is created. A new action appears that takes place in the image space – like hanging from a pine for a year, or sitting immobile on a spruce stump through the passing seasons – something that did not occur in real life in front of the camera. When I edit a piece, I make copies of all the footage in the order it was recorded, keeping the original chronology, and I also use all sessions, disregarding none. Then I cut out the preparations, like entering and exiting the frame, in order to create the impression of a continuous action or pose; I also separate the various actions, such

as the swinging and the hanging in the case under discussion. Sometimes I also separate the “empty” views, like the pine tree without the human performer. Although the order of the clips is fixed – I follow the chronology of the recordings – I experiment with different clip durations, and often I create several alternatives. There are also other details to consider, such as the duration of crossfades between clips – or the choice of using crossfades in the first place, because crossfades have been “forbidden” in much moving image work for some time. I mostly use a standard one-second crossfade to smooth the sound over the cut and facilitate synchronization between parallel videos. A colleague once commented on a raw edit of the swinging version, saying that the double movement was disturbing – the bodily movement and the movement from one image to the next through the crossfade. That made me reconsider my choice and try slightly shorter crossfades.

Usually I edit a maximum length version of each sequence of actions, in this case following the movement of hanging or swinging from the tree. I then edit synchronized versions of all these sequences, adjusting the clip length according the shortest one. With the static poses, I often edit versions with a fixed clip length, showing perhaps one minute or ten seconds of each session. With an action like hanging or swinging, the duration must follow the movement. Preferably I make several different versions, leaving the possibility open to choose the final duration of the work according to context: shorter versions of less than 20 minutes for academic presentations, longer ones for installation display (anything up to an hour and more), and a duration for screenings, preferably less than ten or sometimes even five minutes. There is also the option of adding a voiceover, to create an essay of sorts, something I explored in Amsterdam in March 2019 with the work “Hanging in a Pine – with text”. Usually I start to make combinations only after the various durations are edited, either for multi-channel installations or more recently also for split screen videos, testing various combinations and

positions, synchronised or not. I can choose to synchronize the videos or to keep only the same total duration without synchronizing the clips; this was the case when combining the swinging and hanging videos.

With multi-channel installations and especially with split-screen videos, another interesting aspect in addition to duration and synchronization is the placement of the channels. In the case of multi-channel installations, the placement can be left open, to be decided at the exhibition venue, but for split-screen versions the channels need to be fixed. For example, when thinking of how to combine the swinging and the hanging version in an installation, my initial impulse was to begin with the hanging images on the left and place the stronger movement of swinging to the right. When I saw the test edits in two adjacent monitors, I immediately realized it made more sense to begin with the swinging on the left and continue with the hanging on the right, to move towards stillness, which gave more space and prominence to the relatively static performance of the pine. I also realized that it was not necessary to synchronize the duration of the images. The continuous variation of combinations was actually more interesting. It added an element of unpredictability to the work, as long as the seasons were more or less compatible, with the total duration of both videos being the same.

In this case, the experimentation began in earnest when I was combining the videos, trying out all the available options: hanging & swinging, swinging & hanging, tree & hanging, hanging & tree, swinging & tree, tree & swinging, hanging & tree & swinging, as well as swinging & tree & hanging. The durations vary from 19 min 31 sec in “Hanging in a Pine – with text” to 70 min 47 sec in “With a Pine”, while the versions combined into diptychs and triptychs have a fixed duration, 15 min 28 sec:

“Swinging – With a Pine” (includes Swinging in a Pine,  
With a Pine)

“With a Pine – Hanging” (includes With a Pine, Hanging in a Pine)

“Swinging – Hanging in a Pine” (includes Swinging in a Pine, Hanging in a Pine)

“Swinging – With a Pine – Hanging” (includes Swinging in a Pine, With a Pine, Hanging in a Pine)

With this method, I rarely decide “this is the work” but produce several variations instead. Often, however, it becomes clear over time – one might say, with experience – that one version is the “best” one, the “real” one. At the time of this writing, I do not know which of these alternatives will be on display at the Exhibition Laboratory until at Christmas 2019, although I think I would prefer the last one.

But what about experience and experimentation? Do I experience as I experiment, or do I experiment as I experience? Of course, I do. There is no way I could do anything without experiencing it in some sense.

On the one hand, experience is important. One of the main reasons for wanting to perform with plants or collaborate with trees is the possibility to spend time with them, to experience them, and to experience the world together with them. While not perhaps being the primary point of the finished work, although I suppose it is somehow visible, it is an important dimension of the practice. Often, I forget to think of the image, focusing instead on the actual practice of visiting the tree, the experience of the repetition and the small (or sometimes large) changes in the environment as the main aspect of the work. Although I check that something has been recorded, I rarely look at the footage during the year, only afterwards. Sometimes I do wish that I had focused less on the experience of visiting the tree and more on the actual images produced.

On the other hand, experience is perhaps too important. I do work fairly systematically, trying to minimize the use of experience as a tool, although I am unable to abandon all aesthetic

choices; and they are, after all, based on experience. The framing, for example, will stay the same, even if the light might be much more beautiful with a small shift, and so on. The final aesthetic decisions made in the editing room (or when the work is installed) are based not only on rules but on experience, my perceptions and preconceptions, and in that sense, they are arbitrary, or habitual, based on conventions. Thus, although I would prefer to think that my work is based on experimentation rather than experience, I guess experience rules.

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# Shangri-La, Paradise under Construction

Everything You Can Imagine Is Real

MIRKA DUIJN

*“A plane once crashed here in Shangri-La.  
It was a huge crash, there was an enormous ball of fire.  
I think two of the passengers were alive when they found them.  
My grandparents brought them to town.  
They were taken to Songzanlin monastery.”*  
Yang Zong, Shangri-La, China 2017

Twenty years ago news spread around the globe that *Shangri-La*, the Tibetan paradise, had been found. Deqin, a Tibetan region in southwest China, had uncovered scientific evidence proving that it was the original Shangri-La of legend. This was quite impossible: *Shangri-La* in fact is a fiction invented by British novelist James Hilton for his novel *Lost Horizon*; the story, of four Westerners whose plane crashes in a mythical paradise, was an instant bestseller and a dream many had longed for. Hilton had never been to Tibet or China—he wrote the book in his study in London during the Great Depression in 1933. Thus, it is not surprising that the evidence presented by the Deqin regional authorities to prove their home was in fact Shangri-La was quite controversial. It all seemed to be nothing more than a government marketing

stunt. Yet Deqin's name was changed to Shangri-La, after which tourism flourished.

Curious about the name change, I traveled to the area with the intention of unraveling the truth behind the presumably fraudulent renaming and the effect it has had on the region. I discovered that the story of *Lost Horizon* is today completely interwoven with local culture. Locals sell the story eagerly, and some of them even sincerely believe (and sometimes even have proof) that the *Lost Horizon* story is an historical account of events that actually took place in the region. The total adherence of residents to the fictional story makes it practically impossible to find out the truth about the renaming. However, the testimonies do offer a magnificent forum for analyzing the mechanisms behind Deqin's successful marketing campaign.

This film, which is also the backbone of my PhD research, will be a personal account of my journeys; exploring the region and its (partly fictional) history. Digging through the layers of fact and fiction, truths and lies, constantly shifting perspectives on the revival of the myth of Shangri-La. What words and images have attached themselves to facts and how have they developed into new myths? How do stories come into being and how do they connect to reality or actually shape it? And what is our position in that, as tourists, filmmakers, outsiders trying to depict the place and its story? Reflecting on these questions, *Shangri-La, Paradise under Construction* casts a critical eye on tourism, media, even documentary filmmaking itself.

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*“We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we’ll act again, creating new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history actors... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”* – Karl Rove (American political advisor of George W. Bush)

This statement is often mentioned when people speak about “fake news” and the supposedly “post-truth era” we live in today. Most people find Rove’s statement despicable. But I secretly find some hope in it. I grew up at a time in which Jean Baudrillard’s and Umberto Eco’s postmodern ideas about “hyperreality” were popular. But whereas those ideas seem cynical and pacifying to me—“*You can’t grasp what is real anymore, so why even bother trying*”—Karl Rove’s statement is active. It acknowledges that reality is a construct, but it doesn’t disconcert us. For me his statement reads as an (unintentional) encouragement for us to make reality, too, just as he does.

In Shangri-La, the present-day reality is carefully constructed by the local government. Quite deliberately they connected loosely and intertwined myths and realities, intending them to be heard, retold, twisted, and finally lived by local inhabitants, entrepreneurs, tourists, researchers—and the media. Our tourist image is an iteration of just that: a reinforcement of an ungraspable, constructed image.

When traveling through the area, doing my research, I slowly started to realize that I myself had become a useful part of the marketing machine: I asked for the story of *Lost Horizon*, and was given the very story I wanted to hear. And I, of course, was not the only one entangled in these dynamics. All tourists are. We all simply reproduce the image that we know from brochures, TV, and Instagram, thereby (unconsciously) reinforcing the branded image of the place.

So, when I was working there I began to wonder: what should I do (as a filmmaker) to go beyond the propaganda image? The French philosopher Bruno Latour once said: “*The critic is not the one who debunks but the one who assembles, [...] the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution.*”

I guess the answer lies there. I do not want to be the one who debunks images but the one who assembles them. Or to put it in Rove’s words: I don’t want to be the one who “studies what his-

tory actors do” but become a history actor myself. And by doing so, I hope to give others the tools and media literacy to become history actors as well.

This, then, is a research project about our position as tourists and as media consumers, and also about me as a documentary filmmaker working in the present-day post-truth era. It is about understanding our image not as the neutral picturing of reality, but as a way of coming to terms with reality through images and narrative.









# An Endless Searching for Substance

SUZANNE MOONEY

‘An Endless Searching for Substance’ is an evolving work exploring the relationships between bodies and objects, looked at through multiple perspectives. Focusing on moments of mutual exchange between probing hands and (un)known forms, the work delves into parameters, beyond clear procedures and structures of knowledge production, into learning through sensory enquiry and visual observation. Images, words and objects all intertwine in an overlapping constellation that takes many forms. The following text is one element.

*I break things to find out what is at the core.*

*Or beneath the surface.*

*A feeling of guilt gets suppressed. I don't entirely take responsibility for my actions. I'm well able to argue the why. I'm an artist after all.*

*See how the light glistens, falls on the surface – it forms new shapes and refractions. Twisting to know what's behind, underneath, but not within.*

*A deceptive façade of solidity. It's light, until it gets heavy.  
Gloved hands hold with care, rotating to observe all of its sur-  
faces.*

*There is a tenderness to this touch,  
one of knowledge, of inquiry, of learning.  
The wristwatch reads eight thirty-eight.*

*I imagine the center is liquid, held by a thin crust.  
Thick brine inside mute lump.*

*An endless searching for substance – trying to make sense of the  
physical world.  
Gently hold an unfamiliar object. Turn between fingers to feel  
all sides.  
Pressure leaves an indentation.*

*In trained hands, the feel of earth is a variety of basic touch sen-  
sations that enable them to judge the quality of the soil.*

*Is this a mutual exchange?*

*You stand in close proximity, within touching distance and extend  
your right hand. Thumb pointing upwards and fingers pressed  
together. When contact is made you firmly clasp my hand. We  
move the connected hands up and down twice – then release and  
lean back.*

*Press firmly and release.*

*Touch must be kept to the bare minimum.*

*She has her finger on the button,  
not yet pressed.  
Her other arm is resting on top of the large beige machine – a  
photographic processing device. She doesn't look at the button,*

*rather somewhere in the middle distance, outside the image. As if in that moment she loses concentration and is no longer posing.*

*The message is clear – even she can operate the machine.*

*An enquiry allowing hands to know object and object to know hands. The sensation of sinking a finger into the unknown. Of seeing, of feeling, of sensing.*

*Mute lump in thick brine.*

*The wristwatch reads ten to two.*

*The hand holds a negative by the narrow end, for fear of marking the surface. The photograph depicts a topless figure – a boxer. The left hand awkwardly clasps the opposite fist, both arms pulling apart yet stay entwined – as if to appear naturally posed. Flexing biceps to seem larger in the image.*

*She grasps with two hands – he with one.*

*They squeeze.*

*It will burst, but not yet.*

*None of this should be touched.*

*Overlapping images, a multitude of perception – touch made visible, like a memory.*

*See the pointed finger investigate the surface, watch how it wanders. Heat transfers from one body to another. Contamination will occur.*

*Liquid solidifies, particles transfer.*

*The object cools the hand until there is no temperature difference between them.*

*The clock reads twelve midnight.*

*Pressing down on the surface, it gives, slightly. But these objects never truly reveal themselves to me, but then again, why should they. I never do.*

*Feeling separation, there must be some way to connect, to feel, to merge.*

*This is not submission I seek, but knowing. I work from my fingertips to the elbows, imagining my thumb, each finger, wrist and forearm connected. Never working backwards.*

*The hand heats the object until there is no temperature difference between them.*

*Caress in both hands, over a clean surface.*









# Valinta

MAIJA NÄRHINEN

Näyttelyssä *Kun koen kokeilen – kokeilen kun koen* Exhibition Laboratoryssa on esillä *Ähky*-niminen teos. Teos on osa Galleria Sculptorissa 2018 ollutta näyttelyäni *More is more*, jonka teokset koostuvat suuresta määrästä tyhjiä laatikoita. Näissä teoksissa on yhdistämällä, pakkaamalla sisäkkäin, vierekkäin ja päällekkäin – sovittelemalla ja pakottamalla – syntynyt uusi tehtävä ja sisältö käytetyille laatikoille. Teokset tuovat esiin rajan, määrän ja rajattomuuden kysymyksiä. Laatikko on tila. Enemmän laatikoita on siis enemmän tilaa – vai onko?

Pahvilaatikko on oman sisällyksensä muisto, josta haluamme usein saman tien eroon ennen kuin se esimerkiksi muuttuu todisteeksi kuluttamisen määrästä. Se on tietenkin myös sisältönsä väliaikainen koti, kuori ja raja sisä- ja ulkopuolen välillä. Teoksisani tämä raja hämärtyy laatikoiden yhdistyessä toisiinsa.

Käsittelen tässä tekstissä sitä, miksi esine on puhutellut minua – miten pahvilaatikko on valikoitunut teoksen osaksi – ja rinnastan omaa työtäni siihen, minkälaisia paikkoja esineille on yleisemmin kuvataiteessa valittu.

## Teokset tekstissä ja tutkimuksessa

Taiteellisen tutkimukseni tekstiosassa seuraan tapahtumia ja muutoksia teosten tekemisessä. Näyttelyosuudet muodostavat tekstin lähdeaineiston, ja yritän löytää sanoja jälkeensä, teosten valmistuttua. Hyväksyn sen, etteivät teokset palaudu tai hajoa sanoiksi, ja sanallistamisen mahdottomuus on ollut myös yksi motiivini tekstin kirjoittamiselle. Teksti ei selitä teoksia, eikä välttämättä edes vie lukijaa lähemmäs niitä vaan muodostaa uuden tarkastelupisteen teoksiin.

Taideesta sinänsä on kutsuttu myös tutkimukseksi eri yhteyksissä, tosin keskenään hieman eri merkityksissä. Esimerkiksi postmodernia taidetta luonnehtiva Jean-François Lyotard toivoo postmodernin teoksen olevan tutkimusta teoksen omista säännöistä. Taideteoksen tulisi määritellä omia, tehdessä syntyviä toimintaperiaatteitaan. Parhaimmillaan saadaan siis aikaan uudet säännöt, ja teos on – reaktionä tai vastareaktionä modernille – tutkimus omista säännöistään. Tunnetussa tekstissään *Vastaus kysymykseen: mitä postmoderni on?* (1982) Lyotard kertoo: ”Taiteilija, postmoderni kirjailija on filosofin asemassa: hänen kirjoittamansa teksti tai teos, jonka hän luo, ei periaatteessa ole vakiintuneiden sääntöjen alainen, eikä sitä voi arvostella determinoivan arvostelman keinoin, soveltamalla tunnettuja kategorioita tekstiin ja teokseen. Nuo säännöt ja kategoriat ovat juuri sitä, mitä teos tai teksti tutkii. Taiteilija tai kirjailija työskentelee siis ilman sääntöjä: sääntöjen vahvistamiseksi sille, mikä tulee olemaan tehty.” (Suom. Martti Berger, teoksessa *Estetiikan klassikot II*, toim. Ilona Reiners, Anita Seppä ja Jyri Vuorinen, Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2016, s. 519–520.)

Edeltävää yleisempi ajatus varmasti on, että teoksen tulkitaan olevan tutkimusta siksi, koska se saa esiin jonkin yksittäisen, ai-nutlaatuisen asian, totuuden. Esimerkiksi filosofi Alain Badiou mainitsee taideteoksesta, kuinka ”Teos on tutkimus totuudesta, jonka se aktualisoi paikallisesti tai jonka äärellinen osa se on.” (Badiou: ”Taide ja filosofia”, 1998, suom. Anna Tuomikoski,

teoksessa *Estetiikan klassikot II*, s. 640, ”Art et philosophie” teoksessa *Petit manuel d’inesthétique*.)

Vaikka teosta voidaan nimittää tutkimukseksi, piestä varovaisuutta sanojen kanssa on syytä noudattaa. Teoksen on mahdollista ja samalla mahdotonta olla tutkimusta. Jotakin taideteoksessa selvitetään ja jotakin paljastuu, eikä tavoite tietenkään ole toistaa aiemmin tehtyä, joten jonkin uuden tutkimus on meneillään. Silti teoksen tekeminen on myös mielivaltainen ja satunnaisuuden hallitsema prosessi, ja jos teoksen odotettaisiin vastaavaan ennalta asetettuun tutkimuskysymykseen, ennuste tuloksen saamisesta voisi olla huono. Teoksen edellytys on sen riittävä itsemääräämisoikeus ja itsenäisyys. Samansuuntainen ajatus kärjistyy Juhana Blomstedtin kirjoituskokoelmassa *Muodon arvo* (1995) kirjoittajan pohtiessa maalaamista: ”Maalaus, joka vastaa ennalta määrättyyn kysymykseen on turha.” (s. 79)

Tarkastelen *Kokeita kuvaamisen tavoista* -tutkimuksessani teoksen esittävyttä ja materiaalisuutta lähtien liikkeelle omista teoksistani. Sanallistan tutkimuksessani, miten eri muotoisten teosten kautta olen näyttelyosuuksissa lähestynyt esittävyden ajatusta. Teosteni tekeminen on yhdistämistä, elementtien liittämistä toisiinsa. Koska tekstissä tuon esille asioiden välisiä yhteyksiä, keskeisiksi tulevat kysymykset sekä fyysisistä – konkreettisista – että ajatuksellisista rajoista. Teoksen lähtökohta on myös usein jokin kuvaamisen rajoitus, kuten vaikkapa kuvan koko tai kaksiulotteisuus. Jatkan esimerkiksi kaksiulotteisia kuvia kolmiulotteisiksi teoksiksi tai, kuten teoksessa *Joki*, yhdistän lukemattomia kaksiulotteisia kuvia toisiinsa. *Joki*-teoksessa karstoista irrottamani mutkittelevat viivamaiset jokimerkit muodostavat ”veden” pintaa, ja teos koostuu lähes pelkästään jokikuvien reunoista.

Pahvilaatikkoteoksissa esittävyteen kuuluva rajoitus on laatikon lähtökohtainen kaksoisidentiteetti. Esine esittää jo jotakin, omaan tarkoitukseensa valmistettua tuotetta. Esine on rajatapaus: kun se otetaan teoksen osaksi – teosmateriaaliksi – jääkö se edelleen puoliksi, kokonaan tai lainkaan esineeksi?

## Pakkauslaatikko teoksessa

Pahvilaatikkoteoksissa yhdistän elementit toisiinsa poistamalla välimatkan yksittäisten esineiden, laatikoiden, väliltä. Päinvastoin kuin esimerkiksi *Joki*-teoksessa, jossa hajotin karttoja, materiaalia ei tarvitse pilkkoa osiin päästäkseen käsiksi rajoihin. Laatikon voi ajatella olevan jo valmiiksi raja: ulkopuolen ja sisäpuolen tai yhtä hyvin oman sisältönsä ja ulkomaailman välinen.

Siirryin pahvilaatikkoteosten myötä käyttämään pelkästään kolmiulotteista materiaalia. Matka kaksikulotteisista kuvista esine-materiaaliin ei kuitenkaan ollut pitkä. Järjestelin edelleen viivoja, kuten esimerkiksi *Joki*-teoksessa, jonka viivoiksi muodostuivat kartoista leikkaamani jokien kuvat. Pahvilaatikkoteoksissa visuaalisesti olennainen tekijä on sisäkkäin pakattujen laatikoiden reunoista syntyvä viivarytmi. Kolmiulotteinen materiaali tuottaa teoksissa yhdelle taholle vaikutelman eräänlaisesta kaksikulotteisesta kuvasta: labyrinttimaisen viivaston. Yksittäinen laatikko vaikuttaa myös samalla katoavan teoksen massaan.

Laatikkoteokset ovat pohdintoja tilasta sen hävittämisen kautta. Laatikon sisältämä tyhjä tila häviää, kun täytän laatikot toisillaan: jokaisen aina edellistä pienemmällä, täsmälleen siihen sopivalla samanmuotoisella laatikolla. Muista Galleria Sculptorin näyttelyn laatikkoteoksista poiketen *Ähky*-teoksessa on sarja sisäkkäin pakattuja kokonaisuuksia, joissa osien väliin on sijoitettu hieman eri muotoinen laatikko. Tällöin teoksen uloimmat laatikot ovat antaneet periksi, joustaneet ja pyöristyneet, menettäneet suorakulmaisuuksensa, ikään kuin niihin olisi pakattu liikaa sisältöä.

## Esine ja taideteos

Teosmateriaalina pahvilaatikko kiehtoo minua monipuolisuudessaan. Laatikko on tyhjä tila mutta sen merkitys viittaa kuluttamiseen, maailman täyttämiseen. Muodoltaan se on suorakulmainen kappale, joka kuitenkin voi litistyä tai pyöristyä. Se on esine siinänsä mutta toisaalta pelkkä kuori.

Kuvataideteoksen osaksi liitetty esine on aina vaihtamassa identiteettiä tai sillä on samanaikaisesti useita identiteettejä. Jälkimmäisessä tapauksessa voi ajatella esimerkiksi yhdysvaltalaisen Sarah Szen tuotantoa, jossa käyttöesineet on usein aseteltu osaksi teoksia, mutta niin itsenäisesti, että ne ovat ikään kuin valmiina otettaviksi uudelleen käyttöön alkuperäiseen tehtäväänsä. Kuvataiteen historian eri vaiheissa esineille on annettu ja edelleen annetaan erilaisia paikkoja ja tehtäviä. Mitä esineet tekevät teoksessa – mitä asiaa niillä meille on?

Kiinnostus tehdä esinekoosteiksi luokiteltavia teoksia ilmeni 1950- ja 60-luvuilta lähtien muun muassa Joseph Cornellin, Armanin, Louise Nevelsonin, Robert Rauschenbergin ja Claes Oldenburgin tuotannossa. Rauschenberg halusi esineteoksillaan korostaa ajatusta elämän ja taiteen välisen kuilun täyttämisestä. Ikävä kyllä kuilulla oli huonot mahdollisuudet täytyä tällä keinolla, yhdistämällä esineitä teoksiin. Mahdollisesti se vain syveni, kun teolliset, massatuotetut esineet asetettiin osaksi taide-teosta ja tultiin siten ylläpitäneeksi, osoittaneeksi uudestaan eroa elämän ja taiteen välillä.

Vaikka edellä mainitut taiteilijat tekivät teoksiaan jo teollisen vallankumouksen jälkeisessä maailmassa, heidän ympäristönsä poikkesi huomattavasti nykyisestä, ylijäämän ja esinemarkkinoiden hallitsemasta maailmasta. Lähestyttäessä 2000-lukua alettiin tehdä esineistä installaatioita, jotka verrattuna esinekoosteiden pioneerien teoksiin olivat isokokoisempia ja sisällöllisesti usein jonkinlaista metamorfoosia, prosessia, hetkellistä tilannetta kuvaamaan keskittyviä.

Käsitteli esineinstallaatio sitten mitä teemaa vain ja oli sen materiaali kuinka pitkään säilyvää tahansa, se sisälsi perinteisessä näyttelytilassa – museossa tai galleriassa – esitettynä häivähdyksen siittä, ettei teos ei ole välttämättä ikuinen, staattinen, pysähtynyt. Viimeistään seuraavan näyttelyn alku merkitsee teoksen purkamista.

Installaatian tilannesidonnaisuudelle vastakkaisesti asetelma-maalauksen taas vaikuttaa olevan pysähtyneisyyden ilmentäjä, mah-

dollisesti hetkellistä, häviävääkin tilannetta kuvaava, mutta omalla tavallaan pysyväksi tehty arkielämän muistomerkki. Se pyytää katsojaa uskomaan, että sen välittämä rauha ja hiljaisuus säilyy maailman loppuun asti.

