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EDITORIAL

The first Artistic Research Conference in the Netherlands took place in Amsterdam in 2003. That meeting assembled the protagonists most prominent in the Artistic Research debate at that time.

The conference resulted not only in a fine and often quoted publication – *Artistic Research*, Annette W. Balkema and Henk Slager eds., L&B Series, Amsterdam/New York 2004 – the event also led to instituting the European Artistic Research Network (EARN). Over the last five years, EARN has made known and manifested itself as one of the most important platforms for discussing and disseminating artistic research. Large-scale manifestations have taken place at various locations in Europe such as Dublin, Gothenburg, Helsinki, Utrecht, Malmo, London, Brussels, and Venice.

Manifesta's invitation to organize a collaborative project in Murcia in 2010 fully matched EARN's philosophy, since EARN believes that the research debate should relate as directly as possible to concrete artistic practices. This perspective was the natural starting point for the project *As the Academy Turns*, developed for Manifesta 8. *As the Academy Turns* is a multilayered project exploring the potentials and the tensions in the growth of artistic research and the current academization of art education.

The 'academicization' of art is increasingly affected by the strong expectations placed upon research trajectories and how these will continue to be shaped within the changing institutional framework of art education. In that context, the present possibilities of PhD research within the visual arts are the specific focus of our debate. What do the current challenges mean for the art academy itself?

In order to answer that question, an investigation has been made into the practice of artistic PhD research currently being conducted in art academies. During the three-day *As the Academy Turns* symposium, eight exemplary doctoral research projects from leading European art academies were presented and discussed. Four of these projects have been just recently completed: Magnus Bartas (Gothenburg), Matts Leiders-tam (Malmo), Maija Timonen (London) and Denise Ziegler (Helsinki). Four other projects are still in progress: Frans Jacobi (Malmo), Irene Kopelman (Utrecht), Janis Rafailidou (Leeds) and Katja Tukiainen (Helsinki). The presentations were critically reviewed by a number of high-profile authorities such as Juergen Bock (Lisboa), Mika Elo (Helsinki), Tom Holert (Vienna), Jan Kaila (Helsinki), Sarat Maharaj (Malmo), Tuomas Nevanlinna (Helsinki), Marquard Smith (London), Hito Steyerl (Berlin), and Jan Svenungsson (Berlin).

In addition to the symposium, the project *As the Academy Turns* consisted of two more dissemination trajectories: an infolab presentation in an exhibition space of Centro Parraga with statements from participating researchers and a production of an artwork in the form of a soap opera set in an art academy by Tiong Ang.

maHKUzine 10 is based on the *As the Academy Turns* symposium's lectures and discussions. The editors of *maHKUzine* are convinced that this publication, both in the Netherlands and in many other countries, will contribute in a constructive sense to a further debate on the role of artistic PhD research in the position of the art academy and the practice of art.

EDITORIAL

We thank Fonds BKVB (Netherlands Foundation for visual arts, design and architecture). They were not only willing to generously support the entire *As the Academy Turns* project in Murcia, but also made possible the first conference on Artistic Research in Amsterdam in 2004.

To conclude, we thank Manifesta for co-organizing the EARN event and for the extraordinarily positive evaluation of the collaboration project – see the text below. – *Henk Slager*

This past December Manifesta had the pleasure of hosting and co-organizing *As The Academy Turns* at Manifesta 8 in Murcia, Spain. As a collaborative project carried out by EARN (European Artistic Research Network), Manifesta, CENDEAC (Centro de Documentación y Estudios Avanzados de Arte Contemporáneo) and the University of Murcia, *As The Academy Turns* constituted a unique experiment at the intersection of artistic research, contemporary art, and the new art academy practices that have emerged across Europe in the last decade.

Now, at first sight, one might think it to be a strange combination: hosting an event on the growth of artistic research and the current 'academization' of art education at a Biennial for Contemporary Art. Especially at a biennial taking place in the relative periphery – in artistic terms – of Murcia, Spain. But, as far as Manifesta is concerned nothing could be further from the truth. Manifesta is very aware of the fact that contemporary art is not produced in a vacuum, and from its very outset Manifesta has aimed at facilitating a meaningful and long-term European cultural dialogue as well as building strong links between both European and international artists, art students, and art audiences. Furthermore, in direct connection to its nomadic nature, Manifesta sets out at all times to enable close links between the host cities and/or provinces of each edition and the wider field of art and education in Europe. As such we were also very pleased with the fact that three Spanish Universities not previously connected to the EARN network participated in *As The Academy Turns*. And we truly hope that the symposium will prove to be a fertile starting point for future collaborations.