Onko esineinstallaatio eräänlainen päivitetty versio asetelmamaalauksesta? Esineinstallaatio on tilallinen ja koostuu kolmiulotteisista elementeistä, asetelmamaalaus sen sijaan on kaksiulotteinen, kuvaan rakennetun illuusion varassa toimiva järjestelmä. Ilman muuta asetelmakuva on huomionosoitus materiaalisille, fyysisen maailman esineille kuten esineinstallaatiokin. Asetelmamaalaus tai -kuva on itsekin esineen kaltainen: selvästi lähempänä kohdettaan, esittämiään esineitä, kuin esimerkiksi henkilömaalaus omaa malliaan.

Asetelmamaalauksen kukoistuskausien ja tänä päivänä syntyvän kuvataiteen väliin mahtuvat alussa mainitsemieni esinekoosteiden lisäksi monenlaiset pop-taiteen esinetulkinnat ja -toteutukset sekä Marcel Duchampin julistukset. Niissä herätettiin teollisesti tuotettuja esineitä uuteen elämään. Ne eivät enää antaneet esineiden pysyä suvereenina, suljettuina järjestelminä, vaan ne tekivät esineistä välineitä kysyä esimerkiksi: Mitä on taide? Missä kulkevat taideteoksen rajat? Mitkä ovat ihmisen vallinnan mahdollisuudet?

## **Valintojen valikoima**

Ready made -termi viittaa työläyden väistämiseen. Kaikki on jo valmista, vain valinta on jäljellä. Marcel Duchampin julistuksissa korostui valitseminen, kun taas taiteilijan työn osuus jäi prosessissa vähäisemmäksi. Valinta ja esineen siirtäminen teokseksi ei ollut tuolloin totuttua taiteilijan työskentelyä, teoksen valmistamista käsin. Toisaalta valitsijan persoona muuttuu kuitenkin entistä tärkeämmäksi, kun teoksen toteuttamisen osuus pienenee.

Teoksen ”valmistajan” osuuden kyseenalaistamisen lisäksi Duchampin provokatiiviset valinnat – käyttöesineet, pullonkui-vaustelineet, pisoaarit ja lumilapiot taideteoksina – olivat yhtey-

dessä myös siihen, että katsoja loi teoksen mielessään. Mielessä, ajatuksissa rakentelua oli tietenkin sisältynyt vaikkapa figuratiivisen maalauksen katsomiseen, mutta nyt mieleen aukeavat reitit haaroittuivat aiemmista vakiintuneista ajatuskuluista huomattavasti: vaihtoehdot lisääntyivät.

Nykyhetkeen tultaessa käsitys teoksesta on ehtinyt uudistua kokonaisuudessaan, ja omasta perspektiivistämme äärimmäisen monenlaista toimintaa – kuten äänen tallennusta sen esittämiseksi kuvataideteoksena – voidaan pitää teoksen tekemisenä.

Duchamp ja hänen aikalaisensa valitsivat esineitään omiin olosuhteisiimme verrattuna eri maailmassa. Heillä ei voinut olla kokemusta elämänmenosta, jossa samaan käyttötarkoitukseen tehdyistä esineistä on lukemattomasti versioita, ja arkipäivän käyttöesineen valintaan liittyy usein ahdistus ilmaston ja koko maapallon tulevaisuudesta.

Duchampin aikaan verrattuna meidän aikamme esinesuhteet ovat erilaisia myös siten, että esineettömyyskin on tavoite. Teknologian kehitys on tehnyt monista esineistä tarpeettomia, mutta tietenkin on eri asia, ovatko vanhentuneet ja tarpeettomat esineet poistuneet ympäristöstämme, elämästämme. Toisaalta esine voi tällä hetkellä saada jopa ihmisen paikan, tulla valituksi ihmisen asemasta, kun kone voi useassa tilanteessa työskennellä ihmisen sijaisena.

## **Valinnan epävarmuus**

Osoittaako *Ähky*-teos, että äärettömän esinevalikoiman kanssa tullaan toimeen loistavasti? Teoksessa kaikki esineet saadaan mahtumaan toistensa sisään, laatikot joustavat ja antavat anteeksi pienet kokoerot. Ehkä laatikoiden reunojen väleistä esiin kiipeää kuitenkin kysymys siitä, miten suoriutua kaiken kanssa. Äärimmillen täytetty, jopa alkuperäisen muotonsa menettänyt laatikko ja tietenkin myös se, että materiaalina on pelkkä pakkaus, tuo sopivuuden sijaan esille epävarmuuden siitä, miten on mahdollista

selvitä kaiken hankitun kanssa, ovatko hankinnat välttämättömiä – ovatko valinnat oikeita.

Kun teosmateriaalina ovat arkiesineet, kuten laatikkoteoksissa, katsojan on palattava esinesuhteisiinsa, kanssakäymiseen samantyyppisten esineiden kanssa, omiin valintoihinsa. Teoksen keskeltä ajatukset suuntautuvat yhteyteen sekä teoksessa olevien käytettyjen esineiden entisen elämän että katsojan omien kokemusten kanssa. Käytännössä esinesuhteemme tarkoittavat myös suhdetta rajaan ja rajanvetoon: valinnanvara, esineiden määrä, merkitsee jatkuvaa rajanvetoa, esineiden hylkäämistä tai uusimista.

Teos vie vastakkain myös toisen suhteen kanssa. Kun teoksen muodostaa toistensa kaltaisten esineiden joukko, tulevat mukaan kysymykset niiden keskinäisistä eroista tai yhtäläisyyksistä: havaitsemeko esineet erillisinä ja erilaisina vasta suhteessa muihin vai alkavatko ne näyttää merkityksettömämmiltä yhdistettyinä samankaltaisiin?

Arkielämässä esineiden yhteydessä näyttäytyy siis toive rajojen havaitsemisesta, laatikkoteoksissa taas hävitän rajoja yksittäisten elementtien väliltä. *Ähky*-teoksen aine on arvoltaan kyseenalaista pakkausmateriaalia. Vaikka työn tekeminen oli minulle visuaalista leikkiä, visuaalisten ja tilallisten kysymysten ohella teos vie katsojan myös esineiden, kulutustavaroiden uudelleenkäyttämisen mahdollisuuteen tai mahdottomuuteen.

### **Materiaalin valitsijana ja valitsemana**

*Ähky*-teoksen tekemisessä valintojen teko sujui helposti. Laatikat omalla tavallaan kertoivat minulle, miten toimia. Aiemmat saman teoskokonaisuuden työt neuvoivat minua tekemään sarjan, joka koostuisi niin täyteen pakatuista laatikoista, että niiden muoto muuttuisi.

Koko laatikoista muodostuvan teoskokonaisuuden aloittaminen johtui siitä, että havaitsin laatikon paradoksaalisuuden: onko se pitkäikäinen ja pysyvä vai hetkellinen, kertakäyttöinen esine?

Miten muiden laatikoiden avulla voisin kadottaa yksittäisen laatikon niiden joukkoon? Miten laatikoiden joukolla saan aikaan viivaston: miten laatikon reunoista tulee viivoja, jotka muodostavat ”kuvan”? Materiaali herätti kysymään nämä kysymykset, joiden takia minun oli alettava työskennellä.

Saako materiaali – kuten tässä tapauksessa esine – siis kuva- taiteilijan työssä erityisaseman? Ilmeisesti materiaali voi pakottaa taiteilijan toimimaan, tuottamaan uusia lajeja tai yhdistelmiä. Sen sijasta, että se olisi polttoainetta, jota työprosessissa annostellaan sopiva määrä, materiaalia pitäisi ehkä kutsua moottoriksi tai käynnistysnappulaksi.

Onko taiteilijan työtä sitten nimitettävä löytöjen tekemiseksi? Kuulostaisi hauskalta, mutta mieluummin vastaan ei, koska minun on hankala käyttää teosmateriaalista ilmaisua löydetty, löytöesine, *objet trouvé*. Johtuuko tämä siitä, että esineelle paikan löytäminen teoksesta on olennaisempaa kuin esineiden löytäminen? Esinelöytöjen tekeminen tuo mieleen oman vastakohtansa: etsimisen, joka olisi jonkin tietyn asian hakemista, ja ehkä myös shoppailijan, jota löytöjen tekeminen kuormittaa, kun herätelöydöille ei ole paikkaa elämässä.

Löytämisen sijaan olisi helpompi käyttää taiteilijan työstä kevyempää ilmausta ”tunnistaminen”. Tekijä tunnistaa materiaalin omaksi teosmateriaalikseen tai havaitsee esimerkiksi esineen kuuluvan työskentelyynsä. Hän tunnistaa ja luokittelee, tekee ajatuksissaan valinnan siitä, mitä jokin havaittu aine tai esine on. Onko se jokin esiaste, välitila vai kenties hänen teoksensa valmista materiaalia?

## **Ajatusten valikoima**

Kun 1960-luvulla käsitetaiteilijoiden piirissä virittäydettiin muutamaan taiteen olemusta ja luonnetta, teosten esineluonne kiusasi ja häiritsi taiteilijoita. Tavarat haluttiin siivota taiteesta ja saada tilaa ajatuksille. Miten taideteos muka voi olla lähellä esinettä – kaupallista rihkamaa? Taideteokset – veistokset, maalaukset

– olivat objekteja, lähes esineitä, joilla oli hankalaa käydä yhteiskunnallista keskustelua. Esineellisyyttä oli syytä epäillä, ja objektinomaisten taideteosten tekeminen koettiin vanhanaikaiseksi toimintatavaksi, tradition kuorrutukseksi. Havahduttiin siihen, että esimerkiksi maalaustaiteen perinne oli jo niin merkittävä, että yksittäinen taiteilija ei voinut maalaustaiteen puitteissa enää luoda mitään sen ylittävää. Traditio oli niin iso taakka, ettei sen raahaaminen kannattanut.

Taideteos voi sen sijaan olla jotakin, joka toteutuu vastaanottajan mielessä pelkästään esimerkiksi taiteilijan antamalla vihjeillä ja ohjeilla, lähes ilman minkäänlaista konkreettista materiaalia. Taiteentekemisen tulos sai mieluiten olla muuta kuin jokin staatistiseksi, lopulliseksi ajateltu tuote.

Käsitetaiteilijat eivät muodostaneet kiinteää yhtenäistä suuntausta, ja esimerkiksi Lawrence Weinerkin, joka toteutti teoksia sanoilla ja kielellä, suhtautuu teoksen käsitteeseen kuitenkin siten, että teos on aina jotakin materiaalista. Hän mainitsee kokevansa itsensä ”materialistiksi”: ”Still, I experience myself as a materialist.” ja kertoo: ”The things I make and whatever means I choose to make them, all revolve around the idea that art relates to people’s relationship to objects.” – teokset, joita teen ja menetelmät, jotka valitsen toteuttaakseni ne, pyöriivät kaikki sen ajatuksen ympärillä, että taide liittyy ihmisten suhteisiin esineisiin. (Grøgaard, Stian: (2001). ”Lawrence Weiner – Material and Metaphor”. Teoksessa *The Restless Object*. Oslo: Unipax. s. 28–35.)

Nykyään niin taiteilijoille kuin taideyleisölle on selvää, että kuvataideteos voi olla myös tilanne ilman näkyvää materiaalia ja toteutua esimerkiksi vuorovaikutuksena tai teokseen osallistumisena. Näkymättömissä saattavat olla myös nykyisten teosten juuret tai maaperä, jossa teokset ovat syntyneet. 1960-luvun käsitetaiteen käänteet jättivät jälkeensä mittavan perinnön, jolla on vaikutusta edelleen nykypäivän kuvataiteeseen. Kun 2020-luvulla tehdään teoksia ja valintoja, onko ajateltava, että esimerkiksi maalaus- ja veistotaiteen traditioiden lisäksi mukanamme seuraa

käsitetaiteen tradition taakka? Onko valinnanvapautemme tässä mielessä hieman entistä kapeampi?

## Valintojen järjestys

Kuten omat teokseni, moni muukin kuvataideteos on konkreettisen materiaalin, kuten esineiden, ja käsitteellisen idean yhdistämistä. Voiko näin erilaisten elementtien yhdistämisen takana nähdä jonkin kaavan tai yhtälön? Materia on sinänsä vaikea ja moniulotteinen termi selittää. Onko mielekästä edes asettaa aineellista ja ”henkistä” – jotakin ihmisen päässä syntyvää – vastakohdiksi toisilleen? Elämänmuotomme on täysin materiaalisuuteen ja esineisiin sitoutunutta. Ajatusten synnyttäjät, me itse, olemme ainetta kiireestä kantapäähän. Aineellisen kehon päällystämme suurimmaksi osaksi aikaa vaatteilla, kengillä ja niin edelleen, emmekä liikuttele tai pidä sitä paikoillaan luonnonolosuhteissa vaan rakentamiemme koteloiden, talojen, sisällä.

Mutta jos mainituista yhteyksistä huolimatta hieman yllytämme itseämme pohtimaan, onko mahdollista asettaa järjestykseen sekä fyysisestä, konkreettisesta materiaalista että käsitteellisestä ideasta koostuvan teoksen syntyprosessin vaiheita, mihin päädyimme? Ensin taiteilijalla täytyy olla jonkinasteinen ajatus teoksesta. Sitten on toteutettava tämä oivallus jostakin aineesta, materiaalista. Koska teosidea ei ole ollut taiteilijalla hänen syntymästään lähtien, se on tarttunut jostakin hänen matkaansa. Tuuleeko se tyhjiöstä tai muiden ideoiden keskeltä – oivallusten varastosta? Ja miten taiteilija rakentaisi tällaisen ideoiden varaston, jonka valikoimasta poimia sopiva? Mahdollisimman laaja ideapankki olisi epäilemättä paras. Mitä enemmän ehdotuksia olisi jo tallessa, sitä todennäköisempää olisi pelkästään niitä hieman muuttamalla tai yhdistämällä saada valituksi myös uusi, entisistä poikkeava idea.

Luultavammin taideteoksen idea on kuitenkin kotoisin materiaalisesta maailmasta, katseen tai käden kosketuksesta materiaaliin, johonkin, joka edustaa materiaalisuutta. Omassa toi-

minnassani huomaa uuden työn suunnitelman usein syntyneen työskennellessäni, siis käden ja katseen kosketellessa tekeillä olevia teoksia.

### **Sijoitusvaihtoehdot**

Entä jos taideteoksen tekemisen pohdintaa jatkaa vertaamalla sitä sijoittamiseen? Taiteilija ei sijoita rahaa – vaikka sitäkin voi kuluu teosten tekemisessä – vaan ajatuksia. Taiteilijan sijoituskohteet eivät ole rahastoja tai obligaatioita vaan eri materiaaleja. Saadakseen aikaan teoksen taiteilijan on siis sijoitettava pääoma – ajatukset – johonkin materiaalin, mutta miten sijoituskohteet valikoituu? Sijoitusneuvontaa ei ole saatavilla, vaan valinnat ovat taiteilijan omia päätöksiä. Tämä tekee materiaalien kanssa kommunikoinnista, niihin tutustumisesta ja niiden kanssa elämisestä oleellista.

Tuotto, jota taiteilijan työssä tavoitellaan, on se, että teos synnyttäisi katsojassa ajatuksia, tunteita tai niiden määrittelemätöntä sekoitusta, hämmennystä. Kuten talouselämässä, taiteilijan toiminnassakaan riskitöntä vaihtoehtoa ei ole, vaan jokaiseen sijoitustapahtumaan liittyy vaara, ettei tuottoa saada: ettei elämystä synny tai että teos ei edes kiinnosta kohderyhmää – toista ihmistä. Tuottoa ei voida ennustaa toteutuneiden tapahtumien perusteella. Esimerkiksi ajatusten sijoittaminen aiemmin hyvin tuottaneeseen – jotakin entistä muistuttavaan yhdistelmään – on vain näennäisen turvallinen valinta eikä takaa voittoa.

Passiivisena pysyminen ei kuitenkaan tuota mitään, joten ajatukset kannattaa sijoittaa ennemmin kuin pitää päässään, ja joka kerta uuden teoksen tekemisessä taiteilijalle kertyy sijoituskochemusta. Odotus on, että aktiivisena sijoittajana hän harjaantuu valinnoissaan ja siten sijoittaminen kehittyy oikeaan suuntaan.

Jos materiaalivalinta – sijoitus, tunnistaminen, löytäminen – osuu elottomiin esineisiin, se ei kohtaa mitään pysyvää yksikköä tai järjestelmää. Esinemaailma ei ole pysyväksi rajattu kokonaisuus eikä muuttuvan ihmisen vastakohta, vaan arkielämän

esinevalinnan mittakaava ja valitsemisen kohteet ovat jatkuvassa muutoksessa. Yhtä todennäköistä on, että ihminen pysyy koukussa kamaan, esinevalintojen teko jatkuu.

Esineet ovat osallisia, seuralaisia ja asiamiehiä apunamme. Tilanne näyttää selkeältä ja yksinkertaiselta: voi päättää, mitä tarvitsee, ja esineiltä lupaa kyselemättä tehdä kaikki valinnat. Tarkemmin ajatellen emme silti ole vapaita tai itsenäisiä päättäjiä, vaan harmittavan riippuvaisia esineiden toiminnasta. Ne rikkoutuvat liian pian tai toisaalta jäävät jäljelle liian pitkäksi aikaa, kun tarve ja kiinnostus niitä kohtaan on hävinnyt. Tai sitten tottumus ja kiintymys estävät niiden hylkäämisen, vaikka ero esineestä olisi järkevin valinta. Voi ihailla asenteita ja tekoja, joilla luovutaan turhasta, mutta ei voi kuitenkaan kuvitella elämää, jossa ei olisi esineiden ympäröimänä. Koska muun muassa esteettiset ja käyttötarkoituksiin liittyvät vaatimukset ovat vaihtuvia, ulottuvilla on yhä esineiden muuttuva joukko odottamassa uusia kysymyksiä, eleitä ja liikkeitä.

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# Omistettu teokselle, jota ei vielä ole – taiteellisen prosessin alkuvaiheesta

PILVI PORKOLA

*Kuvittelen tilan; valkoinen seinä, tummempi lattia, ikkunat. Musta monitorin näyttö. On olemassa paikka teokselle, jota en ole vielä tehnyt.*

## I Elokuu

Taiteen tekeminen ei koskaan ala ”alusta”, vaan aina jollain tapaa umpimähkäästä. Prosessi ei synny tyhjästä, eikä se synny tyhjään. Teosta edeltävät muut teokset; ne, jotka olen nähnyt, ne, joista olen vain kuullut sekä ne, jotka olen itse tehnyt. On olemassa traditio, traditioita, joihin tuleva teokseni tulee liittymään. Osaksi teosten virtaa.

Prosessin alku on usein näennäinen alku, joka on määriteltä jälkikäteen. Teos, josta yritän nyt kirjoittaa ja jota ei ole vielä olemassa, ”alkoi” mahdollisuudesta, kutsusta osallistua näyttelyyn. Näyttelyn paikaksi on päätetty, Exhibition Laboratory Galleria Helsingin Punavuorella Kuvataideakatemia tutkimuspäivät – tapahtuman yhteydessä. Kun vastasin näyttelykutsuun, en vielä tiennyt, mitä tulisin tekemään. Oli idea – epämääräinen, kevyt, hahmoton ja leijuva, yksi monista tuulisena päivänä.

Jotkut teokset alkavat ideasta, toiset muodosta. Jotkut syntyvät tekemisen myötä. Monet esityksistäni ovat alkaneet jostain mielikuvasta, *käsi silittää kiveä*. Tai istun tuolilla ja teen käsilläni *n ä i n*. Koen äkillistä varmuutta teosta ja sen painokkuudesta, vaikka en osaa sanallistaa juuri tämän liikkeen tai toiminnan merkityksellisyyttä, saati sen tarkoitusta tai mahdollista teemaa.

Minulle, kuten useille muillekin taiteilijoille, apuraha- ja näyttelyhakemukset ovat hirvitys, koska ne tehdään usein vaiheessa, jossa taiteellisen työn prosessi ei ole kunnolla alkanut. Tuntuu siltä, että teokset ja esitys täytyy pakottaa sanalliseen muotoon, jota niillä ei vielä ole. Idealelle täytyy kuvitella järkeenkäypä kielellinen ilmaisu, tarkentaa teema ja konteksti, aihe ja sisältö, muoto ja yksityiskohdat. Tulee kirjoittaa työsuunnitelma ja määrittellä materiaaliset tarpeet, vaikka ajatus teoksesta on vasta hahmottumassa, ituna mielessä. Väri, jonka olemassaolon tunnistaa mutta jota ei osaa kuvata.

Tämän tekstin kirjoittaminen tuntuu vähän samalta. Yritän hahmottaa sanoiksi jotain, jota ei vielä ole.

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*Olohuoneen lattialla on kivi. Kokeilen sitä, se painaa.  
Asetun selinmakuulle ja nostan sen vatsani päälle.*

\*\*\*

Taiteellista tutkimusta kirjoittaessani olen pääasiassa kirjoittanut jo tehdyistä teoksista, mutta toisinaan myös sellaisista, joiden prosessi on vielä kesken. Keskeneräisistä projekteista kirjoittaminen sopii huonosti tutkimuskehikseen, jossa oletetaan, että havainnoidusta asioista voi tehdä johtopäätöksiä. Kirjoitus muokkaa tutkimusta, se luo siihen johdonmukaisuutta ja rakenteen. Sanat piirtävät teokselle rajoja, antavat sille omanlaisensa muodon. Mutta miten luoda johdonmukaisuutta prosessiin, joka ei ole vielä toteutunut?

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Jotain kuitenkin on; on kivi ja on ajatus videon tekemisestä.

Olen ensimmäiseltä koulutukseltani videokuvaaja, ja tohtorintyötä aloittaessani viisitoista vuotta sitten<sup>1</sup> minua kiinnosti videokuvan ja elävän esityksen suhde. Olin kiinnostunut erilaisten esitysformaattien tavasta suhtautua aikaan ja ruumiillisuuteen sekä siitä, miten teoksen formaatti määrittelee katsemme suuntaa. Videokuva tarjosi tietynlaista muotoa ja katseentapaa, valmiiksi ajatellun kuvan. Elävä esitys, performanssi, näyttäytyi epämääräisenä ja hallitsemattomana, mahdollisuuksina, jotka toteutuvat läsnäolossa.

Ajatus videon ja elävän esityksen tutkimisesta rinnakkain muuttui, kun suhteeni videokuvan tekemiseen kriisiytyi. Tuntui kuin kulttuurin visuaalinen tulva olisi hyökynyt ylitseni, ja ajattelin, että uusien kuvien tekemiselle tulisi olla joitain erityisiä perusteita. Esityksen katoava luonne tuntui lohduttavalta: Ajatus siitä, että tässä hetkessä on jotain yhdessä jaettua, ja sitten se on ohi. Jotain kerrostuu katsojien muistiin, ja esitys kantautuu kenties epämääräisinä muistoina jonnekin toisaalle, ei muuta.

En tiedä johtuuko vanhenemisestä, että suhde jälkien jättämiseen muuttuu, vai keskenjääneestä kysymyksestäni suhteessa kuvan tekemiseen, mutta viime vuosina olen ollut taas varovaisen kiinnostunut kuvasta. Katson kiveä, ja tutkin kameran säätöjä. Pohdin mahdollisia kuvauspaikkoja jossain lähellä. Mietin säätä ja vuorokaudenaikaa, olisiko aurinkoinen vai puolipilvinen parempi? Pitäisikö lähteä ihan aamusta vai vasta iltapäivällä?

## II Syyskuu

*Ulkona paistaa aurinko. Ajattelen: tänään olisi täydellinen kuvauspäivä. Lattialla on kivi, se odottaa. Ehkä kuitenkin menen keittiöön tiskaamaan.*

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Performanssitaiteilijoilla on pitkä historia työskentelystä erilaisen esineiden kanssa. Suhde objekteihin voi olla hyvin erilainen,

usein kuitenkin tavalla tai toisella ruumiillinen. Kameralle tehdyssä performanssissaan *Board* (1993) taiteilijat Paul Harrison ja John Wood liikkuvat valkoisessa studiomaaisessa tilassa heitä isomman levyyn kanssa. Toinen nojaa levyyn, toinen ottaa vastaan. Sama toistuu, mutta toisella tavalla. Toinen pitää levyä pystyssä, toinen hyppää sen yli. Tarkasti koreografoidussa teoksessa esine lakkaa olemasta esine, jotain arkista, melkein näkymätöntä, vaan siitä tulee objekti ja olennainen osa liikesarjaa. Vielä enemmän: siitä tulee toimija, teoksen se elementti, joka mahdollistaa juuri tällaisen toiminnan. Taiteilijoiden ruumiit sulautuvat saumattomaksi koreografiaksi, toiminnalliseksi jatkumoksi esineen kanssa. Kamera todistaa ja tallentaa tilanteen.

Hyvin erilainen tapa lähestyä esineitä on taiteilija Bobby Bakerilla. Performanssissaan *Kitchen Show* (1991) Baker kertoo arkisia fragmentteja ja havainnollistaa niitä toiminnalla. Baker kertoo, että kun hän suuttuu keittiössään, paras tapa purkaa jännitettä on valita sopiva päärynä ja heittää se kaapin oveen huutaen kovaan ääneen. Hän toteaa ironisesti, että kaapin ovi on paras, koska sen voi helposti maalata tarvittaessa ja suosittelee samantyyppistä toimintatapaa katsojallekin. Sitten hän havainnollistaa toiminnon. Toisen päärynän hän pistää siivousmekkonsa taskuun muistutukseksi raivon purkamisen mahdollisuudesta. Bakerin esityksiin liittyy usein narratiivinen ulottuvuus ja eräänlainen hahmo, keski-ikäinen, keskiluokkaan kuuluva nainen, joka edustaa tietynlaista maailmaa ja maailmankuvaa. Arkiset esineet ja materiaalit ovat olennainen osa tarinankerrontaa. Baker puhuu kameralle ja sitä kautta oletetulle katsojalleen.

Artikkelissani ”Objects That Matter – Performance Art and Objects” (2019) pohdin, millaisia lähestymistapoja performansitaiteilijat ovat tarjonneet esineisiin omassa taiteessaan. Näkökulmanani oli uusmaterialismi ja ajatus siitä, että materia ei ole muuttumatonta ja jähmeää. Performanssitäiteilijat ovat usein teoksissaan osoittaneet tämän; esineet aktivoivat toimintaa, toiminta tuottaa uusia merkityksiä ja merkitykset ruumiillistuvat performansseissa.

Artikkelin keskeinen osa oli sarja lyhyitä videoita, *Study On Objects* (2019). Olin valinnut joitain esineitä – ilmapallo, kivi, sanakirja – ja kokeilin erilaisia toimintoja niiden kanssa. Kuvasin toiminnat tavoitteenani nähä, millaisia näkökulmia ne tuottavat ihmisten ja esineiden suhteeseen. Kuvattuani lyhyet toiminnot huomasin tutkijana olevani eräänlaisessa kaksoispositiossa; tulisiko minun pohtia enemmän sitä, mitä ajattelin tekojen tekemisestä, vai sitä, mitä näen videoilla (mitkä ovat eri asioita). Ehkä enemmän kuin valitsemiani esineitä, jäin hämmentyneenä pohtimaan itse välinettä, kameraa, sekä sitä, millaisia reunaehtoja ja toiminnan tapoja sen käyttöön sisältyy.

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*Makaan lattialla kamera vatsan päällä. Ulkona sataa.*

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Olen esitystaiteilija. Olen tottunut tekemään esityksiä, jotka tapahtuvat samassa tilassa katsojien kanssa. Tunnistan tutuksi tilanteen, jossa minä puhun ja liikun, kommunikoin. Minulla on käsitys siitä, miten olla ihmisten kanssa tilanteessa. Video on formaattina erilainen, se pelkistää performanssin kuvaksi, representaatioksi. Kuva toimii erilaisin ehdoin kuin elävä esitys, siihen vaikuttaa raja- ja valo, kameran etäisyys kohteesta ja jalustan asento. Kuvassa toimintani näyttäytyy kömpelönä. En ole siellä enää, on vain pikseleitä, joilla on viittaussuhde ruumiiseeni.

Olen myös huolissani näyttelytilanteesta, sillä minulla ei ole juurikaan kokemusta näyttelyistä tekijänä. Pohdin, toimiiko se siis kaikessa yksinkertaisuudessaan niin, että vien näyttelytilaan valmiin teoksen, ja jätän sen sinne. “Siinäkö kaikki?” esiintyjä minussa kysyy. Ei alkulämmittelyjä, ei yleisöä joka ottaa paikansa, ei satunnaista katsekontaktia. Ei huokaisua ennen alkua, ei värinää äänessä eikä hitaasti tulevaa ruumiillista varmuutta: näin tämä menee. Ei naurunhörähdystä katsomosta, ei lämpöaaltoa joka laskeutuu tilaan. Ei tarvitse muistaa rytmiä, katseen suuntaa, vuorosanoja. Teos jää näyttelyyn, ja minä menen kotiini

tekemään jotain muuta. Tällainen ajatus taiteen tekemisestä on minulle aivan uusi.

Tekstissään Mark Leahy kirjoittaa:

“At an exhibition, I am always in a situation of being after, of coming late to these things that have been brought here. They are here now, with nothings round them, absences that give them status, meaning. One absence is the artist, who has departed, leaving this arrangement of stuff for the visitor to come upon. In my encounter with these works, the artist is present in what he has made, chosen, or formed.”

Jotain minusta kenties siis jää teokseen, joka on näyttelytilassa?

### III Lokakuu

*Ulkona paistaa aurinko. Syksy on tavoittanut puut, ohi leijuu lehti. En voi lykätä tätä ikuisesti. Pakkaan kameran ja jalustan reppuun, nostan kiven syliini ja astun ulos ovesta.*

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<sup>1</sup> Väittelin Taideyliopiston Teatterikorkeakoulusta vuonna 2014.









# Practical Reflections on the Verbalization of Craft Experience

JAN LÜTJOHANN

Whether to make a mold, stitch a wound or launch a satellite, craft is learned and taught. Craft is also present in everyday life and in the artistic process. Through working with hands and tools, I take a special interest in the language of teaching and learning craft processes, wherein the experimentality of learning-by-doing meets the experience accumulated by others. What I want to engage you in is a practical way of talking about doing that happens wherever people get together to learn and to teach in a dynamic tradition.

My approach is based on three areas of my own experience: my work as a visual artist involving sculpture, installation and exhibition-making; countless conversations and knowledge-exchanges with craft practitioners from different backgrounds; and a series of courses and workshops that I have taught at art academies, craft museums and other places. In my work as a sculptor and teacher, I use pre-industrial tools and obsolete technology. Even though I appreciate the ingenuity and convenience of machines, I favor working and thinking on a scale of what can be done with my own hands and body. By verbalizing my experience in conversation, I become aware of what I know.

In being an artist, researcher, teacher and a learner, I find the combination of talking and doing to be extremely versatile but not without contradictions. I have spoken with innumerable craftspeople who were excellent at verbalizing their experience and making me understand what I had not been able to see or feel until then. It is easier to voice something that one is familiar with, whereas relatively new experience or deeply ingrained intuition can be hard to translate into language. This, however, does not mean that it can't be done. The subject of tacit and inexplicable knowledge has become a steady part of our conversations. Instead of stating craft knowledge to be inexplicable and cutting the conversation short, I wish to reflect on how artists, craftspeople, teachers, and other practitioners verbalize and make their experience accessible.

The site of my reflections is a situation of learning, which is not limited to institutions but can happen anywhere and take the shape of a visit, a conversation, or working side by side with someone. In that situation, the roles of teachers and learners are flexible and can be swapped. Craft experience is primarily formed by doing, by experimentation, trial and error, repetition, and time. Besides using one's senses of touch and hearing, for example, one can also learn by observing others who carry out the processes. Acknowledging that language cannot replace immediate physical contact, I will attempt to sketch out different means by which practitioners verbalize their experience in the midst of work, material and movement.

Competence cannot be transferred directly from head to head and hand to hand, but in the form of tasks and questions, words can point us in the right direction. **Instruction and advice** offer a shortcut to collective experience, and a chance to save learners the time and pain of trial and error. Through these unassuming linguistic devices, intuition and knowledge are made explicable and are translated into action, often without us noticing. The many aspects and variables of a craft process refuse to present

themselves to us in a neat order and are too numerous to be met one at a time. Instructing or being instructed how to mold clay would be a tedious exercise if it was done with words alone, whereas observing someone who is actively shaping clay, and receiving or giving precise recommendations at the same time can make a profound difference – even after many years of practice. Giving instructions seems simple, but is challenging and full of potential. An economy of means is at work here – both in the amount of instruction and in the work processes themselves. While some elements of craft are best taught well, others are left for learners to discover for themselves.

What looks effortless when done with an experienced hand can be more than challenging for the beginner. An observer might not see clearly what is happening in front of their eyes and gain nothing if one doesn't know what to look for, and sometimes even demonstrating or pointing a finger is not enough. Whether the subject of observation is an action, a process or an object, instructions guide the viewer's attention, and **descriptions** offer a frame of sensorial reference. For example, in carving with chisels and gouges as well as their sharpening, both the cutting and the precise re-shaping of the tools' edges in sharpening are compound movements that are not easily understood only by watching. Here, language establishes points of reference, through description or instruction: 'Listen how the sound of hammering gets higher as the wooden wedge is driven in more tightly.' An abstract geometrical shape is suddenly endowed with slim necks and round bellies, an angle between tool and material becomes sharp or wide, a rhythm fast or gentle. Is this piece of steel good to make tools from? 'Hold it to a grinder and observe the sparks. If they are fat, dull and orange it's only mild steel, if they are bright, sharp and crystalline, the steel contains more carbon and might hold a keen edge.' When helping someone understand how to select materials, to form or to construct, all our adjectives and descriptions are needed to verbalize shapes, textures, processes

and movements. With all the resources and devices of poets and other wordsmiths at our disposal, we must allow ourselves to use language richly and generously.

In view of the endless possibilities, both in physical work and in talking, we practice abstraction, transfer and creativity to work out solutions and keep things simple. Even across language borders it is surprisingly manageable to express complex ideas with a limited grammatical and lexical repertoire – or precisely because of it. The relativity of opposites such as big/small, easy/difficult, fast/slow and good/bad becomes tangible when working with materials and tools. In speaking about craft, **contradictions** enable us to approximate and condense what cannot be approached or described directly.

Wit and wordplay open up subtleties of craft that may be difficult to phrase in other ways. Playful language introduces an educational and mnemonic potential, warmth and lightness to an otherwise serious effort. Non-tangible wisdom is conveyed by familiar parables and **stories**, condensing complex experience into short narratives. Sometimes these arise out of the conversation, at other times a tool, an artefact or an inconspicuous piece of material serves as a starting point for experience to become a narration. We are often concerned with fact and truth, yet knowledge is often transmitted in the shape of fables, parables, stories, tales, aphorisms and anecdotes, founded in witnessed experiences or in our collective imagination. In my youth, in my village, in ancient Egypt, in geology, in a five-dimensional universe... things unfold that spontaneously come into reality between me and you as we struggle in the workshop with material and gravity.

Telling stories and jokes is evocative and visual. Artists lay claim to unique expertise in the handling of images and their context, and it would be surprising if they didn't make use of visual language. Speaking in **images and comparisons** enables us to quantify amounts and forces or to delineate minute movements and decisions. In explaining the effort of carving with a dull chisel by comparing it to a dull kitchen knife accidentally slipping

off the skin of a tomato, one brings together two realizations of the same phenomenon. Describing the wooden fibers of a tree by likening them to a bundle of dry spaghetti effectively visualizes why wood splits better in one direction than another. Imagine wet clay like millions of miniscule wet cucumber slices clinging together. Feel how it is sometimes necessary to grasp a tool handle as if it were a little bird – firmly enough so it doesn't fly away yet gently enough not to squeeze it. Metaphors like 'thinking with one's hands' and 'working with one's hands' can be ambiguous and could be used either to clarify or mystify what is at once a whole-body process and deeply cognitive. When they are fixed in writing and placed under the drawn-out scrutiny of reading, metaphors reveal their shortcomings, but in the dust and frustration of manual work they offer a temporary solution. Even the sharpest steel inevitably becomes dull, and metaphors wear out. In the case of dead metaphors, like the head of an axe, leg of a workbench or eye of a needle, the novelty of the metaphor has become established enough to pass unnoticed. The phrase 'let the tool do the work' is so common in its efficiency that we don't question its implications anymore. Our everyday life has been shaped around the idea that things are lifeless and passive, yet in language inanimate tools become personified when a carpenter's plane whistles, a saw stutters or an anvil sings.

There is value in how people perceive and discuss inexplicable forms of knowledge and thereby acknowledge specific nonverbal competences of practitioners. However, it often seems to mark the conclusion of a conversation rather than provide a new beginning. The idea of nonverbal knowledge is in contrast with my own experience of the lively sites of craft learning, which are everything but silent. Where the experimentality of learning-by-doing meets the experience accumulated by others, a practical use of language develops. Though less self-conscious than the rhetoric of speeches and debates, this dynamic tradition is no less inventive, but it is a spontaneous application of language directly intertwined with movement, material and space.

Stories, images and comments that come forth naturally in teaching seem dull when they appear as words on paper. Practical rhetorics evolve in practical situations, and their origins and effects cannot be easily reproduced without either recording them in great detail or choosing a narrower focus. In this text, I have attempted to summarize observations from my artistic work, research, teaching and learning over the last five years, and in the process I have formulated many questions and ideas for a future inquiry. In front of us in the workshop rest an axe and a roughly hewn wooden shape, one in need of sharpening and the other ready to dry out before further use in construction. I invite you to join me at the workbench.









# An Experiment in Letter-Writing

ELINA SALORANTA

*Jacob's Place 26/13 Aug. Thursday 1909<sup>1</sup>*

*Dear People!*

*I believe I have received all your letters and you presumably mine too. The last time I wrote cards to you from Mitau. That was when Jan left for a week in Riga to draw his altarpiece, as he said. Consequently I now have some peace and quiet again. I nevertheless think the solitude here is having an overly depressive effect on me. I have become so melancholic and nervous that I cannot tolerate anything. I frequently miss Father – especially at times like this – I loved him so unreservedly and he was always so good to me. I do not miss Jan in the slightest – I contemplate the future with him with nothing but dread.*

*He is surely sick – no normal person behaves like he does. But whatever it is that is troubling him – it is impossible to know. And nor does he himself believe in doctors. While he was in Riga he went to see a doctor friend, who examined him and said he has Magenkatharr<sup>2</sup>, and gave him Karlsbad water with large*

*amounts of some sort of powder. That did not make it any better. I think he most probably has a worm – or then there is something wrong with his nerves.*

*One day, for example, I had just got fresh butter from the Krahbant. – As soon as Jan put it in his mouth he started to feel sick, pronounced it bad butter and has not let it pass his lips in any form since, not even in food. – On the contrary he was aggrieved that I did not think it bad too. – With the best will in the world I could not detect anything wrong with it. – And yet I consider myself much more demanding with regard to butter than J. is.*

*Then when we were getting into the carriage to go to Mitau and Laila was wearing her white lace hat, Jan became enraged, insisted that he could not stand the hat, grabbed it off the child's head, crumpled it between his hands and threw it straight into a dirty puddle by the well. – No normal person behaves that way, there is actually something sick about it. Hardly a day passes without him yelling and criticizing us, usually for some trifle. – He is quiet for at most a few hours a day, i.e. when he is painting outside the home.*

*I have written to you about all this in the hopes that you might find some source of light for me. I cannot find any myself.<sup>3</sup>*

*Elli*

The above letter was written by Finnish singer Elli Forssell-Roventälä (1871–1943) in the Latvian countryside somewhere close to Mitau (Jelgava) in August 1909. A century later, during the academic year 2018–2019, I read the letter at five research events<sup>4</sup> and asked people to write a reply to it from today's perspective. They had five to ten minutes to write the letter, and when it was over, I collected texts from those who were willing to share them. People also had a chance to reply to Elli by email to an address I had created for her: [elliforssell@gmail.com](mailto:elliforssell@gmail.com).

What led me to do such an absurd experiment? Firstly, I am interested in letters as a literary genre, a practice between speak-

ing and writing. Secondly, I am interested in participatory presentations as a collective way of producing knowledge. In other experiments preceding the letter-writing task, I had invited conference attendees to console a painting or to give a reply on its behalf.<sup>5</sup> I had also written a collaborative essay<sup>6</sup> based on emails and had begun struggling with a new epistolary text<sup>7</sup>, my own reply to Elli. So, in retrospect, I see the experiment as an attempt to ask for advice, just as Elli does in her letter. I was not, however, thinking about publishing the participants' replies, not until I read the first one and realized that Elli's concerns do not belong to the past. Since then, the work has been more than an experiment; it has become an emancipatory project.

In the exhibition *I Experience as I Experiment – I Experiment as I Experience*, visitors can engage with the project by leaving a note to Elli. They can listen to Elli's own letter on a video or read it in this publication together with nineteen anonymous, slightly abbreviated replies. After the exhibition, all notes and letters will be delivered to Elli's home in Riga. It is now a memorial museum dedicated to her husband Jan, a famous painter.<sup>8</sup>

Among Elli's letters there are many that touch me deeply, but the letter from August 1909 stands out because of its timeless, human nature. It even starts with the words 'Dear People', as if Elli were writing not only to her sisters and brothers but to all of humankind. What advice does she get from her 21<sup>st</sup> century pen pals? What advice would she get if the experiment were repeated in the next century?

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*Terribly sorry for the late reply. I've been quite busy, but a delay of 109 years is a bit excessive. I hope this response finds you well – I imagine it's quite hot in Latvia; it is here in Sweden. And I hope that you have found some sort of peace with your situation, however temporary.*

*Your description of Jan sounds just like my father behaves with us. Everything will be pleasant enough, but then something changes – he'll drop something, a piece of technology will malfunction, something will burn on the stove – and he'll lose his temper, fly off the handle, become paranoid and refuse to calm down. I've seen the toll it has taken on my mother, and I feel deeply for your plight.*

*Unfortunately, I have no advice for you, having found no solution of my own. Two things: as I tell my own mother, it is important to remember that you are not the cause of these outbursts. Jan has something unresolved within him, emotionally, and you should not carry blame or guilt for that, because it is wholly out of your control. You want a husband who is stable and gentle, and unfortunately Jan must want to change for the better.*

*In the meantime, take your peace wherever you can find it.*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*I am sorry to hear you are struggling. Travel to Vienna and find a Dr Freud. His methods are far from perfect, but he would be able to help.*

*Best of luck,*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*I don't know you and you don't know me. Also, I am not a close relative like those you addressed in your letter. Moreover, I cannot, from what you have written, fully understand your plight, your exact situation or the context of the experiences you describe. So, this is a difficult situation, and it is difficult to advise you to, as you put it, find 'some source of light' for you.*

*You say that Jan must be ill; I'm not sure if you mean that literally. Perhaps he is indeed ill, in which case the best course of action would be get him to see another doctor, if only for a second opinion, and preferably someone he doesn't know, and one who specializes in conditions of the mind.*

*But I feel that the problem may be psychic in the old sense of the word (that is: a problem Jan perhaps has in his soul). I note you say you miss your father because he loved you so much and was so 'good' to you. Parental love is a wonderful thing, and often – if one is lucky – it is nearly unconditional. Only very lucky people find that kind of unconditional love in a partner. So, to compare Jan (or at least Jan's love) to your father may be a little unfair.*

*I am also aware that I am writing to you from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a hundred years after your letter. So, the power relations and expectations in marriage and family are different from what they were in your time. I am sure you had no access to marriage counselling, which is probably why you turned to your siblings for advice. But I don't believe that human nature changes much, and I will try to make a reading of your situation.*

*It is difficult to know how deep your love for Jan is, and maybe more difficult to know how much he loves you. I fear that perhaps Jan is out of love with you. If that is the case, it is of course very sad.*

*Above all, you must not let Jan's temper tantrums terrorize you. That is not acceptable. You cannot allow yourself to be abused by another person however much you may care for them, otherwise that situation will be very destructive to your own life and your sense of self. So, I urge you not to accept this situation, for your own sake and for Jan's also.*

*I wish you well and Happiness!*

*Dear Elli,*

*You say there is something sick inside him (Jan), but is that interpretation too individualistic and somatizing/naturalizing? You live in a heterosexual family situation, you are both talented people, with probably high-intensity kids. Is this working for all of you? I would say that sexual difference is something of a post-naturalist register, a social structure and symbolic, too. You claim you need help. This, too, is individualistic and somatizing/naturalizing. Seeing sexual difference as a social and symbolic fabric that keeps individuals and bodies confined – that is what I can offer. Who are your friends in your home town? Who do you talk to? Your neighbours? The women in the shop? A family member? You love your father, you say. Who else do you love and whose love could you bathe yourself in? I bet that person is a woman. A woman as a sister or a lover. I'd love to give you such a person. I hope you will find her soon, now that Jan is in Riga.*

*Best,*

\*

*My Dear Elli,*

*I feel for you, being so far away from us in this difficult time. Me too, I miss Father and wish he was here to help us when things get out of hand.*

*After reading your description about Jan's behaviour, I must say that I agree, he is not behaving like a normal person. But it is hard to figure out what you, or even I, can do about it. In my women's club, where I go once a week, we sometimes talk about our husbands and their behaviour. Sadly, I think that Jan is not alone in the way he acts. Men seem to have a longing to control, to show their strength and power by criticising and yelling. One of my friends fantasized that in the future this might be seen as a sort of violence – unjust and harmful – something that might even be treated with help of specialists.*

*But then again you say that he has already spoken to a doctor friend and tried the powder. Are you sure he took it? Perhaps he flushed it and lied to you about the powder not having any effect. Do you have any means of contacting the doctor to get more powder and perhaps mix it in a glass of cognac you could bring Jan at night?*

*Remember always that I love you, and if you want to come and visit, we have a spare room set up for you.*

*Love from your sister,*

*PS. About the butter: he was probably just making a scene to attack you. Please try not to think about it, he obviously knows nothing about buying and storing food.*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*Thank you for your openness, your honesty and your confidence in writing to me and telling me with such clarity about your situation and your worries. Do you remember the time when you fell in love, when you found out that this painter, this very attractive man, wanted to marry you? I can still remember it like yesterday, the sparkle in your beautiful eyes when you told me about the two of you. I only knew him a little from before, and I couldn't have been happier for you to have found such a great love in your life. Remembering these feelings, I'm now very sad to hear how he has changed and turned into a completely different person. Maybe you are right, and it is indeed an unknown illness that has overwhelmed his character and makes him act so weird and aggressive. I wish I could come to you and help find out what is wrong with him. Maybe we could arrange a visit? And even if I most probably won't be able to change the situation much, I think the two of us could share so much of our latest experiences and stories.*

*Best wishes,*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*It is easy to describe your partner as sick, but I think he is no more ill than anyone else. Actually, the problem is that he doesn't love you. You are not important enough for him, that is why he dares to criticize your food, for example. For a person who values you highly, your food would be delicious, even with the old butter.*

*Just admit that you don't mean much to Jan. He doesn't really care about you, and you cannot force him to love or respect you, because you cannot influence the feelings of another person. The only element that you can change is you yourself. Why should anyone respect you? Are you independent? Good looking, self-confident? What are your hobbies, who are your friends, are you interesting to Jan at all? Are you interesting to yourself? Don't think about his imagined sickness, think instead how to become a better person, but remember you should change only for your own goals. Jan might never appreciate that, and that is something you cannot change. You have to be independent from his opinions & behaviour.*

*Sincerely,*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*I am writing to you from a remote island and I am here among friends, but in the last weeks I have been nervous and melancholy, so I think I understand your state of mind. And perhaps also Jan's.*

*I have no good advice to offer, but I wonder if this time apart will be beneficial for both of you. I have heard that you are very busy at this time of year, picking berries and making jams. I wonder if these familial duties can bring you some peace. Perhaps not.*

*Jan has his painting and his travels. What does he leave you? Loneliness and melancholy... Perhaps you could take a journey with Laila. Perhaps on a boat to St. Petersburg – I have heard it is a beautiful city and the sea air will freshen your mind and give your body some strength.*

*But I am not the person to give advice. I am struggling to control my feelings myself and waiting for the hopeful effect of the island atmosphere.*

*Yours,  
an anonymous friend*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*I worry about you. It cannot be easy to cope with this uncertainty and the underlying violence. Whatever happens, please don't blame yourself.*

*Did you try to talk to him?*

*Did you ask if he noticed how sad Laila had become?*

*Did you consult his closest friend?*

*If I were you, I would try to empathize with his victims and put less focus on him.*

*So, next time he throws Laila's hat, run after it, brush it and tell her what a lovely hat it is and how sad you are that someone tried to destroy it.*

*If he refuses the butter, ignore him and give it to someone else in the room.*

*Yours,*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*Your letter made me very worried and I wonder how you are doing now. Jan's behaviour truly sounds bad. He is nervous, like so many seem to be – especially men. I remember many nervous*

*men from my childhood, my grandfather and others. It is devastating when you have to watch out all the time, and there is no one to protect you.*

*You should get out of there, for your own sake and for your children's – at least for a while.*

*Best wishes,*

\*

*Hi Elli!*

*I just heard about you for the first time. I heard about your marriage for the first time, but I have heard about many other marriages before this, and especially in recent times.*

*For example, I have learned that single people are more critical about their future spouses than those who are married. Single people say 'I wouldn't tolerate that' whereas married tolerate all kinds of things. Why?*

*There are, of course, happy marriages as well. But even in happy marriages people must bear hardships. In happy homes, too, if they exist. In happy families, if they exist. The longer a marriage lasts, the less likely it is to be purely happy.*

*Is it so? Try to cope.*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*While married life is not always a bed of roses, it surely seems that there are some problems at the heart of your home. It seems as if Jan has some underlying physical condition which makes him irritable, but it seems, more importantly, that he has other psychological and behavioural issues which he needs to deal with. This behaviour towards Laila is bullying and unfair to the child, and it seems as if he is terrorizing you all with his bad humour. He needs to seek help for all your sakes as you also seem to be near to the breaking point.*