Throughout the whole of the visual arts sector one can observe a proliferation of education-based practices, questions, and formats. During the *As The Academy Turns* symposium it quickly became clear that the developments discussed are certainly not limited to the Academy. This goes for art production, as one can see when comparing some of the methodologies artists grapple with. But this also goes for art reception. Some of our earliest discussions about the project showed that all partners involved felt a certain responsibility or obligation to make sure the project would not only limit itself to address a small segment of professionals. The current developments and debates surrounding the state of the Art Academy also need to be made accessible to a larger audience of Biennial visitors. The final result of this discussion was

Matts Leiderstam

NEANDERTHAL LANDSCAPE –

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AFTER THE DISSERTATION

Two of my projects are connected to the context of practical artistic research at Malmö Art Academy. My dissertation, *See and Seen – Seeing Landscape through Artistic Practice* (2006) and a postdoctoral project from 2009–2010. *Neanderthal Landscape* is a short text about the last project.

KNOWLEDGE In 1856, Neanderthal became world famous when the so-called Neanderthal Man was discovered. Bones were found in sediments from one of the caves when they were quarrying in the valley of Neander.¹ Today this place may evoke memories and associations connected to ice age landscapes and deep caves, but I am relating a different kind of stories. Stories about ways of seeing landscapes and how these stories from the past have leaked into the present.

¹ The valley is named after *Joachim Neander* (1650–1680) a priest and composer who used to walk to what was then called 'Das Gesteins'. According to traditions, Neander composed hymns about the way God was reflected in the landscape – and one of the biggest caves was named after him: 'Neanderhöhe'. In the 19th century the canyon was named Neanderthal – the valley of Neander.

In the early 19th century, Neanderthal was a very narrow canyon, about 700 meters long, made of limestone cliffs, some of them about 30–50 meters high. The cliffs were formed over thousands of years by the stream Düssel, which joins the river Rhine at Düsseldorf about 10 km away. The site had famous caves that carried beautiful names such as Engelkammer, Feldhofer Kirche, Löwengrotte, Neanderhöhe and Teufelskammer – all historical sites destroyed more than 150 years ago.

My own path into this landscape started with a visit to the Museum Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf. Dr. Bettina Baumgärtel, the supervisor of the painting collection, introduced me to the museum's collection of landscape paintings of the Düsseldorf School. She pointed out a couple of oil studies by Johann Wilhelm Schirmer (1807–1863) made in the Neanderthal around 1828–1830. These beautiful and carefully made naturalistic studies made a strong impression on me, triggering questions that finally led me to the geographical site itself.

Appointed in 1839, Schirmer became 'Düsseldorfer Malerschule's' first professor in Landscape Painting. As professor, he developed a pedagogic system regarding landscape painting. Schirmer's own oil studies, mostly showing details of vegetation, cliffs, and streaming water, came to be used as important tools for training. Some studies were stored in a special room in the academy for his students. The idea was that students should learn by copying the professor's studies, but also by making their own sketches outdoors in order to build an archive of nature elements for future landscape compositions. Neanderthal served as a location for what we today could call case studies – where students could test their skills – but it was also a location connected to a way of seeing.

In the mid 19th century, Düsseldorf saw the rise of an international school attracting many students especially from remote areas of Europe such as Eastern Europe, Russia, and Scandinavia – but American artists also came to Düsseldorf to study. A landscape tradition was established

started by artists such as the American Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902), the Swiss Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901), the Russian Ivan Ivanovich Shishkin (1832–1898), the Swede Marcus Larsson (1825–1865), and Hans Gude (1825–1903) from Norway. Many of them are important for how their respective national landscapes came to be seen.

Gude became one of Schirmer's best students.² Later, in 1854, he came to succeed Schirmer as professor in landscape painting. As a teacher, Gude attracted many students from Norway, Sweden, and Finland. Interestingly, Scandinavian art historians often point out that the Nordic Landscape was first seen and painted by artists educated in Düsseldorf.