*I hope you can find a way through these issues to recover some serenity in your household.*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*Thank you for writing to me. I don't know you very well, but what you describe reminds me of the relationship of a good friend of mine. I hope she won't have children with this person. I don't mean it would be the end of the world – but I guess it would be more difficult to get away. And in your case, in another time, perhaps even harder.*

*Would you like to come visit me in Gothenburg? Perhaps a trip would give new perspectives... You can stay with me, and please don't feel like you need to be a certain way or anything. We can do things, talk, or do nothing at all.*

*I want to say you seem strong, I don't want anyone to push you down. You have me, here in the future, as support, you need to get what you need in your life. Even if it breaks conventions. There are more people in the world who are on your side, but revolution is slow!*

*Sorry for writing so corny and clichéd, I didn't take time to formulate very well because I really wanted to reply just now...*

*Love,*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*I wish you could just let Jan go. Nowadays a woman can have a room of her own. Although you might have to struggle, I believe it would be easier than enduring your husband's tyranny.*

*So, go ahead and leave, take your child and the hat from the puddle and come here. You can continue as a singer, and we might be able to find you work as a teacher, too.*

*Be brave, my friend, be brave.*

*Yours,*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*Unfortunately, I didn't receive your postcard from Mitau, and so I don't have any image of that place. I hope it's nice enough.*

*Leaving your own country and having to learn and adapt yourself to a new culture and language is, of course, something I've experienced for the last eight years. I too miss greatly some of my country, but mostly its people and my family. I get news from them, but not the whole story.*

*I'm sorry to hear about Jan. Have you consulted another physician? Perhaps you could put an inquiry to Dr Freud in Vienna.*

*Wishing you the best,*

\*

*Dear Unknown Friend,*

*As there are borders between us that are protected by people and time, it took some time until your letter reached me. Today is a wonderful and sunny day, which contrasts even more with the content of your letter. I am very sorry to hear that you and your daughter are left alone with the issue.*

*It seems to me that there is actually something wrong with Jan as he appears not to be able to control his behaviour and words anymore. Good doctors are rare, so the only hope for change is you. From the small clues I got from you, I would advise you to keep Jan as busy as possible. You mentioned that he likes to paint and that this is the only time you are free. So, keep him occupied by asking him to paint a subject which is far from home and hard to reach, even if he will be grumpy.*

*Yours,*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*It is hard to say such things & questionable whether it is right to give such invasive advice – but – it is important for you to ask if you & Laila are safe around Jan, to consider how being there affects you both emotionally.*

*I have been in a situation likes yours & I was not safe – I had to leave. It saved my life. There must be a way for you to do so. Seek it – at least so that you can have a plan of action.*

*No one has the right to terrorize another person, even if he is sick. It is unacceptable that his sickness is channelled into abuse against you.*

*I know all this is hard to hear. Yet you must hear it. Tell it to yourself. Remind yourself that it is not okay. Look for the light in the direction of the exit. Trust you will find a life outside. Have faith – he does not control you.*

*Best,*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*Your friend Elina has asked me to write to you. This is hard, because I don't feel I have anything to offer you by way of consolation. Are you unable to leave him because of practical problems (money, children) or emotional one (you love him, need him) or because of faith, ethical reasons (it would be wrong to leave him)?*

*I'm afraid I really don't want to have to think about you because I suspect there is nothing I can say that would make any difference to you.*

*At times like this I think about Samuel Beckett's phrase to a lover whose husband died: 'the old earth turning'. The earth turns, the days and nights come and go.*

*When I was a baby and then a small child and well into my adulthood, I felt my mother's depression far too much. I never*

*knew my own sadness, only hers. I am full of her sadness and cannot/don't want to feel any more, especially the sadness of someone who is dead.*

*I'm sorry, but I am trying to write something that is truthful, as truthful and as self-knowing as I can be.*

*Perhaps there is some consolation in knowing that another person, someone you don't know, is trying to speak the truth about her experience.*

*With love,*

\*

*Dear Elli,*

*Thanks for your letter and your honesty. You describe the world as it is, in all its brutality. And yet you have the strength to look at it straight in the eye. Keep doing that, and you will survive. The light is within you, in your beautiful soul.*

*Best wishes,  
your friend from the future*

Translations:

Elli's letter was translated by Michael Garner.

Other letters originally written in Finnish are translated by me.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Latvia observed the Julian calendar, while Finland followed the Gregorian calendar. Elli's letter gives the date in both.
- <sup>2</sup> German for gastroenteritis.
- <sup>3</sup> The letter is from the private collection of Elli's descendant Antto Leikola. I have abbreviated the letter, but have not changed the sentence order.
- <sup>4</sup> The first event was a symposium of the Nordic Summer University on Fårö island, Sweden, 29.7.–5.8.2018. The second event, *Life and Fiction*, took place in Turku, Finland, 22.11.2018 and it was organized by Turku University's Centre for the Study of Storytelling, Experientiality and Memory

- (SELMA). The third was a conference in Helsinki (*Connoisseurship in Contemporary Art Research* 29.–30.11.2018) that asked, among other things, what can be used as research material. The fourth and the fifth events took place at the University of the Arts Helsinki: one was a symposium on performance and feminism (Theatre Academy 20.3.2019), the other a small seminar related to music history (Sibelius-Academy 30.4.2019).
- <sup>5</sup> See my doctoral thesis *Genre pictures and experiments in writing* (University of the Arts Helsinki, Academy of Fine Arts 2017). The thesis has been published in the Research Catalogue (<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/275593/275594>).
  - <sup>6</sup> ‘Windows – a correspondence between Elina Saloranta and Myna Trustram’. In the anthology *Being There – exploring the local through artistic research* edited by Eduardo Abrantes, Luisa Greenfield and Myna Trustram. NSU Press 2018.
  - <sup>7</sup> My reply to Elli – an essay titled ‘Pitsihattu likalätäkössä’ (A lace hat in a puddle of water) – was published in November 2018 in the anthology *Suo, kuokka ja diversiteetti* edited by Markku Eskelinen and Leevi Lehto (ntamo).
  - <sup>8</sup> Janis Rozentāls (1866–1916) was one of the first professional painters in Latvia. The museum is located on Alberta Street in Riga in an apartment where Janis and Elli lived from 1904 to 1915.







# Designing 36Q° *Blue Hour* VR, a Site-Responsive Mixed-Reality Installation for the 36Q° Project at PQ19

JORIS WEIJDOM AND PAUL CEGYS

## Imagine ...

*Imagine walking from a bright and sunny day in Prague through a door and into the dark reception area of an unassuming sports hall. Walking down a stairway, you are greeted by emerging sounds and smoke. At the bottom of the stairs you see an opening to a huge space filled with moving lights and an environmental soundscape. Entering the space you see other visitors exploring circular pools filled with water or little micro-environments with plants and other materials. On both sides of the space are three-storey high scaffolding structures on which coloured LED stripes and video projections show abstract light patterns and moving textures. Then you notice that in some of the pools people are standing with bare feet in sand, lit by a small spotlight above their heads. They are wearing a VR helmet that blocks their eyes and ears, while holding some sort of orb lantern-like object in their hands. They seem to be looking*

*and moving around in a space you cannot see or hear. You walk over to have a closer look and are invited by a friendly volunteer to sit down in a nearby chair to take off your shoes and be the next person to have the 36Q° Blue Hour VR experience...<sup>1</sup>*

### **The collaborative 36Q° Project at PQ19 (Prague Quadrennial 2019)**

The Prague Quadrennial, or PQ, is one of the largest international festivals on theatre and stage design. Launched in 1967 and held every four years, the 2019 edition had 79 countries presenting, 800 artist visiting and about 600 performances, workshops and lectures. We were invited to participate in a recurring project, called ‘36Q°’, by its curators Markéta Fantová and Jan K. Rolník.

The 36Q° project was introduced as follows:

*Prague Quadrennial’s 36Q° (pronounced “threesixty”) presents the artistic and technical side of performance design concerned with creation of active, sensorial and predominantly nontangible environments. Just like a performer, these emotionally charged environments follow a certain dramatic structure, change and evolve in time and invite our visitors to immerse themselves in a new experience.*

*The curatorial team seeks to experiment with the shifting boundaries between the “non-material” or “virtual” and the “real” world, to explore the capacity of performance design to enlist technology in cultural production.<sup>2</sup>*

The 2019 edition of the 36Q° project was titled ‘Blue Hour’, a theme introduced by Romain Tardy, the artistic leader of the project, as a metaphoric reference to that time of day when the horizon between the sky and the sea becomes blurred.

In order to explore and produce such an *intermedial performative environment*<sup>3</sup>, six media-specific working groups were

assembled, each led by an established artist, offering an opportunity for young designers to apply and co-create through a workshop format. We, Paul Cegys and Joris Weijdom, were asked to lead the *Augmented and Virtual Reality Workgroup*. During the workshop, a week before the opening of PQ19 in June, the other workgroups created a 24 minute audiovisual looping performance within the Malá Sports Hall<sup>4</sup>. Filled with haze, sounds and lights, the space contained 36 circular ‘pools’ holding water or micro-tactile environments as well as two large scaffolding structures with video projections and LED lights.

### **The 360° Blue Hour VR installation as part of the 360° Project**

Four of the pools were dedicated to identical versions of the 360° *Blue Hour VR* installation, adapted for the unique position and perspective within the 360° space. The physical setup consists of a 2.4-metre wide ‘pool’, filled with sand, with a ledge 20 cm high and 30 cm wide, an overhead metal dome shaped construction, an orb-shaped transparent object 25 cm in diameter, and a computer with wireless virtual reality headset.

After taking off their shoes at a nearby chair, the experimenter<sup>5</sup> is instructed by a volunteer to don the wireless virtual reality headset, step over the ledge into the sand-filled pool and pick up the orb-shaped object that is lying there. With the headset, the experimenter sees a real-time digital 3D reconstruction of the pool, the dome and an empty version of the sports hall. When the experimenter finds the confidence to step into the sand and pick up the Orb, they realise that they are free to physically move and look around in the virtual 3D space, within the safe confines of the pool that is present both in the virtual and the physical space. Now a 10-minute journey starts in which the experimenter is lifted, with the virtual pool-dome, through the roof of the virtual building and into the first 360 Blue Hour video world. They can choose between four 360 Video worlds that represent the four seasons

and provide different poetic, audiovisual 360-degree experiences of the Anthropocene and its impact on the natural environment. Finally, the experiencer is transported back to the virtual sports hall, which is now in a state of decay and abandonment. The end credits are shown and a volunteer gently taps the experiencer on the shoulder to indicate that the experience has ended.

### **Mixed-reality and its experiencer**

Before describing our design challenges in this project and its specific field of expertise, a brief discussion of the terms ‘mixed-reality’ and ‘experiencer’ is in order.<sup>6</sup>

By the term *mixed-reality*, or MR, we refer to a technology that enables ‘the merging of real and virtual worlds to produce new environments and visualizations where physical and digital objects co-exist and interact in real time’.<sup>7</sup> As we understand the term, it incorporates virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies as well as ideas which others more recently have referred to as ‘extended-reality’, or XR.

By the term *experiencer*, we refer to a person who has a multi-sensory experience of an intermedial production, such as our MR installation. The term was proposed by Prof. Robin Nelson (Bay-Cheng, Kattenbelt, Lavender, & Nelson, 2010) as an alternative to terms like ‘audience’ or ‘spectator’, because those foreground only the single modality of hearing or viewing.

### **Designing the ‘360° Blue Hour VR’ mixed-reality installation**

In the *Augmented and Virtual Reality Workgroup* we used virtual reality technology with a *mixed-reality approach*: we would focus on combining, or mixing, the virtual with the physical space by incorporating all design aspects for both environments while foregrounding the physical body of the *experiencer* as a connecting element. Whereas the emphasis in VR experiences is often

on the audiovisual, we incorporated other technologies, such as those relating to tactility and mobility. However, our focus was not aimed at the technology as such but rather at the multi-modal type of experience it affords. Compared with the more traditional theatre technologies employed by the other workgroups, such as audio, light and video projection design, ours was the most unconventional medium<sup>8</sup> in the project. Extra effort is therefore needed to find the language, concepts and design solutions that can capture the unique experiential qualities this medium affords and translate them into a dramaturgy and scenography that would connect to the performance design context of the 360° Blue Hour project.

Inspired by the theme of Blue Hour and the artistic renderings of the space by Romain Tardy, we realized that we wanted to design a site-responsive mixed reality installation that would enable us to artistically explore questions around *embodiment*, *presence*<sup>9</sup> and *performative space*, while maintaining an intimate and meaningful connection with the actual sports hall, the entire 360° environment and its visitors. We were excited by the idea of the pools becoming 3D ‘virtual portals’ or gateways between 3D and 360 video worlds. This led to the decision to create a computer-based digital 3D reconstruction of the entire physical building and 360° environment, including the pools. The solution enables the experiencer to reconnect to the physical space while entering VR, and to travel from there to other environments by inserting their heads into virtual portals, thereby entering ‘immersive 360 video bubbles’.

Accompanied by Richard van de Lagemaat, programmer and Unity 3D game engine specialist; Jonathan Cegys, music composer; and Jessica Sarah Bertrand, our research assistant, we started our explorations. First we mapped the themes and experiential qualities we wanted to incorporate into the experience. Meanwhile, the 3D reconstruction of the sports hall, developing the technology for the virtual portal functionality, recording 360-degree video material, and composing the music score

where done by the team members in their own respective time and places around the world. To get these elements to work together, to design the overall experiential arc and to explore the experiential qualities of the virtual portals, two intense studiolab sessions were held in the Netherlands. The sessions were held a few weeks prior to the final assembly in Prague, which would take place four days before the opening.

### **An embodied approach to mixed reality design**

To make our installation work, we needed to incorporate physical and virtual space with a multi-modal approach and an interaction model that engages the body, to find balance between physical action and contemplation, and to implement a clear *onboarding*<sup>10</sup> scheme. But the tools that are customarily used to sketch, record, model, manipulate, program, animate and simulate digital materials for a VR experience are screen-based 2D computer interfaces operated with a mouse and a keyboard. Which raises the question: **How to design an embodied and spatial experience using a 2D computer screen?**

The two studiolab sessions enabled the creators to physically work together in the same space for several days. Next to brainstorm sessions in which the final experiential arc of the experience was finalised, we used this precious time to bring all rough materials together into a mixed-reality setup, or prototype, that we could manipulate live. This prototype consisted of a 1:1 scale circle on the floor, representing a physical ‘360° pool’, with a one metre wide physical object positioned at the entry side marking the pool ledge with similar dimensions. A VR setup enabled a person to explore this space freely while being observed by an operator behind the computer running the VR experience. Finally, a mock-up of the intended Orb, a lantern-like object, was introduced and, most importantly, a MIDI device<sup>11</sup> with physical knobs and sliders for the operator to manipulate objects, animations and lights in the virtual space in real-time.

This setup would have one of the team inside of the VR experience, representing the experiencer, and another team member behind the MIDI device manipulating live elements of the virtual space to represent the eventual automated system. This enabled us to perform and puppeteer the intended scenes of the experience and vary or improvise interactions between the experiencer and the virtual space, while constantly communicating and evaluating the embodied qualities it caused. This working method is, without its technological context, very common in the performing arts, and with our technological setup it facilitates an embodied approach to mixed-reality experience design. The approach is a highly responsive way to determine the experience's visual dramaturgy, sequencing, rhythm, timing of transitions, and interactive intentionality. Iterating these sessions from 'puppeteered improvisations' to more 'automated interactions' offered the team the possibility to make meaningful and efficient decisions concerning complex technical development issues on the basis of a fully embodied multi-modal experiential perspective that approximates more closely the position of the experiencer and intended artistic end-result.

### **Looking back and forward**

From this project and from our earlier professional experience with researching and designing mixed-reality productions we have acquired know-how of the unique characteristics of the technologies involved and of the experiential qualities it affords. In our case, this knowledge is partly framed through the disciplinary mindset of traditional and post-dramatic<sup>12</sup> theatre and performance design practice.

The experience of the MR installation starts by the prospective user observing the physical installation from the outside while somebody else is already in it. Because this makes the experiencer inside the installation inherently performative for the outside spectator and thereby an intricate part of the artwork, we paid

equal attention to the design and lighting of the physical structure as to the virtual experience. We approached the narrative of the ten-minute experience as an atmospheric spatial journey rather than a story, whereby the sense of presence is achieved through active bodily engagement with the MR environment. However, because the attempt to engage the body and stimulate a sense of agency does not necessarily translate into a necessity for constant (inter)action, we tried to find a delicate balance between states of physical interaction and mental contemplation. This was also connected to the affordances of the two distinctly different types of VR technologies we used, real-time 3D computer graphics and 360 video, which offered modes for live interaction and more contemplative spectatorship, respectively.

The design of the 360° Blue Hour VR mixed-reality installation was put to the test during the nine days that the work was showcased as part of the 360° experience at the Prague Quadrennial in June 2019. At least 500 people, most of them professionals in the performing arts and performance design, have experienced our work. We were happy to notice that much of the feedback we got resonated with our artistic starting points that formed the underlying basis of our design choices. Although each experience was of course personal and different, many people felt the need to share their journey, often describing a sense of joy and wonder, while others shared deeply emotional reflections. We did however notice that our poetic references to the Anthropocene and its environmental impacts was only partly recognised as a leading theme, and could be expanded in the next iteration. The degree of physical movement of the experiencers varied wildly, with some standing mostly still and looking around while others would walk, lean over the pool ledge and even crouch in the sand. Although the experiencers did not see their own body represented in VR, most people reported no sense of vertigo or other discomfort, which was a real danger considering we were virtually moving the experiencers through the roof of the virtual sport hall. We suspect that the instrumentalization of the instabil-

ity of sand as a surface to stand on creates a situation in which the experiencers constantly re-sensitise their awareness of their body in space through their feet, offsetting the potential disorienting effects of being virtually moved around and not seeing your body in the virtual space.

Although we did not collaborate with the other working groups as much as we would have liked, we are astonished how well the entire 36Q° Blue Hour experience worked as an intermedial performative environment. Each of us had created some parts of the space, which manifested itself as a coherent experience the moment the first wave of visitors came to the opening night, becoming living inhabitants of the 36Q° experience. We do however look forward to presenting the installation as a 'VR-only' version without the 36Q° audiovisual environment or the physical structure of the dome and sand filled pool. This enables us to observe any differences this will have on the experience and to verify the validity of our assumptions and design choices concerning embodiment and presence within our mixed reality approach to VR, and to see if they can be further explored in our next mixed reality installation project.

### **Acknowledgements**

We gratefully acknowledge everybody who was collaborating in the 36Q° project, initiated by the Prague Quadrennial curating team, which without the '36Q° Blue hour VR' installation would not have existed. For this reason we encourage you to visit the 36Q° project page, at <http://www.pq.cz/2018/03/27/36q-3/>, to see all who contributed to this inspiring project.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This passage describes a walkthrough video of entering the 36Q° project environment. For an online version, see: <https://youtu.be/Rd8yWz3Tj1I>
- <sup>2</sup> Both quotes are taken from the 36Q° project page at the PQ website: <http://www.pq.cz/2018/03/27/36q-3/>
- <sup>3</sup> Concerning the *performativity of intermediality*, Kattenbelt proposed ‘using the concept with respect to those co- or interrelations between media that result in a redefinition of the media, which by impacting upon each other, provoke in turn a resensibilised perception. This means that pre-existing medium-specific conventions have been altered, allowing for the exploration of new dimensions of perception and experience.’ (Bay-Cheng, Kattenbelt, Lavender, & Nelson, 2010)
- <sup>4</sup> Right next to Výstaviště Prahaiaal Palace, Prague, the main venue for PQ19.
- <sup>5</sup> See next section for a definition of *experiencer*.
- <sup>6</sup> We are aware much more precise formulations would be needed in the discussion of these and other terms used in this paper. However, due to space constraints we opt for these short descriptions as working definitions for the purpose of this text.
- <sup>7</sup> This definition is taken from Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mixed\\_reality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mixed_reality).
- <sup>8</sup> In fact, mixed reality design includes many of the other media, and could for that reason be called a *hyper-medium*.
- <sup>9</sup> *Presence* is a term used frequently in the context of MR experiences. For this paper, we use Lee’s definition of presence as ‘a psychological state in which virtual (para-authentic or artificial) objects are experienced as actual objects in either sensory or nonsensory ways.’ (Lee, 2004), which can be further divided into three types: physical, social and the self.
- <sup>10</sup> A common term in VR installations, onboarding refers to the process of helping the experiencer enter the place of the experience, get clear instructions on the degree of freedom of movement and interaction, put on the required technical equipment and to make sure that he/she is totally safe during and after the experience.
- <sup>11</sup> *Musical Instrument Digital Interface*, often used for connecting digital music instruments but also suitable for other types of digital media control.
- <sup>12</sup> I.e. not based on a text, characters or plot with a traditional dramatic structure.

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# True Colours of Twilight – Twisting Strands of Experiment and Experience in the Fabric of Art and Science

TUULA NÄRHINEN

## A PRIORI Aesthetic mediations

Claude Monet's *Impression, soleil levant* (1872) marked the starting point for the Impressionist movement. The seminal painting can also be regarded as an iconic representation of the dawn of modern industrialism. Monet invites us to dive into a dazzling mist of violet, purple and blue colours. Reflections of the sun are traced by vibrant orange patches that direct our gaze deeper into the background where a conglomeration of smokestacks rises against the sky. We suddenly realise that the air must be thick with smog-producing soot particles emanating from the chimneys. Monet's skilful rendering of scattered light turns out to be an eye-catching enhancement of the optical effects caused by atmospheric pollution.<sup>1</sup> Given the circumstances, I can't help wondering what kind of impression awareness of the sordid origins of the haze makes on innocent art lovers gathered to admire the seascape in Musée Marmottan?

In a similar vein, my installation *Impressions plastiques*<sup>2</sup> evokes feelings of unease and puzzlement that arise from a con-

tradition between the picturesque subject matter and a sloppy material reality underpinning the aesthetic experience. Titled after the famous harbour scene at sunrise, the work touches upon questions of epistemic realism and proposes aesthetic methods for environmental critique.

This essay considers art as a means to embody experiential knowledge that is derived from visual observations and from material engagement with the surrounding world. I look at the ways visual art could contribute to an understanding of our environmental condition. The contextual framework of “Experience and Experimentality” is first addressed by means of a thread that connects *Impressions plastiques* as well as another new installation, *Plastic Horizon*, to my earlier experiences of working with marine plastic debris. A second thread to be discussed here runs through the experiments devised by the chemist and taphstry manufacturer Michel Eugène Chevreul (1786–1889). His practice-based theories of colour and simultaneous contrast were widely embraced and adopted not only by Impressionists painters but by various designers in the field of arts and crafts as well. Chevreul’s work addresses the intertwinement of experiment and experience from the perspective of legitimate science. His scientific method<sup>3</sup> emphasised the epistemic relevance of subjective perception (physiological optics and the beholder’s experience) as opposed to the ruling scientific doctrine of physical optics and chemical analysis stressed by empirical positivism<sup>4</sup>.

## Part I BY EXPERIENCE

Out of Sight out of Mind – The beachcomber’s practice

*Impressions plastiques* is a result of my long-term interest in maritime plastic waste. Since 2006, I’ve gathered plastic debris from seashores in Helsinki. My works *Impressions Plastiques* and *Plastic Horizon* (2017–19) as well as earlier pieces *Mermaid’s Tears* (2007)<sup>5</sup>, *Frutti di mare* (2008)<sup>6</sup>, and *Baltic Sea Plastique*

(2014)<sup>7</sup> set out to combine the plasticity of visual arts with the creative and resilient capacity of marine life in a way that reveals the challenge plastics present to marine life.<sup>8</sup>

It all started in the winter of 2006 when I came across an article about tiny plastic crumbs called nurdles, also known as “mermaid’s tears”. I learned that such small plastic pellets resembling fish eggs can commonly be found among seaweed and flotsam washed up to the shore, and that they pollute the seas of the world. My first thought was that the problem must manifest itself only in the oceans. I had not noticed any such pellets on my walks on the shores in the vicinity of my island studio. Surely mermaid’s tears were not found in the Baltic Sea?

But at the onset of spring I decided to check it out. I was shocked to find several square meters of shoreline awash with agglomerations of these small plastic pellets. I must have passed the same spot hundreds of times without noticing anything out of the ordinary. But in order to perceive something, you must look for it, and to look for it you need to know that it exists. To notice the plastic pellets and to tell them from similar grains of sand such as translucent crumbs of quarts, one must be familiar with the concept of mermaid’s tears. I developed a sieving method for separating microplastics from the rest of the flotsam. The installation displays the sieves along with the result, a necklace put together of tiny pieces of plastic.

The mermaid’s necklace looks pretty but the story behind it is sad. The nurdles are used as raw material for the manufacture of new objects. Plastic items are moulded or extruded from pre-produced pellets. Both virgin and recycled pellets are transported through waterways all over the world, and it is hard to avoid spills and shrinkage from pallets and containers during shipment. Like dandelion seeds on the wind, nurdles keep blowing into river estuaries and polluting marine environments. Mermaids worldwide will continue to shed plastic tears for thousands of years.<sup>9</sup>

In *Frutti di Mare*, I continued working with plastic waste, but with larger pieces. I collected a pile of trash from the shores of

Helsinki and put odd pieces together to make floating sculptures. The creatures thus created represent new kinds of marine species from a previously unknown sea called the *Plastic Ocean*. While working on *Frutti di Mare*, I observed how plastic materials behaved in an aquarium. Some of the plastic floated while heavier items sank towards the bottom. And I started to wonder: what would happen if they were released to swim in natural waters?

The installation *Baltic Sea Plastique* shows how the objects interacted with waves and sea life. The work consists of nine plastic creatures put on exhibit in tall and narrow cylindrical glass containers filled with water. Short video clips show the sculptures floating in the Baltic Sea. A plastic bag jellyfish contracts its transparent swimming bell, a pink seahorse dances to the rhythm of the waves, a plastic tube ray lazily flaps its blue fins. The synthetic organisms swim in the shallow brackish water, meeting algae, tiny fish and murky flows. Watching the videos, one begins to understand the strain on marine organisms. The movements of the water make the plastic waste seem surprisingly alive. The synthetic material adjusts to its surroundings with appalling ease. The plastic creatures take to the water like a duck—literally.

The latest addition to my projects on plastics is *Impressions Plastiques*. Two tapestries (*Soleil levant* and *Soleil couchant*) represent romantic seascapes: a sunrise and a sunset. On the floor, between two pieces of textile, lies a pile of plastic filaments arranged in a rainbow to form a sun path. The work is put together entirely out of marine plastic debris. The cheesy tapestries as well as the prismatic colours of the “sun path” are woven from trash collected from the shore on Harakka Island in Helsinki.

Dirty discarded plastic bags and odd pieces of rope served as warp and weft of the tapestries. On closer inspection, the tapestries reveal banal details: the blue sky is marked with streaks of white cloud that turn out to be Clas Ohlson’s labels, and the lower part of the skyscape consists of a bag printed with H&M logos. Other trademarks also figure as clouds, sun or waves on the tapestries, such as K-Supermarket, Mustapekka, Grillimaisteri or

Moomin (!) characters. The presence of the commercial brands discloses our shopping habits and reveals popular aspects of ruling consumer culture in countries surrounding the Baltic Sea. A sunset woven out of discarded bags from local trash along the Mediterranean Sea would probably tell a different story.

The partly bleached filaments of the sun path are pieces of colour-coded detonator shock tubing used to blast the bedrock. When the city of Helsinki expands, excavated rock material gets dumped into the sea together with the pieces of plastic tubing. I browsed the internet searching for their origin and discovered that the filaments were patented as a component of the *None1*<sup>10</sup> shock tube detonator system, a trademark nowadays manufactured by a descendant of the Nitro-Nobel<sup>11</sup> explosives company named after the renowned chemist and businessman Alfred Nobel. The plastic tubes come in coded colours which indicate the transmission speed of the initiation impulse. They are manufactured in three basic colours: yellow, red and pink, although for multiple explosions other colour codes such as orange and light blue are used as well.<sup>12</sup> The in-between colours in the installation indicate that some of the tubes have stayed in the sea long enough to become significantly bleached or totally washed out.

The installation is an epitome of the complex fabric of urban seashore: a tangle of shipwrecked romantic dreams, vanished islands and marine debris. A sun path reflected on water creates a bridge between the observing subject and the sun. Optically, the path seems to move as the viewer moves; it usurps the observer's position in relation to the setting sun and creates a visible link between the seer and the seen. The disruptive beauty of the sunrise (or sunset) strives to unravel the complexity of the challenge that marine plastic pollution presents to the resilience and ecological sustainability of the oceans. Long-chained polymers were once the chemist's answer to the need for elastic, thin and lightweight materials hard enough to withstand breaking. Plastics enabled us to manufacture objects of any form or colour without the physical or chemical restrictions that are characteristic to natural materi-

als. The brilliant future promised by the plastics industry opened a Pandora's box which spreads its curse for years to come.

With *Plastic Horizon* my years-long exploration into the plastic ocean has returned to its starting point. Like the mermaid's necklace, this installation addresses the problem of microplastics. It is put together from small pieces of plastic sorted out from other organic and inorganic debris. *Plastic Horizon* comprises two narrow shelves, both 515 cm long and 12 cm wide. Microplastic waste is placed on the shelves and arranged according to hues of colour or values of luminosity.

The work is a result of a desperate cleaning operation. Looking at the mess on the seashore, I felt a strong urge to pick up every piece of plastic and sort it out to create some order in the chaos. But my attempt was doomed to fail. The heaps along the shoreline were awash with plastic crumbles: everything from tiny nurdles and unrecognisable broken fragments to intact small items lay thickly packed and intertwined with natural materials in overwhelming layers of debris. The deeper I dug, the more plastic I found. There was no end to my undertaking.

The process of gathering was reminiscent of my experiences in picking blueberries or mushrooms. As in the hunt for delicious yellow chanterelles hiding in the forest, my eye became gradually tuned to even the smallest pieces of colourful plastic. The collecting acted like a drug on me. I spent hours scanning the flotsam with keen eyes, my hands eagerly catching every piece of plastic and storing them carefully like berries in a bucket. Oddly enough, digging in the heaps of waste turned out to be addictive to the point that at times I found it hard to stop. Was it an in-born survival instinct or some sort of a primitive drive inherited from the ancient hunter-gatherers searching for edible plants and sweet berries? But this was not about food. I was not even aware of what I was picking up, it was *the colours* I was after. Looking back at the fragments I collected, the inventory of recognizable materials shows some consistency. The most frequent plastic pollutants are straws, Q-tip rods, fishing gear, bottle caps, toys and

clumps of polyurethane foam, in addition to the already mentioned pieces of plastic detonator tubing.

The archaeological interest notwithstanding, it was the colour of the plastics that mattered most to me. I went as far as washing off the dirt and dust to fully appreciate the brightness of the pieces. And unfortunately, I'm not the only the animal attracted to the bling of plastic. Countless seabirds, turtles and fish keep falling under the spell of its aesthetic appeal only to get lured by the fatal consequences of indigested plastics.<sup>13</sup> With the colourful mosaic in front of my eyes, another childish obsession kicked in. As a little girl I kept organising my kits of crayons and felt pens to create rainbows. Arranging the colours, I felt as if I was in possession of the whole spectrum. To see the crayons harmoniously lined up was so satisfactory that to put them in order was at times almost as enjoyable as the fun of drawing.

To work with plastic debris made me relapse into my old naive habit of arranging colours. I began by grouping similar hues together and then proceeded to combine two adjacent colours. However, the material at hand did not always let me create a continuous transfer of hues. To avoid gaps at the junctions I mixed up the colours of the flotsam in a pointillist manner in order to allow one hue to fade as smoothly as possible into another. The installation shows the plastic waste arranged in two narrow lines. The first line sequence constitutes a rainbow of prismatic colours starting from dark red and continuing through orange, yellow and green to finish with blue. In addition to the brightly coloured plastic pieces, a fair amount of the debris I had collected was translucent or grey. It was hard to fit them into the rainbow line. Without much thinking, I separated the greyscale crumble to form a second line arranged according to luminosity, starting from white through shades of grey into black.

The making of *Plastic Horizon* was a feast for the eyes but a funeral for the analytic mind. I let intuition guide me and acted like a *bricoleur* (or should I say *bricoleur*) from Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Savage Mind*.<sup>14</sup> According to Lévi-Strauss, the work of

an artist (or bricoleur) creates a miniature model of the world. There is an abstract meaning embedded within the visual appearance of a concrete man-made object. The function of the model is aesthetic contemplation; its message is mediated through the sensual qualities of the work.

Dumb as a painter and stupid as a (proto-)scientist, I set out to create a harmonious world from the odds and ends the sea had brought. Pleasing to the eye and equally comforting the savage mind of an artist-brico(u)leur, *Plastic Horizon* is a DIY three-dimensional colour model. My work is materialised out of the contingencies of the seashore through a pragmatic visual logic governed by my subjective sense of colour. In the form of colourful plastic fragments derived from objects made of oil, a fossilised black sun resurfaces from the bottom of the ocean and casts its prismatic rays all over the world.

## **Part II FROM EXPERIMENT**

What You See Is What You Get – The theory of simultaneous contrast

Claude Lévi-Strauss considers the epistemic in art and science. Drawing from anthropological studies, he developed “a science of the concrete” which entails “speculative organization and exploitation of the sensible world in sensible terms”<sup>15</sup>. The notion allowed him to identify an “aesthetic sense”<sup>16</sup> for ordering and classification that is rooted in material practices, not unlike the various techniques of world making employed in art and science. Lévi-Strauss emphasises the intelligible in man-made objects. To engage with the world through materials at hand constitutes a method of inquiry and a medium for abstract thought. Art and science operate with experimental objects<sup>17</sup> defined by their technical and material contingencies. A work of art speaks, but not only through its formal subject matter. Taking my cue from Lévi-Strauss, I argue that hypotheses in visual art are expressed

aesthetically. An artistic experiment is a proposition that is conditioned by the artist's immanent stylistic choices and technical skill. The work responds to a particular problem of representation by creating new speculative combinations using the tools and materials on hand. An experiment initiated by the artist-bricoleur is accomplished through the exposition of her practice. In observing the tentative working model put together by the artist, the spectator validates the aesthetic propositions embodied in the artwork.<sup>18</sup> Following Lévi-Strauss, I believe that the artist's "sensible intuition"<sup>19</sup> is read in and reflected through the observer's experience. The epistemic in the process can be traced back to an underlying shared visual culture of mediation which governs the attribution of meaning and constitutes a paradigm for the artist's experiment.

As it strives for objectivity and rationality, modern science tends to put the human observer aside. Her active role and potential influence on the phenomena under scrutiny is often left unacknowledged. The theory of simultaneous contrast and the chain of events that led to its discovery are a case in point. As the newly appointed director of the dyeing workshop at Gobelins Manufacture, the chemist Michel Chevreul faced repeated complaints concerning the intensity of the colour black. The weavers claimed that black shadows on blue and violet tapestries especially were lacking in intensity; they tended to shift towards yellow or orange and did not fit the surrounding colours. Chevreul could ascertain that the problem was not of physical or chemical order. There was nothing wrong with the quality of the wool or the pigments used for dyeing.<sup>20</sup> Instead he discovered that colours interacted with each other; adjacent hues intervened and reduced the strength of the black shades. Determined to find a solution, Chevreul set out to study the psychophysiological phenomenon empirically with the help of artists, scientists and other experts specialising in judging colours. Despite the clearly visible effects, it took long for Chevreul to discover the principles of simultaneous contrast and to formulate a general law

which scientifically explained how the apparent changes derived from the juxtaposition of different tones and hues. The laws underpinning the phenomenon are expressed in his magnum opus *On the law of Simultaneous Contrast of Colours and on its Application to the Arts*.<sup>21</sup>

Chevreul was hired to Gobelins for his chemical expertise. He was invited to provide a rational approach to a craft, to make use of his scientific knowledge to improve the quality of tapestries by streamlining and consolidating industrial processes of dyeing and weaving. Paradoxically, he ended up dealing with problems of aesthetic perception that could not be solved through chemistry. However, Chevreul succeeded in conceptualising the phenomenon; the law of simultaneous contrast allowed him to test his theory in several pragmatic applications ranging from wall-papers to garden design. Since the scientists in Chevreul's day had no access to the kind of modern technologies applied today in neurobiological research, the only means of proving his theory was to put it to practice. He verified the laws through empiric demonstrations following *la méthode expérimentale a posteriori*, as Chevreul referred to his protocol. With this method, the loop was closed: what started as random visual observations had generated a coherent articulation of the theoretical laws that govern our perception of colour.

Another practical tool to emerge from the theory was a system of colour classifications devised for the needs of the Gobelins workshop. Shaped like a hemisphere, Chevreul's colour system enabled weavers and dyers to accurately communicate the colours to each other simply by referring to numbers and to exchange coded hues without having recourse to physical samples or actual pieces of wool. Chevreul's system was structured on colour wheels which indicated the differences in luminance values between primary colours (yellow being brighter than pure red) and distinguished (on a separate vertical axis) the tonal scale of "broken" colours (*couleurs rabattues*) mixed with grey or black. Chevreul's focus on luminance enabled the workers to

tell the effects of tonal contrast from the interaction of hues and facilitated the matching of contrasting colours. A three-dimensional physical model of Chevreul's hemisphere was built for the workshop's archive. The original model which housed coloured wool samples has not survived to our days, but the *Manufacture nationale des Gobelins*<sup>22</sup> still uses his reference system. I believe that Chevreul's model would have qualified as a compelling proof and a fine example of an "experimental object" in the Lévi-Straussian sense. The sculptural piece constitutes a "véritable expérience sur l'objet"<sup>23</sup>; it exposes our eyes to a system of colours embedded in the hand-made model's spatial form and aesthetic appearance.

Chevreul's colour theories were an important source of inspiration for Delacroix and the Neo-Impressionists, but whether they had any direct influence on for example Monet or Renoir has been a subject to debate.<sup>24</sup> The tendency to overlook the influence of cultural history on Impressionist painting is due to a persistent myth of the innocent (or savage) eye, presumably due to the painter's intuitive ability to deal with colour perceptions. However, as Martin Kemp points out, analytical application of colours and the adoption of a new prismatic palette are evident in Monet's paintings. The colourful shadows in the *Rouen Cathedral* or the *Haystacks* series indicate that the painter must have been aware of contemporary theories of light and colour, including the theory of simultaneous contrast and its practical consequences. Study of the interaction of colours was part of the Impressionists' daily practice; the painters showed a keen interest in enhancing colours and producing atmospheric effects with the help of simultaneous contrasts. Even if they did not read Chevreul's publications, they were bound to be familiar with the phenomenon through contemporary discussions and popular literature, where the topic was a frequent subject of debate.<sup>25</sup>

## A POSTERIORI – Myopic meditations

Years ago, while wandering around the basement of the Musée d'Orangerie, I happened to take off my glasses. Looking at Monet's *Waterlilies* I was suddenly struck by the free-floating space which seemed to transgress the physical boundaries of the oval room. Oh wow! Seen without glasses, the traces of Monet's brushwork (which normally anchor the painting's surface to the wall) disappeared along with other perspective cues, and a gentle blur of colours took over, creating a powerful sense of enhanced depth. The experience was corroborated by my partner, likewise a myopic. Startled by this new experience, we spent the rest of the visit without glasses. The mutual myopic condition allowed us to fully enjoy Monet's skilful colourism. We delved long in the museum, surrounded by the dynamic and pulsating colours which became further accentuated through our shared distorted perspective.

In her book, *Vision and Art*, the Harvard neurobiologist Margaret Livingstone explores the techniques that enabled the Impressionists to fool the eye. Painting after painting, she analyses instances of atmospheric effects and explains how they emerge from the combined effect of colour intensity and luminance.<sup>26</sup> Drawing on neurobiology, Livingstone establishes the causes underlying the illusions of depth and motion. She pins them down to cues and triggers that are characteristic to human colour perception, and draws a nice line from cultural representations of light to the biology of photoreceptive cells in the retina.<sup>27</sup>

Using Monet's paintings as examples, Livingstone takes us back to the starting point of this text. She stresses the painter's habit of juxtaposing equiluminant shades of colour as the key factor behind the eerie effect in Monet's *Impression, soleil levant*. A black and white reproduction of the painting reveals her point; the brightness value of the red sun matches exactly that of the surrounding blue sky. In greyscale,<sup>28</sup> both colours are rendered in a similar shade, making it impossible to tell the sun from

the sky. Surprisingly, the prominent effect of the bright sun relies on a low contrast value between the red circle against its blue background.<sup>29</sup>

To conclude, I want to return to Lévi-Strauss' thinking. Following the epistemic strand of the “science of the concrete,” I believe that miniature models produce objects of situated knowledge just as artistic experiments do. Even if my artworks cannot solve environmental problems, they enable us to become more sentient and aware by exposing our eyes and minds to the ecosystems' threatened condition. In triggering aesthetic emotions and speaking “through the medium of things,”<sup>30</sup> artworks can transform strange items into meaningful objects. The experimental works “serve alternatively as ends or means”<sup>31</sup> of the cognitive process; they generate new ways of seeing which – along with science – reveal underlying structures and/or create openings towards a previously unknown world.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Monet's series of paintings can be used as evidence for meteorological research of London air quality. Authors of the article “Solar position within Monet's Houses of Parliament” have found that the colours of the sky can be used as indicators of the chemical components in Victorian smog. Baker and Thorne, *Proc. R. Soc. A* (2006) 462, 3775–3788.
- <sup>2</sup> More information and images of the installation: <http://www.tuulanarhinen.net/artworks/impressionsplast.html>
- <sup>3</sup> Chevreul argued for a *méthode a posteriori expérimentale* which entailed an empirical verification following hypotheses formulated “a priori”. The initial guesses based on observations and first-hand experiences about the underlying causes of phenomena were tested through further empirical experiments. Bitbol & Gayon, 234–236. See also Chevreul, M. E. 1870. *De la méthode a posteriori expérimentale, et de la généralité de ses applications*. Paris: Dunod.
- <sup>4</sup> Positivism is a philosophy of science founded by Auguste Comte. Comte's seminal *Cours de la philosophie positive*, published in 1830, draws a methodological outline for mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology. Comte's positive philosophy stresses the discovery of rational laws governing phenomena. Bitbol & Gayon, 197–212.

- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.tuulanarhinen.net/artworks/mmtears.htm>
- <sup>6</sup> <http://www.tuulanarhinen.net/artworks/frutti.htm>
- <sup>7</sup> <http://www.tuulanarhinen.net/artworks/frutti.htm>
- <sup>8</sup> Part of this chapter is based on my earlier essay to be published under the title *Between City and the Deep Sea – on the plastic nature of the Helsinki shoreline*.
- <sup>9</sup> Charles Moore: Plastic Ocean, 240–43. See also Higeshige Takeda (Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology), *International Pellet Watch - Global Monitoring of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) using Beached Plastic Resin Pellets*. <http://www.tuat.ac.jp/~gaia/ipw/en/pollutants.html>. (Retrieved 3.7.2019)
- <sup>10</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nonel> and [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shock\\_tube\\_detonator](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shock_tube_detonator). (Retrieved 3.7.2019)
- <sup>11</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AkzoNobel>. (Retrieved 3.7.2019)
- <sup>12</sup> For the colour codes of *Nonel* explosives used in Finland, see e.g. <https://forcit.fi/assets/product-brochures/Tuotetieto.pdf>. (Retrieved 3.7.2019) and <https://www.dynonobel.com/~media/Files/Dyno/ResourceHub/Guides/Explosives%20Engineers%20Guide/EE%20Guide%202014%20W.pdf>. (Retrieved 3.7.2019)
- <sup>13</sup> E.g. Nancy Wallace, “From Giant Gray Whales to the Tiniest Corals. Everyday Problem with Real Impacts”, in Julie Decker (ed.), *Gyre – the Plastic Ocean* (London: Booth-Clibborn Editions & Anchorage Museum, 2014), 15. On whales and dolphins see also Moore, *Plastic Ocean*, 228–231.
- <sup>14</sup> Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. Trans. George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966. [https://monoskop.org/images/9/91/Levi-Strauss\\_Claude\\_The\\_Savage\\_Mind.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/9/91/Levi-Strauss_Claude_The_Savage_Mind.pdf). (Retrieved 3.7.2019) Originally published as *La Pensee sauvage*. Paris: Plon, 1962
- <sup>15</sup> Lévi-Strauss, 16.
- <sup>16</sup> Lévi-Strauss, 12–13.
- <sup>17</sup> Lévi-Strauss, 24. Lévi-Strauss uses the French noun “*experience*” for experiment which implies that both scientific and artistic experiments derive from the empiric. They build on (visual) experiences of the artist/researcher and the spectator in the process of making and looking at the work of art, see Lévi-Strauss (1962), *La Pensee sauvage*, 38.
- <sup>18</sup> Lévi-Strauss, 24–25.
- <sup>19</sup> Lévi-Strauss, 10.
- <sup>20</sup> The story of the discovery was recounted by Chevreul’s son, Henri Chevreul, in the introduction to the 1889 edition of *De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs etc.*, III. See also Kemp, 306–308.
- <sup>21</sup> Published in English under the title *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colours and their Application etc.*
- <sup>22</sup> <http://www.mobiliernational.culture.gouv.fr/fr/nous-connaître/les-manufactures/atelier-de-teinture-et-nuancier>. (Retrieved 3.7.2019)
- <sup>23</sup> Lévi-Strauss, 16. In the original *La Pensee sauvage* Lévi-Strauss uses the

- French noun “*expérience*” for experiment. “il constitue une véritable expérience sur l’objet”. Lévi-Strauss (1962), *La Pensée sauvage*, 38.
- <sup>24</sup> Kemp 311–312, see also Roque (1996) and Roque (2011).
- <sup>25</sup> Kemp 311–312.
- <sup>26</sup> Livingstone defines luminance as perceived lightness judged by an average human being. Artists often refer to luminance also as value. Livingstone, 37.
- <sup>27</sup> Livingstone, Margaret. *Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing*. New York: Abrams, 2002.
- <sup>28</sup> Livingstone, 37–39. Margaret Livingstone points out that only some greyscale renderings, such as the Photoshop conversion algorithm, as well as certain brands of analogue film materials, are devised to respond to colours similarly to the human eye. These greyscale reproductions enable us to see, compare and analyse luminance values of different hues of colour.
- <sup>29</sup> Livingstone, 37–39.
- <sup>30</sup> Lévi-Strauss, 21.
- <sup>31</sup> Lévi-Strauss, 33.

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# LAB - O (U) R A T O R Y

MIKA ELO

This text is composed of a series of attentive gestures. It is born from turning towards a video exposition of my installation *Mitä uutta kivistä? / Anything new about stones?* (2017). Through its form, the text weighs the gestures of the video, its rhythms and sequences. It focuses on selected angles, it zooms in on abyssal details, it draws parallels between separate elements, it highlights passing issues, and it ends.

Not unlike the video that it undertakes to move along, the text is a block of time and space limited in length, scope and resolution. It is a space of investigation wherein “certain limits of what can be done, perceived, felt, discovered, thought or justified can be tested”.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, it is a *laboratory*. Further, the text is a space of *labour*. It invites its readers to raise their sensitivity and work out an attentive relation with the hyperobject installation-video-text. Finally, the text is also a kind of prayer, an *oratory*, a meditation in attentive looking.

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Emphatically, the eye tracks along the camera's autofocus in its search for depth. It digs its way into the image. When the camera doesn't move, the eye wanders across the image, jumping from one detail to another. The eye is looking for something, for a tiny spark of contingency, for a faint shift in the way things are, and this search keeps it moving. But nothing is hidden, everything is laid bare on the weightless surface.

[01:16]

The gaze, nevertheless, possesses *a kind of gravitas, something ultimate and unchanging, something that will never perish or else has already done so*. When the camera moves within a frozen moment of time, smoothly gliding across the photographic space, it seems to incorporate an idea of perfection that brackets the embodiment of vision.

[01:53]

The gaze manifests *an obvious achievement, yet one arrived at without invention, skill, industry, or anything else that would make it a technology comparable with the camera*. There is a gap between the eye and the camera, *but the far-off roots and hidden models of both lie in the obscure yet irresistible suggestions cast in [...] light!*

[02:31 ]

*The word "camera" is often used in an imprecise way. There are many kinds of cameras: even a dark room with a hole in the wall can function as a camera. Nowadays, most consumer cameras suggest the making of both stills and clips. Semi-professional cameras are quite affordable, but in a video piece, the camera movement easily reveals the quality of investment. These are*

visible affordances. Therefore, one should provide some specification when using the word “camera”. The gravest misuse of the word is when it is equated with a tomb, even if photographing is, in a sense, sarcophagous activity.

[03:05]

*The cow-spot formed by the crater on the moon doesn't exist after all, since ordinary stones don't fly that far. Regardless of how paradoxical images might be evoked along the way, we will follow the line.*

No doubt, the cable is attached to the dark moon. The window is closed, for memories to enter through the shortcut of mirroring shadows. This room is not just a physical volume.

[03:48]

The holes in the wall are a bad sign. My sight gets blurred. *The men surround the woman as she stands in a hole dug into the stony ground...* Unfortunately, you can easily imagine the rest. Stones can become deadly fists. Such disastrous events take place repeatedly, but they are not written in the stars. Constellations are made up by us humans.

The individual letters group into words and words into lines. Lines follow lines; and the eyes know how to tie them together. Something similar takes place when we watch a film. These forms of reading make up a spatio-temporal *habitus*, a “technique of the body”:

“A kind of revelation came to me in hospital. I was ill in New York. I wondered where previously I had seen girls walking as my nurses walked. I had the time to think about it. At last I realised that it was at the cinema. Returning to France, I noticed how common this gait was, especially in Paris;

the girls were French and they too were walking in this way. In fact, American walking fashions had begun to arrive over here,

thanks to the cinema.”<sup>2</sup> What was taking place was a prestigious imitation.

[05:28]

Bodily habits haunt us as if they were fossils embedded within ourselves. The networks of our daily routes in the cities we live in are imprinted on our being, yet *the world is governed by chance*.

Each corner constitutes a point of decision, and step by step we walk deeper into the labyrinth of our lives.

[...]

*Randomness stalks us every day of our lives, and those lives can be taken from us at any moment – for no reason at all.*

A video forces us to follow its linear flow. It reorganises the spatial setting of the installation into a succession of images. We are reading it like a text, step by step. There is no time to get lost, the time runs by the code. We are, inevitably, walking *straight into the trajectory of the falling object*, into the event, as if by chance. But the fact that this text stutters and stammers reveals that everything is set up on purpose.

The scale matters, of course. *In order to find out the direction in which the land masses were transported during the melting period after the ice age*, we need to make measurements.

With a panning camera movement, we can delineate the visible features of a location without unnecessarily highlighting any specific details. This kind of neutral gesture of documentation enables us to establish a background for whatever we want to focus on later. This should be repeated as many times as necessary.

[07:49]

Whatever is captured in a photograph, gains new life that is *imprisoned in another reality*. The grey matters of this frozen real-

ity leak, however, to the living presence. New layered formats settle down in our imagination.

Sometimes the gaze is directed inwards. The emptiness in front of our eyes is populated with fleeting images from time immemorial. What once wasn't captured, is now taking shape. What once didn't count, is now more than one.

[...]

*In this respect the categories used in this text need to be revised at some point.*

Letter by letter... word by word... adding letters, a lot of letters after each other...

we get a text... a chain of words... by inserting the letter "l" into the word "word" we get "world"... But who are we?

*Stones grow and so do texts, slowly. Any writer can tell you this as a kind of empirical confirmation of their ritual practice. They are not referring to just any texts, but those that have a fragile body.*

These delicate texts deserve to be treated gently by everybody involved.

*I have begun showing how technical coupling of words and images on a timeline might produce a feeling that the regularities of nature and of mind are nothing but effects of an ongoing arrangement.*

[11:30]

*Kivijärvi*, literally "stone lake", the not-so-hidden reference in this installation is not a crater, unlike some other lakes in Finland. It was formed during the ice age when the geophysical forces of melting ice showed their claws and left deep scars in the surface of the earth. Huge amounts of stones were transported from northeast to southwest. Some of them landed here.

*“He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set.”*

As you might recognise, this sentence is extracted from the Bible. But today these words gained a new meaning for me. Our son had gone to his girlfriend’s and stayed there for the night.

She had not been very stable lately, and the relationship was breaking down in a series of dramatic bursts of confused emotion. Tonight, she had run across the street in a psychotic state of mind and was almost hit by a car. He had tried to calm her down, in vain.

She had been like a magnet switching poles. She had disappeared and come back again only to break away once more. Now he is lying like a porous stone on his bed, the blocked mobile in his hand.

*We are at the centre of a field of forces too unpredictable to be measured; and we awkwardly call the result chance, hazard, or fate.*

“Fate,” what a peremptory word, very suitable for endings.

Insisting on immediate attention, it cuts the flow of thought, just like that.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Yves Citton (2017): *The Ecology of Attention*, Cambridge and Malden: Polity, p. 151.
- <sup>2</sup> Marcel Mauss (1934), “Techniques of the Body”, [https://monoskop.org/images/c/c4/Mauss\\_Marcel\\_1935\\_1973\\_Techniques\\_of\\_the\\_Body.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/c/c4/Mauss_Marcel_1935_1973_Techniques_of_the_Body.pdf)









# History Is Full of Ruse and Cunning

(2018) Single-channel video installation  
(4K / 6 Min. / 16:9)

JACK FABER

In 2016, the Standing Rock Sioux tribe ignited an indigenous rights movement that captured the world's attention – when the Dakota Access Pipeline, a four-billion-dollar oil project, was re-routed – through the ancient sacred grounds of the tribe's reservation – and threatened to wreak havoc on the environment.

The protests at the pipeline site in Standing Rock, North Dakota, are the largest gathering of Native Tribes in the past 100 years. TigerSwan, a private security firm brought to the site by Dakota Access Pipeline, used military-style counter-terrorism methods to suppress the protesters. The company also made extensive use of the social media to sway public support for the pipeline and against the protests, which it portrayed as a fundamentalist activity.

Facebook has been criticised for assisting the local authorities in censoring the protesters.

*History Is Full of Ruse and Cunning* (2018) is a video work that examines these events through by the same tools of art activism used by the protesters to counter the censorship they confronted; it also plays an intermediate chapter in this tale of mass protest against climate crimes.

—

Being deeply emotionally involved with the Standing Rock Struggle – yet unable to document the protests in North Dakota due to legal and technical difficulties, as well as the rapid radical developments of the struggle – I needed a new strategy as an artistic researcher for addressing the situation.

The decision was to experiment with the essay film format as a single-channel video work; the result is an encounter / collision between a series of long shots, almost completely devoid of human presence, and haiku-like texts informing about the events. The work consists of a slow merging of the superimposed text and contrasting images, between a chronological timeline of events and the factual linguistics of power politics.

Being an artistic researcher, I'm looking into the transposition of political discourse into cinematic matter(s), especially through the subversion of false authorities by the transgressive role of artworks.

Exploring further from this starting point, toward as yet uncharted territories – while communicating it – is at the core of my methodology, making *History Is Full of Ruse and Cunning* an essential part of this journey.









# In the Wrong Place

PAUL LANDON

I was told that it was built in the wrong place. The architecture was exemplary, but the building was incongruous with its surroundings. I wondered about this. Should the building be moved somewhere else? Should its surroundings be altered, rebuilt, to better accommodate it?

The building in question, the headquarters of the Stora Enso company situated on the eastern edge of Helsinki's historic harbour, punctuates the view from the water of a classical cityscape as a full-stop in the form of a minimal white elongated cube.

This oblong structure is perforated by an array of recessed windows that renders its four façades as a repeated, yet slightly varied, series of elegant grids. It was this three-dimensional grid drawing in space that compelled me to film the building, to record the morphing of its form, from two to three dimensions, as I moved around it.

“Buildings don't move but humans move through them,” was the answer the producer of films for the Open University's Modern Architecture curriculum, Tim Benton, gave when asked why he would film static buildings.<sup>1</sup> Would it not be better to just take

still photographs of them? His answer underscored that buildings are perceived and experienced by the people who move around them and through them. I took this statement to mean that a building's substance was fluid. It meant for me that, as I approached a building, its materiality, form and structure were transformed by my proximity to it and by my presence.

The unadorned façade of the Stora Enso headquarters became a minimalist monochrome grid under the grey winter sky, a sky that seemed to reflect the snow-covered ice in the harbour. As I filmed it from the ferry pulling away from the harbour, the building became a virtual model of itself; it took the form of wireframe generated by 3D animation software. As the ferry circled around it, this life-size wireframe rotated.

When I later replayed the images, they resembled a black and white animation. The flat winter light rendered the scene almost two-dimensional. I experimented with the video, exporting it into a sequence of images. Employing a rudimentary rotoscoping technique, I traced over each of image in the sequence, one by one, to create an animated line drawing. My intent was to recreate the rotating wireframe I perceived on that winter's day from the deck of the ferry. I wanted to make it appear that the boat's movement was generated by an algorithm. I was looking for that moment where virtual space and perceived space collapse into one: the moment when the virtual becomes the lived space, the moment in watching a film when you forget you are watching a film, the moment when you stop looking at the filmic construction and enter into the living, sensed experience of the diegesis.

My experiment didn't work. Somehow the movement was too jerky and the content, the image of the slowly rotating building, too simple. The advantage of working with a rotoscoping or hand-drawn animation technique is that you are able to leave out superfluous elements of an image. In order to focus on the rotating building, I left out the rest of the scene. I left out the traffic, the other buildings and the people interacting with these. I left out too much.

I am not sure when or why I decided to reintegrate the people back into the sequence. After I had traced several frames with people in them, I became intrigued by the moving forms their simple outlines created. What appeared as abstract squiggles in individual frames became the rough outline of a person walking when these were played back in a sequence. Without rendering any specific physical characteristics of the person, the human form became recognisable simply through its movements.

The resolution of the camera sensor, my distance from my subject and the hazy damp half-light of the winter afternoon made the figures filmed very difficult to make out. I would retrace the same figure hundreds of times over, each frame as undefined as the previous one. I followed the movements of seven or eight individuals for about two minutes, each minute divided into sixty seconds, each second divided into twelve frames. This repetitive activity meant that I would follow minutely the progress of each of the figures as they passed in front of the camera.

While the movements of the ill-defined figures are undoubtedly those of humans, their blurry shapes are more akin to the half-formed images we have of people in the peripheries of our perception. I took no notice of these figures when I pointed my camera at the Stora Enso headquarters. I only became aware of the people walking around the building when I had broken down my film into individual frames and began tracing over these frames. They were revealed through the creative process, re-animated human forms coming to life as they were animated in post-production.

Rotoscoping is a technique that has been concurrent with the historical development of cinema. It is a process inherent to the frame-by-frame illusion integral to moving image media. Rotoscoping is a labour-intensive but very efficient technique for emulating human movement. The magic experience of Walt Disney's early films was the result of the illusion that the actions of the animal characters were very natural; they moved like humans. This was due to the animators tracing human gestures,

movements and poses frame by frame and then transposing this movements onto the cartoon animals.

I was able to minutely scrutinise the movement of these anonymous individuals during the brief period that I filmed them. The lack of resolution in the image left them devoid of any identifying physical characteristics. Their presence only registered in their movement; they became spectral. Surrounding the harmonic solidity of Aalto's architecture, the spasmodic inscription of the passersby was ghostlike, they were fleeting apparitions that melted into the heavy weather of the winter cityscape, oscillating shadows slowly obscured by the deliberate progress of the ferry's trajectory away from the building.

Reconstructing the sequence involved a process of tracing the, at first unnoticed, human presence in the images by tracking their movement, tracing the passage of their shadowy forms and bringing them back to life. Like recollections of people barely remembered from the past, retrieved and repurposed as mechanical ghosts.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Quote displayed in the exhibition *The University Is Now on Air: Broadcasting Modern Architecture*, 15 November 2017 to 1 April 2018, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal.









# Thirteen Ways of Looking at Choreographic Thinking

LAUREN O'NEAL

My artistic research centers on, and is catalyzed through, choreographic thinking. Choreographic thinking, for me, includes elements of movement and arrangement, embodiment and encounter.

What does this look like, exactly? How does it go?

This essay<sup>1</sup> serves as a meditation on ways I think about (choreographic) thinking (which includes making) in artistic research. It is an opportunity for me to speculate and experiment, in thirteen propositions.

The essay also functions as a disorderly map. Which is to say: I do not yet know where I am going, and it is unclear what I will find when I arrive.

## **I. Choreographic Thinking as Expanded Art Practice**

My work—my studio art, movement, curatorial, and pedagogical practices—fall under the umbrella of ‘expanded art practice.’ It goes beyond simply saying “I curate as an artist,” or “I produce installations that draw from dance notation,” because then ‘I,’ ‘curate,’ ‘dance,’ ‘notation’ and all the other words are subject

to the type of scrutiny that is unproductive during the process of creation.

While the notion of 'expanded art practice' may, by now, be a somewhat hackneyed phrase, it is still useful to me. It is a pointer, a loose assemblage, a beckoning. It is a choreographic practice that propels thinking and moving and making, here, there, and back again.

## II. What (the #\*!@%) Is the Choreographic?

A choreographic practice is not tethered to choreography, dance, or movement arts as they are commonly understood. The choreographic moves beyond one discipline. It is more about activation and emergence than about fixed points or final destinations.

Erin Manning proposes that "a choreographic practice challenges the presupposition that movement is secondary to form, subjective or objective. The choreographic...is a technique that assists us in rethinking how a creative process activates conditions for its emergence as event" (74).

Jenn Joy situates the choreographic in terms of relation: "To engage choreographically is to position oneself in relation to another, to participate in a scene of address that anticipates and requires a particular mode of attention, even at times against our will" (1).

My pursuit of the choreographic reveals that it could be a strategy for thinking, or for structuring the event of thinking. It is a way to be inquisitive.

## III. Awkward Partnering

As a visual artist and curator, mapping and merging the choreographic into my art and artistic research practices can make things awkward for others. As in: "I can't help you. I don't know anything about dance," or simply "Oh."

I work around this by conducting speculative dialogues with materials and with texts—taking many forms, both dimensional and immaterial—as a way to delineate a possible (overlapping) territory.

For example, in terms of Joy’s ideas about the choreographic and the relational, Beatrice von Bismarck and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer might add (*italics are mine*):

A curatorial situation is always one of hospitality. It implies invitation—to artists, artworks, curators, audiences, and institutions; it receives, welcomes, and *temporarily brings people and objects together*, some of which have left their habitual surroundings and find themselves in the process of relocation in the sense of being a guest. Thus, the curatorial situation *provides both the time and the space for encounter between entities* unfamiliar with one another (8).

Irit Rogoff, traveling in a parallel plane to Manning, notes that the curatorial shifts from the representational to being a “trajectory of activity”—it is about the ongoing work of knowledge production (and the production of subjectivity as well), not the end-product: “The curatorial as an epistemic structure... It is a series of existing knowledges that come together momentarily to produce what we are calling the event of knowledge...” (23).

#### IV. Questions, Generators, Movements, Thoughts

Awkward partnerships are catalysts: the intersection of non-coincidental ideas acts as a generator for thinking. I am usually most in my element when trying to take ideas from one domain and applying them, however inelegantly, to another. These awkward pairings—between the choreographic and the gallery, between the dramaturgical and the art object—are not made lightly. They are a way for me to *move*, literally and conceptually. They are a means for *ideas to move*.

Choreographic thinking is my mode of (or method for) artistic research: it is an embodied form of inquiry: a way to ask questions, make introductions, and invite possibilities, using any available platform or space as laboratory, rehearsal room, studio, and stage. It *seeks*, rather than *seeks to answer*.

## V. Lists

Notation	Iterative	Gathering
(In)visibilities	Tools	Architectures
Composition	Slowing	Sensing
Audience	Discussions	Points
Khoreia	Longing	Conversations
Spatial	Ecologies	Structures
Articulation	Subjectification	(Un)disciplinary
Rewriting	Graphein	Excess
Temporality	Objects	Logisticality
Unfolding	Hierarchies	Sites
Inquiry	Atmosphere	Accumulation
Comprising	Unfurling	Assembling
Lists	Discourse	Lines
Disagreements	Score	Resistance

## VI. Points

William Forsythe describes the emergence of choreography as something that “can start at any point.”<sup>2</sup>

... a “point” is not necessarily a geometric point in space; it means any categorical observation. The object, a condition, language: Anything can be the place where something can start. Nothing has to start in any particular way that’s determined by history or practice or anything. It means that it starts from anywhere (Forsythe in conversation with Zachary Whittenburg in *Critical Correspondance*)

So, too, choreographic thinking and artistic research. A(ny) (starting) point can launch (us).

## VII. Mapping in All Directions: Unruly Scores

There are many ways of mapping, and many uses for maps. When I try to employ mapping as a means of corralling or codifying experience or form, it usually fails, because it attempts to be a trace rather than a trajectory. None of my maps, in my practice, are functional in the sense of getting from ‘predetermined point *a*’ to ‘predetermined point *b*.’ Rather, the mapping is more equivalent to gesturing, or even gesticulating. If I move around enough in the studio or in the gallery, something will emerge. *Work leads to work.*

My artistic research is conducted through a series of loosely assembled gestures rather than any specific set of repeatable steps. I place tremendous emphasis on testing, tweaking, and prototyping. I am not usually left with a “one thing,” but many iterations. Some of these iterations become steps—score-like points which facilitate a jump to the next step. Other iterations leak or contaminate the work, causing me to be pulled in another direction, double back on idea (even when I’m not willing), take a detour, or drift for a while until something else comes into view.

## VIII. Flexible Positions

Unruly scores cultivate a type of flexibility in naming, forming, and analyzing artistic work and research. *More* than cultivate: they *require*.

Within choreographic thinking, positions shift. Often, this flexibility makes it easier on my friends and colleagues, when they struggle to understand what it is that I think about and do in my practice.

Sometimes I am a choreographer. Sometimes I am a dramaturg. Sometimes I am a performer. Sometimes I am a sculptor.

Sometimes I am an educator. It depends on my conversational partner. Or my mood. Most often I mumble something about being an ‘interdisciplinary artist.’ This shifting of positions, too, is a type of choreographic experimentality.

## **IX. Moving Desire**

Flexible positions—or even detachable ones—are not just about me (or you). They are more about how objects, ideas, events, sensations, and experiences can be exchanged—made to *move* in different ways. Within an installation, movement can be invoked by *actual* moving parts (video, sound, motorized components), or by making a *desire* for movement (“What is that?”). This desire can be produced through architectural or design means (pathways, stages, chairs), through principles and elements of art (repetition, proportion) or via objects and materials, by how they are perceived (differently, by different viewers), or what they provoke (moving toward, moving away, remembering, forgetting, being with or apart from others).

## **X. Moving-mapping-building-testing-writing-arranging-researching-reconfiguring: A Constellational Ensemble**

I do my aesthetic thinking and making through movement—the movement of ideas, objects, materials, and people. It is necessary for me to move in order to spatialize my thinking and give ample room for concepts to emerge, assemble, and rearrange. This *moving-mapping-building-testing-writing-arranging-researching-reconfiguring* practice is not an attempt to get *away* from something, but rather to move *closer*.

This reveals my curatorial perspective, too: artworks within exhibitions could be said to contain parallel types of movement activities, before, during, and after their occupation in a gallery setting: a choreography of intersection. Beatrice von Bismark

has often remarked on this approach within curating as ‘constellational.’

What is a ‘constellational’ ensemble?

## **XI. Restless Practice & Exhaustion**

I am exhausted. Can exhaustion be used to create different conditions and other options?<sup>3</sup>

By exhausting itself, artistic research has the potential to become restless: to offer the condition of inquiry rather than declaration, producing questions rather than answering them, and to reconceive knowledge production, aesthetics, and audience through projects that are iterative, additive, or contradictory.

Being exhausted creates a type of fatigue aesthetics. Experimenting with fatigue aesthetics, as glacially slow and incomprehensible it might be, is a way of choreographic thinking, too. It’s not always about speed. But it *is* about resistance.

## **XII. Gaps**

I am not crafting a manual of artistic or curatorial practice, at least not one that can be commodified for easy transfer. I disagree with the requirement that new knowledge is always something that can be scaled up, shared, or reproduced. This project will likely expose gaps in my attempts to grasp choreographic curation, shortcomings in my ability to share it completely, inadvertent omissions of details that I will not know to be important until years later, and full-scale chasms where a leap of faith will be required, an acknowledgement of shared, yet incomplete understanding:

*I kind of get it, you nod.*

*(If I squint and tilt my head) I see what you mean.*

### XIII. Wandering and Wondering

Artistic research is a practice of *wandering* and *wondering*. It is exploratory. While I may assemble artworks and exhibitions as a response to a set of questions, I am not seeking an answer. A response is somewhat different: it is a way to engage with a set of wonderings, through the act of wandering. To make room:

What holds true for the way in which a work of art can be approached in an exhibition also holds true of the way in which the work of art itself faces the world. Not as the arbiter of truth, but as a gateway of possibilities. A process whose consequences may not be anticipated by its artist or custodian and that may not be realized even within their lifetimes. This calls for a slow, deliberative prolongation of the interaction between the artwork, its public, and its critical milieu, which is not predicated on the instant processing of readily available information alone. What it probably requires is a belated insertion of the category of discursive and critical wonder, as opposed to the need simply to 'know,' as a valid mode or orienting oneself toward a work of art. Here, by wonder, we do not mean a retreat to ineffability. Rather, we mean in some ways a sidestep into an eloquent and busy conversation founded on possibilities rather than on certainties alone. How to learn again how to wonder aloud in the presence of art... (Raqs Media Collective, 109)

### Notes

- 1 This essay was launched with the help of compositional encouragement from Wallace Stevens' poem *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* from 1917, my sculptural and spatial entanglements with Trisha Brown, and a buoyant reading of already buoyant texts by Raqs Media Collective, among others. It is through these and many other voices that I am assembling (very slowly) an understanding of the choreographic within my artistic research practice. The essay is also linked to my *Research Catalogue* exposition bearing a similar title to this essay. You will see echoes and overlaps of ideas in

this parallel setting, as these pieces emerged concurrently. However, they serve different functions. In this manner, I am using choreographic thinking directly in order to further my understanding of it.

- 2 Forsythe has discussed this idea using many different combinations of this basic phrase. It is now part of the discourse that frames his work. See Steven Spier's book, *William Forsythe: It Starts from Any Point* (Routledge, 2011).
- 3 Samuel Beckett, Gilles Deleuze, and others, such as André Lepecki most recently in *Exhausting Dance*, have proposed exhaustion as a way for moving beyond into new (aesthetic) territories. I look at it as a means for getting out of my own way.

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# What is the Product of These Conversations that You Are Having as Part of Your Artistic Research?

MATTHEW COWAN

There is a mask and a text.

The mask is produced from a handkerchief, and the text is transcribed from a recording of a conversation.

And how are these contributing to your research?

Well, they are both the result of the research process, but they operate in different ways. I am interested in how they function as elements of the same action, a conversation. For example, one – the mask – is tangible in a way that the text is not. You could put the mask on your wall, and observe it like a painting, or you could wear it like an item of clothing, or even keep it in your pocket in a particularly personal or practical way. Maybe it even stores traces of a person. As an object, the handkerchief is different than the text. The text, of course, is primarily a spoken – and then read – course of action. The handkerchief could also be read, in the way that we talk about reading an artwork. But it also holds text in another way, in that it has been spoken through – there is a hole for the mouth – but in the end, it does not give the same kind of information that the text does.

So, what are the differences and what does the text give that the mask does not and vice versa?

This is a big question for artistic research, because it touches on the coming together of the artistic and the research process, but I am not going to try and give a tidy answer. It is more about the fact that there have been two kinds of artistic things produced over the course of these conversations I have been having recently. They have been produced in parallel – that is, mostly at the same time. For example, I recently talked with Bruce Asbestos, an artist who is working on catwalk fashion collections based on folktales. The conversation took place over the course of an evening, drinking in an old pub in Nottingham, England. During the time that it took me to buy a round of drinks at the bar, Bruce produced a mask (the barman was quite busy). As I returned to our seat, to continue the conversation, he held up the mask he had made... We took some pictures and he posted them on Instagram, noting the time and place and what we were talking about. It was a different kind of product than the text, and it was already out in the world, and fixed to a place and time.

Then, what is the text like?

Well, the text is in the process of becoming written at the moment. It is intended to remain conversational, so it will be transcribed and edited with this in mind. It has the ability to show what we were talking about in a way that the mask can only show traces of.

Why and what do you mean by conversational?

Different from another, academic kind of writing that I am also concentrating on in my thesis.

What makes the conversation ‘conversational’ and not academic?

Well, in most cases we are speaking as artists, or as practitioners speaking together. The setting and tone of the place are important for this, and even though we know there is a recording being made, we soon forget about that... But still people do consider what they are talking about. I think they like to be asked

about their practice and share their ideas with someone who is a colleague in some way. I have approached people who are connected to my field, not necessarily artists, but also museum curators and other experts.

But what I would like to emphasise is that the interesting role of the handkerchief. It is a little object that people hold in their hands, as I give it to them in the beginning, explaining the simple process of making it into a mask over the course of our conversation. Mostly they do nothing with it for a while, but then at some point when there is a pause in the conversation, they pick it up and start playing with it. They cut some holes into it and then it becomes their mask. Making a mask out of a handkerchief is a super simple kind of domestic folk prop. It's a little device really, that has some...

Was it Oscar Wilde who said that if you give a man a mask he will tell you the truth?

Yes, it was, he said something like that. I think that leads to another question, which is the question of truth in artistic research. How is the artwork (and the text) evidence of the thinking behind the work? This is an important point in other aspects of my research. Especially as I have been working in museums and with artefacts.

So, are these handkerchief masks readable as artefacts?

I guess you could say that, yes. They will end up as a set of characters, or perhaps you could think of them as a cast for a play. And the play is the dramaturgy of the research.







# Tactile Composition

MARLOEKE VAN DER VLUGT

Dear Reader. You are standing in front of my work, holding this booklet in one hand. Or are you using both hands? It should be possible to use only one hand, because the booklet is lightweight and small compared to the voluminous art catalogues usually on sale in museums. Such a catalogue might be placed on your head to improve posture. That won't be so effective with this volume. But the booklet has other sensuous features. It can be hidden in your clothes. Carried under your arm. How intimate can a text get? A book always leaves a mark on its reader.

Let's go back to the moment you opened this brand new, spotless publication for the first time. Did you do it immediately when you got it at the entrance, quickly flipping through? Or is now the moment you experience its content for the first time, standing in front of the objects on display. How stubborn is the cover and how thick are the pages? Do you observe these sensory attributes, its feel, so substantial for meaning ascription? When we interact with a text, it seems we are conditioned to 'understand' its contents, to discover its meaning and dig deep under the surface, thereby regarding the skin as superficial.

Glide over the type page, the imprint of the letters, the result of my handiwork. Did you use your eyes or your fingers to do it? Because we write with keyboards and printers today, the tactile nature of writing is not in evidence on the pages. We used to feel the pen carving the paper. The smudged ink when the pen was leaking. The etymological meaning of the verb to write is to scratch. And in the early days men did scratch the parchment made out of animal skins. Nowadays keyboards, touch screens and the mouse have altered the impact of writing by hand. For most of us, however, traces of the elemental ability of writing to penetrate the surface and the sensations of enduring handiwork are still leaking through. For a new generation it might be different. Think of the famous example of a child trying to ‘slide’ her finger over the page of a book to turn the page; her expectations and experience in this haptic exploration seem to be completely configured by commercial and economical protocols that make up the technological devices all around her.

How to prevent this notebook from closing down? Place the booklet on the pedestal in front of you. Open it on page 178 and push-slide your finger along the centre line from top to bottom. From now on, the flattened fold will assist *you*, as the book will easily open on this page, inviting you to read it again.

You can see now that a book is a tactile object and reciprocal by nature. You touch the book and it touches you back, or as philosopher Erin Manning remarked: “I cannot touch without being touched in turn”<sup>1</sup>

But what do I mean by the word touch? Touching can be understood in a number of ways depending on context and purpose, because the word can describe a range of actions, sensations, feelings, emotions and so on. For instance, touching something or someone can evoke physical sensations like hot and cold and thereby awaken feelings of contentment, happiness, uneasiness or disgust arising from (sub)conscious thoughts and memories. A touch you feel on your shoulder can be an invitation to speak or to step away, the meaning depends on the characteristics of

the social encounter. If you say that this book touched you, you are using the word in a metaphorical way, meaning that you are emotionally affected by its content. The many interpretations of the word touch(ing) and of its perception, are firmly linked to our social, cultural, personal and historical situations, influenced by who we are and by our prior knowledge, experiences, feelings and so on.

Let's try to step away from interpretation and focus on the act of touching, on the experience of physical, reciprocal interaction with the book.

You are invited to actively explore the material qualities of this notebook and the communicative capacity of the medium itself. As you will probably notice, touching the book is just one part of this haptic exploration; it also comprises the proprioceptive and kinaesthetic senses. In order to produce coordinated movement for opening the book, we need proprioceptors, which are sensors in our joints, muscles, and fascia. For holding and push-sliding the page, we use our kinaesthetic awareness, which is bound with our ability to navigate space and our awareness of how we move. The sensation of touch is initiated by tactile receptors in our skin, which also register pressure, pain, temperature and texture. Together, these senses constitute your basic and fundamental engagement with the object<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the handling, reading and writing of the book and navigating this exhibition are all haptic experiences.

Touching takes time. It slows you down. Unlike vision, which can take in vast surroundings at a glance, it is impossible to touch and at once fathom even the tiniest object.

Touching is movement, it allows the object to play an active role in the process. If you just hold the book in one hand, it won't give you any extra information.

Touching evokes engagement. It has the capacity of transcending the sort of interaction in which subject and object are seen as two separate entities. It facilitates what theorist Karen Barad<sup>3</sup> calls "intra action" where knowledge is fluid and constantly

changing in the moment. As we handle the book for the first time, the thoughts that are acted out arise in a complex collaboration between the object itself, the situation, and the performative moment. As this moment begins to act through us and experience emerges, we can in turn be changed into owners of new thought.

As you probably understand by now, my research inquires into artistic strategies that activate touch(ing) as a prominent component within the aesthetic process which locates itself at the crossroad of performance, scenography and media arts. Through my artistic practice, I examine how haptic exploration can be stimulated and put to creative use within the production and reception of artworks. The project aims to assemble a contemporary vocabulary and an expanded aesthetics of tactile processes that occur within the arts.

*Before reading further – please take your time to experience what is on display.*

Welcome back.

Did you moisten the page a little, to make it easier to turn the page? Saliva has been found in mediaeval books – because religious books were often kissed.

On the following two pages you will find fragmentary descriptions of experiences – momentary and accumulated over time – that give insight into my artistic practice and the trajectory that led me to my current research questions. In retrospect, these fragments seem to have pushed me into becoming “touch sensitive,” and I hope this will happen to you as well. Of course, there were many other experiments that induced me to study the tactile sense. My decision to describe these particular projects, ideas, reflections and anecdotes arises from my discovery of traces in the artistic work in front of you. Reducing the descriptions to a few

core observations relating to my research questions allowed me to infer some first ideas on how the tactile sense can be activated within aesthetic encounters.

For me, the (re)formulating of my research questions that guide, materialise and change in constant dialogue with my practice is a distinctive and productive aspect of conducting research in and through my interdisciplinary, artistic practice. My practice alternates between the creation of performative, relational and time-based works, reading of books, articles and papers, and the observation, documentation and analysis as well as sharing of the process (writing, filming); this is also accompanied by teaching, presenting, lecturing, and co-creating with students and fellow artists. The roles of artist, researcher and teacher are totally merged and are part of the same process of creation. The methods are employed in a cyclical and iterative manner – I do not follow a linear preconceived path: some methods are implicated within each other, some are used in parallel, each step informing the next step and vice versa.

To mirror this method of working, I suggest you to read these pages in a diffractive manner: pick a fragment, allow time and attention, maybe take a stroll in order for other thoughts to emerge. Read a text through another one, read as many fragments and in any order you like. Observe-entanglements, interferences and differences. Reading like this, moving slowly, can guide you to your own subjective focus within this investigation. What activates *your* sensitivity to tactual perception?

### Artistic Practice

I create interactive, performative installations that explore what it means to live in a technology driven, networked world and how that impacts the body. All the installations start from my fascination with hybrid (analogue and digitally mediated) forms of communication, and they invite visitors to experience and crit-

ically “dissect” their communication strategies when engaging in interaction with technology. To give a few examples: in one installation I enabled the audience/participants/performers to communicate with each other via digital avatars, in another I enabled them to oscillate between the inside and outside of their bodies via biosensors and neuro-feedback systems. I have attempted to make “the invisible visible” by enhancing visitors’ sensory capacities with sensors so as to give physical shape to memories. I have also created digital duplicates of spectators’ bodies that could then travel through time and space. In eliciting experiences of confusion and bodily disconnectedness through these mediated forms of communication, my artistic works aim to shift the viewer’s attention towards the body and to emphasise the importance of human-centred staging and creation strategies<sup>4</sup>.

While creating, presenting and reflecting on my artistic works, I found that the tactile sense (or its absence) within technologically mediated communication plays a crucial role in these bodily feelings of fluidity and fragmentation, because “the technology was shaping a dichotomy between body and mind and thus affecting my feeling of ‘wholeness’ or self-agency”<sup>5</sup>. However, such concerns about agency, individuality and engagement in our tactile and affective relation with technology are nothing new, as indicated by the following quote from 1903, when the very concept of a button was just invented: “in touching the button my direct agency ceases. It is true that connected with that button are wires conducting to a wide variety of consequences. But about the details of that conduction I need know nothing. [...] Its working is not mine, but its own”<sup>6</sup>.

Digital communication technologies generally do not invite the user to explore the reciprocal nature of touching: as a user, we only need to know how to ‘touch’ the button/sensor in the ‘right’ manner in order for the communication with the ‘other’ to occur. We do not need to express any emotion by the way we touch the device, nor do we expect any response other than the functional outcome. As a result, we are like “users who lack ‘feeling’ on two

levels – they cannot feel (touch) digital information in the same way that they see or hear it, nor can they engage with the world ‘authentically’ or with a depth of feeling.”<sup>7</sup>

A new generation is growing up with devices of which they expect nothing less than complete *support* as they create their multiple digital lives and share, store and expand their knowledge online, seamlessly incorporating analogue and digital communications, interacting with mobile devices, game consoles, keyboards, touch screens day in and day out.

Touching is instrumental, its meaning highly influenced by our repeated interactions with haptic technologies (like the mobile phone), that are constraining and disciplining our bodies based on commercial protocols. This unidirectional approach is even more apparent in remote touching: as we touch other places and beings over the Internet, our touch is returned to us in the form of (visual) data.

Socially, we seem to be puzzled about the fact that touch(ing) *is* reciprocal yet asymmetrical – you can never be sure what triggers the other persons’ response. This creates uncertainty, especially when cultural and political norms for touch(ing) other people vary (#MeToo). A possible outcome is that we may want to touch other people less, and by thus limiting ourselves to eyes and ears end up belittling our complex perceptive faculties. It would also reduce our diverse and more inclusive possibilities to engage with the world around us.

How can the tactile sense regain prominence in current conditions of technologically augmented communication strategies? Where and how are we stimulated to explore, augment and differentiate the reciprocal nature of our touching?

*To activate haptic exploration and sensitise the tactile sense, both for me as an artist-researcher and for my audience, touching should not be restricted to functionality, it should be presented as an area for exploration.*

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 Art History

Within the tradition of modern arts, the sense of touch is addressed only to a modest degree. It is the visual sense that is given priority, pushing the other senses to the periphery. This practice has a long history, as clearly shown by the general, optical museum where objects are neatly placed behind glass or the audience is asked to keep at a safe distance from the displays. This seems to have changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however. The sense of touch plays an increasingly important role in contemporary art, mostly due to developments in technology – think of interactive installations, ‘multi sensory’ exhibitions, tactile interfaces, and so on. Exhibitions aim to be more open, as a result of museum-based research pointing to the imaginative, affectual engagement of the visitor’s touch in order to “animate the past, the object and, by implication, the visitor.”<sup>8</sup> The boundary between performer and audience has been contested for a long time in theatre and scenography, and today, as the audience is cast in the role of participants/performers, they get to touch and be touched in all sorts of ways.

*Could artistic arenas (museums, theatres, cultural spaces) be locations for experimenting with the tactile sense, could they become “explorative spaces not aimed at resolution but at intuitive engagement; from sites of authority into sites of mutuality”<sup>9</sup>?*

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 Touching as ‘space-in-between’

Touch – both the act of touching and being touched – is an opening up or narrowing down of the ‘space-in-between.’ The concept is actually a metaphor based on formal knowledge, because in reality we are – as science has shown us – unable to touch someone or something. Zooming in to a microscopic level, we

see that atoms are not able to touch each other, there is no actual contact involved. What we sense is the electromagnetic repulsion between the electrons of the atoms that make up our fingers and of that which you seek to touch. All we ever feel is this electromagnetic force: negatively charged particles pushing each other away. “Repulsion at the core of attraction”<sup>10</sup>. In other words, touch(ing) is always a space-in-between, a fluid, *queer* space that by its very nature cannot be closed, formalised or fixed.

The question is how to draw attention to and research the creative potential of this space-in-between that exists within and acquires shape through touching? When is haptic exploration experienced as an open invitation, a visceral space to move within and actively explore?

*When touch(ing) is forced into a single solid and outlined meaning or purpose, our perception and our individual modes of interaction with the world around are thereby reduced.*

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### Touching material

I use small electronic machines as extensions of my body to change the qualities of soft materials into tactile surfaces. This leads me to use a laser cutter to burn into leather, a hot air blower to heat and wrinkle cloth, to cook and experiment with bio-plastic to harden silk and linen, and to use a 3D printer to sew pieces of fabric together with filament.

A material can act as a companion just as it can be resistant and recalcitrant. In the process of crafting objects, my embodied contact with the machines and the material – using my hands or any other part of my body – can make me frustrated: I become anxious and vulnerable when I am not in control. Pretty soon it becomes evident that the material I am working with has something to ‘say’ as well. This intra-action demonstrates quite clearly that I as a human being am not the sole agent who decides what the

outcome will be. Many other (in)visible factors, such as the technology I am using, the properties of the material, the tools, the temperature, the spatial circumstances, all these are performing their agency. Speaking about physics, Barad<sup>11</sup> goes so far as to claim that matter itself is just as active an agent as our interpretative frameworks, so that we do not give meaning to matter, but matter and meaning co-constitute each other.

My own making process takes place in continuous dialogue with this haptic exploration, and as such it needs to be foregrounded: my conceptual practice now equals my making practice. For me, making is an act that is basic, practical and broad – think of building, (de)constructing, working, producing<sup>12</sup>. All my experiments take place in the peripersonal space – the space immediately surrounding the body. How can I share this process of creation and transformation – occurring in ‘the space-in-between’ – with an audience?

*The process of creation and transformation needs to become experienceable in the peripersonal space of the objects that are exhibited. Then tactility is operative, not only in composition but also in consumption.*

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### Tactile imagination

During a lesson with performance students, I observed how they caressed, pinched, folded and stretched a networked, conductive cloth. Their manual handling of the cloth triggered pre recorded audio files, together evoking a complete narrative. Just watching the students suddenly produced a strong tactile sensation in my body. It resembled my experience of wearing a self-made version of a navigation belt: feeling tiny motors vibrating around my waist – they made me feel like flying, and I started to dance. At that moment, I realised that mere visual observation of a tactile encounter could also lead to a strong, intimate and sensual sensation of touching.

Can we explore anew what touch(ing) objects can make us experience and what stories they can tell?  
 What are the performative qualities of touching?

*Both watching and experiencing touch(ing) can mobilise tactile imagination by invoking tactile schemata, i.e. all relevant memories and associations related to that particular kind of touch or that particular thing now touched.<sup>13</sup>*

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### Practicing reciprocity – Case Studies

What materials and crafting techniques have an embedded reciprocal character as they ‘respond’ to being touched by touching back in an unpredictable manner?

- Bandhani is a type of tie-dye textile which is made by tightly tying cloth into many small knots that form a pattern. The cloth is then dyed, the tying thread is removed, which leaves a circular design on the cloth. The name *bandhani* is derived from the Sanskrit word *banda*, to tie. I chose this 5000 years old technique, because it is a delicate way to create patterns. It is like a very precise but simple choreography performed by the hands: pinching the cloth, binding many tiny knots, waiting and then opening them up, like a long line of little stories. Every knot is unique, with its own aesthetic appeal: the craftswomen each have their own specific ‘handwriting’: big knots, small ones with a hole in the middle, squares, knots tied really close to each other, and so on. The structure invites touching with the tips of the fingers, like reading a story written in braille on a piece of paper.

- Knitting Electric Wire. The field of touch has been actively studied from the 18th century onwards. The first research focus was triggered by the discovery of electricity. It became clear that discharge of electricity from generators or batteries was best reg-

istered by skin; no other senses were able to do it as precisely and accurately. Knitting with electric wire connects touch to both fear and intimacy – to fear by virtue of the dread we have for touching anything with live current in it; to intimacy by virtue of the physical act of knitting – think of the domestic, familial, female emotional qualities knitted surfaces evoke even today.

- **Memory Foam.** Lying down on a mattress made out of memory foam, the outline of one's body appears as a deep imprint and slowly disappears when the pressure is removed, creating the peculiar sensation of time getting turned back in front of your eyes. Slightly different foams are used for the popular Squishy toys that help children concentrate when they squeeze them. The small size and apparent reciprocal nature of these objects makes it very appealing to grab them: they return your squeeze at once as they try to get back into their original shape.<sup>14</sup>

These objects can seem attractive on account of their colour, or disgusting because of their disposable beauty.

Working with urethane pour foam is unpredictable, the final shape is created in part by an invisible chemical process. The process is influenced by temperature, stirring, movement, colour pigments, elements added into the foam, the texture of the surface it is pored on, and so on. Consequently the result can have all kinds of tactile qualities to 'read'.

*To activate tactile 'reading' I have chosen materials and techniques that implicate 'vitality' and have a 'dynamic form'.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the objects:*

- *activate the 'tactile eye':<sup>16</sup> watching the (shape of the) material triggers a sensation of touching through the shape's resemblance to skin or landscape, for example;*
- *present traces and marks (reveal the process and the maker);*
- *lengthen and intensify haptic exploration as the material reacts to skin-to-skin contact, either by changing its shape, through conductive properties that trigger audio files, or through embed-*

*ded soft electronics that change the temperature of the material or produce vibration.*

*With an object like this, to get to 'know' it seeing alone is not enough. It is impossible to predict how the reverse side looks without turning the object around, to know what is inside without pressing the object, or to sense its temperature or predict its weight without picking it up. Such an object requires haptic exploration, as this is indispensable for effective decoding and mobilizing imagination.*

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### Tactile Compositions

With my artistic work, I aim for the audience to intentionally experience prolonged haptic exploration. As a result the seeming immediacy of touch on the skin is given time to unfold into a proper dialogue. Wyschogrod<sup>17</sup> suggests that something even stronger might happen: “the decoupling of touch from mere sensation, whereby something more abstract and barely articulable arises within touching experiences.”<sup>18</sup>

At the same time the audience is invited to explore creative and imaginative haptic experiences and to examine the boundaries of what tactility might perform and what tactile communication could be. Within this process of encounter, of engagement between object and subject, sensory responses, emotions and ideas are generated that may open up new and creative approaches to understanding people and things.

*You can put the booklet in your bag.  
Is the contour line pushing through, making its position visible  
from the outside?  
Or can you only make sure it's there  
by touching it.*

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Manning, E. (2007), *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- <sup>2</sup> Sandra Dudley adds: "...this experiential step in our engagement with an object is so fundamental and so basic, that it is often missed in exploration of the socioculturally and historically constituted and situated nature of our emotional and cognitive responses to objects." In Dudley, S. (ed.) (2012) *Museum Objects, encountering the Properties of Things*, Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
- <sup>3</sup> Barad, K. (2003) "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." In *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(3), p. 801–831.
- <sup>4</sup> In 2015 I finished writing the book *Performance As Interface|Interface As Performance*, in retrospect assembling the creation processes of these works. Vlugt, M. van der, (2015), ITFB, HKU University of the Arts Utrecht, Amsterdam/Utrecht.
- <sup>5</sup> Idem, p. 20,
- <sup>6</sup> Quoting George Herbert Palmer in Plotnick, R. (2017) "Force, flatness and touch without feeling: Thinking historically about haptics and buttons." In *New Media & Society*, Vol. 19(10), 1632–1652.
- <sup>7</sup> Idem, p. 1634.
- <sup>8</sup> Jewitt, C., Price, S. (2019) "Family touch practices and learning experiences in the museum." In *The Senses and Society*, 14:2, p. 221–235.
- <sup>9</sup> Editorial, "Towards a museum of mutuality." In *Stedelijke Studies*#8, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
- <sup>10</sup> Barad, K. (2012) "On Touching -The Inhuman That Therefore I Am." In *Differences* 23 (3): 206–223.
- <sup>11</sup> Idem, pag. 206–223.
- <sup>12</sup> Many avantgarde movements of the twentieth century displaced the act of making with various forms of appropriation and conceptual gestures. That is why making does not necessarily resonate as a key aspect in many contemporary art practices. Anik Fournier, "Rudimentariness: a concept for artistic research." In *Journal for Artistic Research*, 12 (2017) <https://www.research-catalogue.net/view/261526/262816/0/0> [accessed 03/08/2019]
- <sup>13</sup> Hossain, M.S. (2016) "Towards tactile reading" in: *Anekaant: A Journal of Polysemic Thought*, presentation on the XIX International Conference on Materialities: Objects, Matters, Things, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India. <https://borncute.com/best-squishies-reviewed/>
- <sup>14</sup> Massumi, Brian (2008) "The Thinking-Feeling of what happens: a Semblance of a conversation" published in *Inflexions Online Journal*. [http://inflexions.org/n1\\_The-Thinking-Feeling-of-What-Happens-by-Brian-Massumi.pdf](http://inflexions.org/n1_The-Thinking-Feeling-of-What-Happens-by-Brian-Massumi.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> Sobchack, V. (2004) *Carnal Thoughts*, University of California Press, London.
- <sup>16</sup> Edith Wyschogrod in: idem.
- <sup>17</sup> Paterson, M. (2007) *The Senses of Touch*, Berg, Oxford, UK, New York, USA.









# Numbered List on the Infraordinary

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About this document:

Through my search for and intention of writing about the Infraordinary, I have found myself going through previous artistic movements that have taken on the everyday. Most of these movements occurred in the middle of the twentieth century within the practices of the Surrealists, the Situationist International, the Lettrist International, and the Fluxus movement.

As so often happens, I came across Lori Waxman's book *Keep Walking Intently. The Ambulatory Art of the Surrealists, the Situationist International, and Fluxus* by chance when I was browsing in a bookstore in Berlin. The red cover with its white typography *Keep Walking Intently* was impossible to miss. It is a title that all by itself suggest that you engage in some action, doing, going, moving, or in this case, walking.

Each point in the list below refers to a passage I marked in the book<sup>1</sup>. By going through them I wanted to elaborate on the thoughts that the book triggered in me concerning the similarities and differences between these artistic movements and the

Infraordinary. However, the end result seems to be a response to how the book established a dialogue with the Infraordinary rather than to its relationship vis-à-vis other artistic movements.

As I read, thinking happens. The text jumps here and there; references are collected, underlined, and marked.

Writing is many times a way of thinking.

The list:

1. About the word “enactment”:  
The word “enactment” seems to refer to something that has been planned, rehearsed, instead of something that just happens. The difference between something planned and something merely happening is one of the points where the Infraordinary differs from the Surrealists, the Situationist International, the Lettrist International, and Fluxus<sup>2</sup>. The Infraordinary is not an artistic movement, and it is not something that can be planned. It cannot be a preplanned event.
2. Something that is Infraordinary can become eventful when it happens, but it cannot be scheduled to happen.
3. The Infraordinary is not something you can find; it is something you encounter.
4. In my background reading about artistic practices relating to the Infraordinary, another word often occurs that is used to refer to what things that are encountered in the streets and in everyday life: “discovery”. However, I am wary of associating this word lightly with an Infraordinary practice, because discovery might imply a search.
5. A search always involves a pursuit. One moment we are staring without focusing at a landscape, at streets, corners, people, and then there comes an impulse towards something. Search is intentional action. There is an end goal.
6. Everyday life is unavoidable, or rather the quotidian is. That is perhaps the difference between the everyday and the quotidian. Everyday life is where things happen, it is the unde-

terminated and never-ending stream of living; while the word “quotidian” refers to routines or repetition that takes place within the everyday.

Routines transform things in the everyday into something ordinary. Routines and repetition can make even the most beautiful object or the most breathtaking situation in our life disappear. Within that same measure of time, however, repetition could also enlighten for us some piece of information we don’t know about a situation or event. There are routines in everyday life; there is the ordinary, the pursuit of the extraordinary, the pursuit of meaning and, most of all, the pursuit of purpose. Everyday life seems to take on a poetic note for the willing eye that longs to be lost rather than focus specifically on quotidian tasks.

I am unable to catch the meaning of the everyday if I think about it as life. However, I am able to approach it whenever I stop and try to focus on different aspects of it, on different questions that might elude a pull towards something; a pull that is like a siren call from the distance and which I willingly follow, until I hit the rocks and my body sinks into the ocean of meaningless pursuit.

It is possible that the point is not to think of the everyday as a single entity, but as something that always needs to be thought about in relation to something else. In that sense, every focus or element we engage with in relation to the everyday renews our understanding and ideas of the everyday and the artistic practices applied to fit.

7. The quotidian suggest repetition; something that happens repeatedly. The everyday is more like a straight line with no end, a space where we walk, with or without aim, to fulfill our unachievable lives.

The quotidian happens in the everyday.

8. Does the word “purpose” have anything to do with the Infraordinary? I know that it resonates many times whenever we do something. When we are in the realm of being some-

thing because we are doing something. Doing something not for the mere enjoyable and beautiful act of doing something, but because that something needs to be done *for* something, to have meaning. But the Infraordinary happens regardless of this.

I think that researching the Infraordinary – making the concept visible, something that *is* – derives from a need to provide a place for artistic practices that are founded on action. When things are something, regardless of their final end, if there is one. It's like trying to say:

*This, too, is something, there is no need for conclusions and results, I just need you to give this a moment of your time to experience it. You don't have to like it, you can hate it, do whatever you like with it. But this, this right here, is also something.*

*Leave expectations behind, they are not needed here; all this needs is you, you to be here and experience it. There is nothing to understand, there is nothing to know, there is only being.*

*We can all pretend to know things. We can tell ourselves we understand and we can theorize about the falling of rain, but before you go and do that, stay here for a moment.*

9. There is something in routines and cycles, something that seems to be necessary in order to make a response towards sense and meaningfulness. We truly want it all, we want have both stability and the unexpected in our pantry, ready to be chosen. That is a very generalizing account of the experience, of course – everyone wants different things – yet in the end, the explorer longs to settle down the farmer craves for some adventure at some point.

The ordinary seems to invite contempt, yet without the ordinary there would be no experience of the non-ordinary, of the extraordinary. When did the word “ordinary” take on this reference to banal, common, unworthy, simple, and unwanted? When did the ordinary acquire such negative rep?

10. Something that is left being what it is, and not set to be something else. When you encounter something undigested, “unprocessed”, what is the experience like? Does it entail a change in the content of experience or within the experiencer, thereby leaving the space undigested? Can a place be left to benothing but space even when an experience is happening in it?

I believe that once a space has passed through a state of experience it is no longer a space but has become a place. Experience attaches the self to the location, and by that attachment, space becomes place.

11. Chance is the total sum of my experience. When you think about experience, a black hole opens. Not filled with a negative idea of death and the end, but with the notion of a disappearance. I disappear in experience. Or, rather, in it, the “I” is in a raw state of being. There is no buffer zone of understanding. Once we understand what is happening, the experience is gone and is replaced by meaning, by thought, by a series of dynamics which will tell us where the “I” is and what this “I” is.

There are automatized experiences which no longer conscious, like walking, sleeping, eating, breathing. Not until we focus our attention on those actions or activities, on the doing, on what is happening, and on the experiences, not until then do they become detached from their function and we can behold a new spectrum within them.

12. How to convey an experience of the Infraordinary? How to convey the Infraordinary? It is curious that when I talk with random people about the Infraordinary, one thing they always ask is: “Can you give me an example?” I haven’t been able to give an example of it. It might be that what is Infraordinary for me might not be Infraordinary for someone else.

A couch on the sidewalk in a city might be Infraordinary, but in some contexts and for someone else it might be ordinary, normal, an everyday thing they are used to seeing on their

sidewalks. Chairs hanging from a wall to economize space was something I saw, something odd for me, almost like an installation, but for the people in that home that was where chairs were to be had. This directs my thinking towards the relationship between objects and experience. Sometimes objects are odd, or oddified<sup>3</sup>, but the experience is not. Or is it that the oddity of the objects makes the experience odd? And in that case, what is the relationship of oddness with the Infraordinary?

The above “examples” happened. I have them in my mind. They are nothing but the visual experience of the oddness of objects being in a place where they are usually not. But they might be experiences to be had and not told. One can talk about an experience and thus convey a meaning, but that takes a different type of storytelling. Being told about an experience is very different from having an experience. Everything that is necessary for an experience to become attached to the self is unspeakable whilst one is having the experience. To tell about an experience you must be able to reach the other with words.

13. The Infraordinary has no goal. It has no purpose. It is not a practice. It is useless. But it's *there*, and it gives us something. When it happens, it is something happening; it is something to be seen, to be experienced. What we see is not the Infraordinary, we are *in* the Infraordinary; there is nothing to see but objects and people. What happened is Infraordinary and yet, we never see the Infraordinary because when it happens, we are inside it. The Infraordinary is shapeless. The Infraordinary envelops us as a room would. We cannot see the room when we are in it, but we *are* in the room. We see things in it, and those things belong to the room and make it this or that kind of room. As an experience, the Infraordinary has either an image which remains in the past, or a sensibility which can only remain in the present.

14. There is something in the act of speaking, talking and conversing while one is strolling, walking, moving. I have never done it alone, that is, I've never spoken out aloud when walking by myself. But whenever I have had conversations with other people while on the move they have been very fulfilling. I am not certain what it is that changes when you have a conversation while walking compared with having one while being static, in one place. Personally, I feel more comfortable talking when I am moving, whether walking or driving, or on a train, or in any kind of system or mechanism in which the body is moving or transitioning from one place to the other. For me, there has always been something about being within a flow that allows me to think, as if something would open up by my not being static.
15. The oddities, the mismatches, the seemingly out-of-place. Since I have been here in this location, away from the city, I have wondered where the Infraordinary could be found. By *this location* I mean being at the residency in Cove Park<sup>4</sup> in the Scottish countryside where the nearest supermarket is an hour on foot, one way.  
Is it possible for the Infraordinary to exist outside the city? It might, but since this is not an environment that is part of my habitual everydayness, it is also possible that the Infraordinary is passing me by without me noticing. If that were the case, it would appear that one needs the quotidian, the routes, the normality in order to experience the Infraordinary. At the moment, everything seems to be in place here. Nothing is odd, or out of place. As I am surrounded by nature, it would be strange to find something out of place. It is not even likely. I did see a plastic bag in a field, but that seems to be a consequence of humans being in nature rather than something infra or extra. There are not the same dynamics here as one finds in a city.

16. The BAP<sup>5</sup> attaches itself to places that are already meaningful by virtue of being in use or being places of experience. The BAP then sets out to re-enchant the quotidian within those places. However, the quotidian is never lost, we forget about it, we forget the everydayness of things, we forget that which holds our lives, the scenario, the stage, the context, the place.

It was never lost, we just forgot it was there and labeled it ordinary.

Experience makes things visible. The Infraordinary is an experience, a particular type of experience, and as such, we cannot hold on to it, we must live through it and accept that such are things in life and the experience of it.

17. The idea of a “quotidian event”:

That is the point where the practice of the Infraordinary separates from the artistic practices of Fluxus, the Surrealists and the Situationist International. The latter created events, arranged things to happen collectively. I am still uncertain of the nature of the Infraordinary in that respect. I don’t know if the Infraordinary can be collective, or planned. Can there be a collectively Infraordinary experience? The Infraordinary is an experience, so I guess there can. But, although the Infraordinary can be eventful, it is not an event in the sense of something being arranged at a certain time and a certain day; there is no making an appointment for an Infraordinary experience.

18. The Infraordinary has no audience or spectators. I don’t think one can apply the term “audience” to the person or persons who experience the Infraordinary. Or to the spectators who encounter an Infraordinary artwork.
19. It is important to note the difference in emphasis in the following two elements: art and life. In the BAP<sup>6</sup>, as within the Infraordinary, the separation of art and life becomes (in the words of Allan Kaprow<sup>7</sup>) blurred. A blurry line between that which belongs to the everyday as part of life – the every-

day as a platform or context where things happen – and that which is found in the everyday in relation to art, that belongs to art.

Can the location of an event be determined by the emphasis made on either life or art? Can the mere act of naming locate something on one side rather than the another? And could there be a third one locus of emphasis: art, life, and the Infraordinary?

Can the Infraordinary be located in art, or in life, or both? On neither?

20. There are thus two aspect I can think of in relation to the Infraordinary:

The Infraordinary and life.

The Infraordinary and art.

The first is embedded intrinsically within the experience of life. The second is the practice of an artist making something visible which otherwise would pass unnoticed.

21. Finding the marvelous in the everyday: that would be an Infraordinary practice.

Making visible the marvelous in the everyday: that is the artistic practice of the Infraordinary.

Although the verb “to find” is contradictory to the Infraordinary in that the Infraordinary happens and is not pursued, it could be used, regardless of the presence of some unavoidable residual contradiction.

A practice of the Infraordinary.

An Infraordinary experience.

22. The Infraordinary and art can meet when a medium serves as a bridge between experience and the recipient of the experience one is trying to convey. When executed effectively, artistic practice is that bridge of communication. Effectively in the sense that everything within the artwork is cohesive and coherent: the chosen medium for the message, how the work is displayed in the chosen space, and the chosen space

itself. When everything is in place, the artwork is left to live a life of its own.

23. A friend once described the Infraordinary as “things that are misplaced”, meaning that things that can be found in the Infraordinary are not where one usually would see them, or find them, or where they belong. This in the case of objects. It might be the same for “things happening” – and not just things but also situations happening “out of context”.

Now, I will have to wonder for a bit about some words. When I read the word “marvelous,” my mind wonders whether things in the Infraordinary are indeed marvelous some way. And when I ask that, my mind jumps into wondering about the “infra” part of the term “infra-ordinary” (which is how it’s usually translated from French to English), wondering why it is hyphenated in English when in French it is *Infraordinaire*, and in Spanish *Infraordinario*. Why is it hyphenated in English?

“Hyphens’ main purpose is to glue words together. They notify the reader that two or more elements in a sentence are linked.”<sup>8</sup>

Is it possible that the hyphen is there only for clarity? Most of the official translations into English I have found seem to use this grammatical punctuation. I’m still unsure why it is not *Infraordinary*, or why the hyphen is used. Is it because of the two adjacent vowels?

Why is this important? In some way, hyphenating the word divides the gesture, it locates the ordinary in the *infra* (below), which I believe is *not* the case in the *Infraordinary*. The *Infraordinary* is not something that physically resides below; it is not located anywhere *per se*. It is a latent state of things becoming. I believe that Georges Perec and Paul Virilio might

have used the suffix in their discussion of what they call a “symptom,” illustrating something that takes place below the social tissue and urban structures of a city. The Infraordinary seems to be even further below, *infra*.

Hyphenating the word locates it. Without a hyphen, it refers to a gesture, to things being without happening or being active at all times, a latency. The latency of the ordinary.

It might be, then, that the paradigm relies on the *infra*, not on the hyphen.

Here is Virilio writing about the Infraordinary in the text “*On Georges Perec*”<sup>9</sup>: “*outside the city nothingness can perhaps exist (...) but certainly does not exist in the city. In the city there is never a void. There is always background noise, there is always a symptom, a sign, a scent...*” It is perhaps within this sense of the word that the *infra* – this layer below what is holding the dynamics of the city – dwells for Virilio and Perec. However, in Perec’s practice, in his writing, in his books, specifically the one on the Infraordinary, and in his film “*Un homme qui dort*”, the Infraordinary does not seem to be located below anything: it is a protagonist that exists in parallel with the main character of the film, and although Perec never names the Infraordinary, it nevertheless seems to be the main subject in his writings. In this sense, the Infraordinary is not located below anything else, because it is an experience and as such cannot be positioned physically anywhere. Experience has no time, nor direction: being timeless, it is possible at all times. Being placeless allows one to attach it to its one’s memory.

24. Focusing on the Infraordinary you focus on experience. The Infraordinary dwells within the everyday, it may happen in the quotidian. However, it is also possible that the Infraor-

dinary does not dwell anywhere, it could be nowhere. It is placeless. I can see the Infraordinary and the quotidian as existing on parallel lines on the everyday. The everyday is a stratum, a repository of everything that becomes quotidian by way of routine and repetition, and which then becomes ordinary by virtue of life being “normalized” – and then becoming Infraordinary by chance or through artistic practice.

One can take an Infraordinary experience, or an aspect of the Infraordinary, and make an artwork out of it. There are examples of this in the work of writers, visual artists, and photographers.<sup>10</sup>

Something has become more visible when going through this book. On one side there is the Infraordinary and life, those experiences which we encounter in the everyday and which have left the ordinary by becoming visible, by virtue of their oddness within the context or situation. On the other side there is the Infraordinary and art, the process of taking an Infraordinary experience, or even just the thought of it, and attempting to make a permanent visibility of it within an artistic medium. For Perec, this was writing, for Wentworth it was photography, for George Brecht it was his text-based pieces and happenings, for Bas Jan Ader it was the actions he made and the videos and photographs in which he made those actions visible. All of these artists have approximated or tackled an aspect of the Infraordinary. It is nevertheless somewhat questionable to say that a work of art is Infraordinary, because its intrinsic quality resides in the encounter, and any pieces that are available for presentation take something away from that thought.

What things do we notice? How do we select so naturally and automatically the things that become noticeable for us?

*How* might not be the right question here, because we all pay attention and speak about what interests us: what is important for us, what we give importance to. What we see and/or select to see, speaks of us and for us. But what happens when we make a conscious decision to see something, or when we decide to make it visible to others? At that point the Infraordinary enters into the dynamics of an Artistic Practice. As artists we do research, but not in the same way as academics do. We make and we think, we think and we make. Most importantly, we create a visibility towards something.

For me, important things are those that are labeled common, ordinary or seemingly unimportant. I think they are poetic, and they carry a lot of meaning. For me, the subtlety of things is important, even essential, because that is what gives them meaning. If these things that are important to me did not exist, life would have little meaning for me. I do not care for the spectacle. I do not care for the bling. I do not care for the grandiose.

25. The Infraordinary is what makes an ordinary action, an ordinary happening, an ordinary object, into something; not extraordinary, but something that has its own place of being; something subtle and long lasting. It makes the ordinary stick to you; it makes the ordinary a part of you on a personal level. The Infraordinary connects you with the banal and the ordinary, it is **a bridge of affection**.
26. Although the Infraordinary finds a temporary place within the moment it is happening, it is the strangeness of not belonging, of being out of context, which is its space or time, that moment of an ordinary “somewhat out of place,” which makes the Infraordinary visible.
27. Open-ended is a term which resonates with me more than the word “definition”. The Infraordinary is an open-ended concept. “The Infraordinary, open-ended description is...”

that might be a way to write about the Infraordinary without feeling that I am compromising any of it.

28. The Infraordinary is remarkable in that it is insignificant.
29. We have our days, our weeks, months, and years. We set out to be someone and for that we have to be somewhere and do thing(s). We walk and forget to see. We speak and forget to think. We sleep and have forgotten to dream. The quotidian is rapidly shaped into a purpose that has a goal, but the end never arrives. Little accomplishments are reached only so we can invent us new ones. We get on with our lives because what other option do we have? When we stop we find ourselves in a crisis unless we are prepared to justify why we have to stop; because a reason must be had.

A reason must be had.

But T has been left behind on the last bus stop by reason.

T runs rapidly after the bus,

panting,

losing its breath,

screaming to the passengers to tell the driver to stop the bus,

T has to catch up with reason.

Sometimes, rarely enough, someone speaks up and tells the driver to stop, someone is running.

“Wait” they tell the driver.

Sometimes, very rarely, the driver stops.

The doors open.

T begins to catch up with the bus, while way in the back, hiding, is reason.

T arrives to the bus, barely able to breath.

T steps in and walks towards reason.

T gets closer.

T reaches reason.

Treason.

**List of references from the book *Keep Walking Intently. The Ambulatory Art of the Surrealists, the Situationist International, and Fluxus* by Lori Waxman. Sternberg Press, 2017.**

Number 1, 2 and 3: Page 9. "Enactment".

Number 4 and 5: No page reference.

Number 6 and 7: Page 9. "A foundational moment in the rapprochement of art and everyday life ... walking as an artistic device."

Number 8: Page 38 "... to catch a purpose..."

Number 9: Page 13 "To chance upon **the unexpected** and extraordinary in these places is to protest against their nullity and to offer a potentially powerful **resistance to a cycle** of consumerist decay, to the speed of fashion and of technology, to the need to be productive and economic." (From Hal Foster Compulsive beauty).

Number 10: Page 29 "The very lack of culture in these places appealed, for being **undigested, unprocessed and unplanned, empty of expectation** but full of unpredictable promise. What was found there would therefore be all the more moving".

Number 11: Page 43 "Although Paysan de Paris brims with detailed investigation of shop windows and services and customers, Aragon encounters that despite his gift for observation: "I love to be buffeted by the winds and the rain: **chance is the sum total of my experience**. I don't have the feeling that this world is a determined fact" (pp, 71)"

Number 12: Page 30 "...convey that experience..."

Number 13: P. 117

"The derive is a technique for moving around **without a goal**. It is based on the influence that décor exerts"

Number 14: Page 24 "... conversing when strolling was key to the quotidian rhythm of a developing Surrealism..."

Number 15: Page 27 "... in a given landscape, it is some **absurdity** and not the essential that catches your eye"

Number 16: Page 13 "The future Surrealists did not find anything extraordinary there - too rainy, too many people, too encumbered by Dadaist antagonism - but they made a **first effort to re-enchant the quotidian** and places of the city by walking through them. It was an excursion that portended miles and miles more to come."

Number 17: Page 14 "... attention" "quotidian events..."

Number 18: Page 240 "Audience was a central component of the success of Fluxus's next foray into the street"

Number 19: Page 11-12 "This is the question recently posed by a magazine to its best contributors. Today at three o'clock in the afternoon in the garden of the church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, rue Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre (métro: Saint-Michel), Dada will inaugurate a series of Excursions through Paris. Dada's friends and enemies are invited to visit with it, free of charge, the annexes of the church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre. There is, it seems, still something to discover

*in this garden otherwise beloved by tourists. This is not an anticlerical manifestation, as one might be tempted to believe, but rather a new interpretation of nature applied this time not to art but to life.*"

Number 20: Page 16 "... 'flânerie' is used to describe their practice..."

Number 21: Page 33 "... finding the marvelous in the everyday..."

Number 22: Page 14 "*But it is not scientific precision or comprehensiveness that interest Jean, rather the ability of the chronophotograph to portray the banal as something magical, and specifically the banal gesture of walking, running, and jumping...*"

Number 23: Page 12 "... finding the marvelous in the banal, in the spaces of everyday life, spaces overlooked and underappreciated..."

Number 24: Page 13 "*Everyday mobility... Walking comprises the most fundamental and definitive of human activities, so pervasive and common as to be beneath notice... ambulated*"

Number 25: Page 14 "... the capacity for an action as ordinary as walking to give access to the extraordinary..."

Number 26: Page 16 "*Take up by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s, the flâneur became a more complex figure, one who looked on the city and the crowd with an estranged gaze, energized by it but also critical, fascinated yet never completely immersed, always somewhat out of place.*"

Number 27: Page 253 "*an open-ended understanding of objects and actions*"

Number 28: Page 174 "... which we can find in the remarkable as in the insignificant..."

Number 29: Page 179 "*Under the heading "Making Do and Getting By," Wentworth has catalogued "all the things we don't notice because we live somewhere and get on with our lives" ... they're the kind of thing no one notices*"

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> These markings are in a list at the end of the document in the section: List of references.
- <sup>2</sup> From here on, I will refer to this group of artistic practices as the background artistic practices for the Infraordinary, or BAP for short.
- <sup>3</sup> *Oddified* and *oddifying* are different from *oddy* for some reason that I am not sure about yet. They might be the same, but for now, in this first encounter with the odd term, they seem to be different.
- <sup>4</sup> [www.covepark.org](http://www.covepark.org)
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2
- <sup>7</sup> See Allan's Kaprow book *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*.
- <sup>8</sup> Merriam Webster Dictionary.
- <sup>9</sup> "Paul Virilio on Georges Perec." In *The Everyday* (Documents of Contemporary Art Series). Massachusetts, The MIT Press; The White Chapel Gallery, 2008.
- <sup>10</sup> George Brecht, Bas Jan Ader, Richard Wentworth, George Perec, Oulipo group, Karl Ove Knausgård, among others.









## **Kirjoittajat / Contributors**

ANNETTE ARLANDER, DA, is an artist, researcher and pedagogue, presently professor in performance, art and theory at Stockholm University of the Arts and visiting researcher at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki. Her research interests include artistic research, performance-as-research and the environment; her artwork moves between performance art, media and environmental art. For bio and publications see <https://annettearlander.com>

PAUL CEGY'S (MSc) work merges multiple practices of performance creation and design, from theatre and opera to site-responsive installation and intermedial VR/MR scenographies. Upholding his commitment to ecological imperatives he merges his artistic work with his sustainability practice (MSc in Sustainability Science and Environmental Studies, Lund University, Sweden). He is on faculty at the University of Waterloo (Canada) in the Department of Communication Arts and is a PhD Candidate in the School of Arts, Design and Architecture at Aalto University (Finland).

MATTHEW COWAN is a New Zealand artist and doctoral candidate at the Academy of Fine Arts at the University of the Arts Helsinki, working in the realm of traditional European customs. His works are photographs, videos, installations and sculptures, which play with the inherent strangeness of the continued popularity of long-established folk customs in a modern world. His recent exhibitions have included artistic responses to artefacts and

folk objects in museum collections, delving into structures that guide perceptions of popular histories and re-examining what is suggested as evidence in the historical presentation of identity.

ANDREA COYOTZI BORJA (born in Mexico) is an artist based in Helsinki, Finland. She is a doctoral student at Aalto University, where her practice and research focuses upon the observation and practice of the ‘infraordinary’, as defined by the author and filmmaker Georges Perec. This subject often eludes definition but can be explored through different concepts, one of which is the notion of gesture. Her artwork has been exhibited in Mexico, the United States, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Spain, Bulgaria and Finland.

MIRKA DUIJN is a filmmaker working on documentary, interactive, experimental and fiction projects. She is known for projects like *Land of Change* (2013), the Emmy Award winning *Last Hijack Interactive* (2015) and *The Industry* (2018). Mirka is interested in questions around the politics of representation and sub-sequential interaction with/appropriation of the image.

MIKA ELO works currently as professor of artistic research at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki. His research interests include theory of photographic media and general ecology. He is participating in discussions in these areas as an educator, curator, visual artist and researcher.

JACK FABER is a doctoral candidate at the University of the Arts Helsinki and a transdisciplinary artist, specializing in moving images and film. After publishing two novels, numerous articles and texts in the artistic arena, he focused on creating film and video works, mostly as part of site-specific installations for solo and group exhibitions in galleries, museums and mainly in public spaces. His film project *Watchmen* (2005–2015) became an international juridical precedent after years of censorship and

has been titled ‘a groundbreaking Surveillance Artwork’ by the press.

Hi. I am TANJA KIIVERI and I am a human. I have a dog named Regina. We are attempting to make a piece together.

PAUL LANDON is the director of the undergraduate programme of the *École de arts visuels et médiatiques* at the *Université du Québec à Montréal*. He takes photos and makes drawings and films. In his free time, Paul Landon enjoys taking walks, looking at buildings and reading old science fiction novels.

JAN LÜTJOHANN’S wooden sculptures and installations take the shape of workspaces, equipment and tools. As a sculptor and educator he uses pre-industrial tools and obsolete technology to contemplate working with hands in a post-industrial society. Originally from northern Germany, he has taught at the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki and has exhibited his work in Finland and abroad.

MAIJA NÄRHINEN I make three-dimensional works. I am a tool with which material is shaped into new systems. I realize plans, but adapt to the terms set by chance: my operational principle is constantly being updated.

Visual artist and researcher TUULA NÄRHINEN holds a Doctorate of Fine Arts (DFA) from the University of the Arts Helsinki. Re-adapting methods derived from natural sciences, her works set out to explore the pictorial agency of natural phenomena (such as water, wind or frost) and to unravel environmental problems related to marine plastic pollution. Her installations showcase the media, materials and DIY instruments implicated; the sea inscribes its pulse on paper and trees trace the shape of wind on their branches, encouraging the spectator to participate in the re-presentation of an event.

ELINA SALORANTA is a visual artist and a postdoctoral researcher at the University of the Arts Helsinki's Centre for Artistic Research (CfAR). She is also someone who likes to write letters, and in her current work, she engages in a correspondence with the Finnish singer Elli Forssell-Rozentāle (1871–1943). In addition to her research, Saloranta teaches writing at the Academy of Fine Arts and coordinates the Nordic Summer University's study circle on artistic research.

LAUREN O'NEAL is an interdisciplinary artist, curator, and educator who has exhibited at the Portland Museum of Art, the Theater Academy of Finland, and Purdue University, and has performed in works by Trisha Brown and Heidi Latsky. O'Neal has presented at the College Art Association Conference and the Nordic Forum for Dance Research. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the University of the Arts Helsinki.

PILVI PORKOLA is a performance artist, researcher, writer and pedagogue. Currently she is working as a postdoctoral researcher in the Finnish Academy funded project "How to Do Things with Performance?" at the Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki. [www.pilviporkola.com](http://www.pilviporkola.com)

MARLOEKE VAN DER VLUGT (MA) is a Dutch artist and researcher based in Amsterdam. She graduated from DasArts (Amsterdam University of the Arts), where she found her specialism, assembling theoretical and hands-on knowledge of the relationship between the body and technology. Van der Vlugt is currently affiliated as a lecturer and researcher with HKU University of the Arts Utrecht. In 2015 her book *Performance as Interface, Interface as Performance* was released: a personal reflection on six years of artistic practice, in which she explores living in a technology-driven, networked world and its impact on the body.

A visual artist currently based in Helsinki, SUZANNE MOONEY utilizes photography, moving image, installation, found images and objects within her practice. Since graduating from the Royal College of Art, London, she has exhibited extensively, most recently in AIR Gallery, New York; Lewis Glucksman, Cork; Galleria Hippolyte, Helsinki; Vitrine Gallery, Basel and University of Greenwich, London. The work examines fragmentary forms, slippages that emerge between materiality and representation and objects' built-in obsolescence. Suzanne is currently a lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki.

JORIS WEIJDOM (MA) is a researcher and designer of mixed-reality experiences focusing on interdisciplinary creative processes and performativity. He is a lecturer at the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht, where he founded the Media and Performance Laboratory (MAPLAB), enabling from 2012 until 2015 practice-led artistic research on the intersection of performance, media and technology. As part of his PhD project, Joris researches creative processes in collaborative mixed reality environments (CMRE) in collaboration with Utrecht University and the University of Twente.

DENISE ZIEGLER, born in Switzerland, is a Helsinki-based visual artist and postdoctoral researcher at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki. Ziegler's interventional artworks pose questions to public infrastructure, to walls, fences, buildings and pedestrian routes. In a post-Beuysian vein, the artist's workshop is extended to public space in order to work with its mechanisms and possibilities.