EXHIBITION In 2007, I was invited to make a solo show in Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. Immediately I decided to do a new project in relation to the Düsseldorf School of Painting resulting in the exhibition *Neanderthal Landscape*. I started my investigations by visiting a number of museum collections, libraries, and archives, finding paintings and reading up on the subject. An important contact for my research was Hanna Eggerath, a local historian living in the area. She studied Neanderthal's history and recorded the artists who came there over the years.³ From 2009 on, I had the possibility to work full-time on the project because of my post-doctoral position at the Malmö Art Academy. The starting point for my project was the space of Kunsthalle Düsseldorf – a large gallery with a lower and an upper part. I used the lower floor, called Kinosaal (cinema room), and a large open balcony gallery on the upper floor, called the Emporensaal (the balcony room), to realize “a landscape of landscapes.” In the Kinosaal I mounted 18 landscape pictures, all of them by painters trained in the city of Düsseldorf, though they represent different national landscapes – from Neanderthal and beyond.⁴ In the center of the wall, I placed a large painting called *The Old Neanderthal* painted when large parts of the Neanderthal had already been turned into a quarry where the skeletons were discovered. The painting is neither signed nor dated, but has recently been attributed to the German painter Peter Jansen (1844–1908). Today the picture is part of the Neanderthal Museum collection.

I learned to use a grid when composing landscapes, when moving a sketch to a canvas, or when copying a painting.⁵ A similar grid was used by 19th-century landscape painters. So I drew such a grid with red chalk on the Kinosaal wall. I placed the paintings on the grid creating lines of landscapes based on the horizons in these landscapes which could be seen from the balcony space. I installed the Neanderthal picture in a central position and had a stream of water, depicted in several of the paintings, continue into a waterfall painting bringing the brook down to the bottom of the wall. Through my mounting, the paintings seemed to belong to one fictive landscape – or one story painted from the same palette. On the floor of the balcony I placed a Skiascope of my own design directed at *The Old Neanderthal*.⁶

For the balcony space I created an installation of seven tables, a free-standing wall, two pillars for video projectors, and two benches. Each of the tables presented a story connected to the Düsseldorf School. In following the structure of the red chalk grid, the design and the installation both related to the Kinosaal wall which could be seen from the back of the balcony gallery. In the center of the table installation were two field easels with video projections of two waterfalls from today's Neanderthal.⁷

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² Gude was only sixteen years old when he came to Düsseldorf in 1841. He wanted to study with Schirmer, but in the application process he drew a bad copy of one of Schirmer's studies and failed to be admitted to the school. Schirmer told him to go home and abandon his plans to be an artist. However, he stayed on to study privately with *Andreas Achenbach* (1815–1910).

Achenbach gave Gude the important advice to go to Neanderthal to study as it was considered to be one of Schirmer's favorite sites. The following year Gude approached Schirmer again showing him his oil study from Neanderthal and was now admitted.

³ See *Hanna Eggerath, Im Gesteins. Das ursprüngliche Neandertal in Bildern des 19. Jahrhunderts*, (1996), *Cologne: Wienand*.

⁴ The paintings were on loan from the Neanderthal Museum, Mettmann; Museum Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf; Malmö Art Museum; and the Staatmuseum Düsseldorf.

⁵ I learnt to paint in the 1970s and the early 1980s, according to a pedagogics that came out of a modernist tradition grounded in early 20th-century Paris, and was then developed in Swedish art schools through a generation of painters from about 1920 to the late 1980s.

⁶ See additional notes

⁷ See additional notes

For me, books are containers of knowledge. They carry facts and figures of art history as well as reproductions of paintings. In the *Neanderthal Landscape* exhibition, books were displayed on seven tables with different display levels. A lower level had a linoleum surface – here most of the opened books were laid out for a closer reading. The higher level tables with a wooden surface and an intarsia grid partly covered the ones underneath. Here other visual materials were presented. Each of the seven tables was dedicated to one ‘story’ related to the various stories I found during my research. Several of the books were given new texts – written and designed by me and then glued and bound into the books. I also worked with drawings, photographs, animations, and original paintings from the time of the ‘Düsseldorfer Malerschule.’

The Düsseldorf School artists often used sketches of details from nature as building blocks for their composed landscapes. At the end of the balcony space, two field scopes were installed so that the public could see these details again. Through the viewfinders one can study brush marks and small details which are not even visible standing close to the paintings. The viewing points I assumed the public would take served as a basis for the choreography of the exhibition.

The relationship between the pictorial space inside a painting and the physical space from where it is viewed has been one of art history’s central concerns since Alberti’s groundbreaking essay “On Painting” (1435–1436). As a window, Alberti argues, a painting is a kind of frame through which we look into a different world. He claims that the viewer needs to stand exactly opposite the vanishing point of the painting in order to be able to see the motif correctly. Such a “point of view”, or actually several “points of view”, is inherent to the exhibition and I tried to make the visitor aware of this. In the *Neanderthal Landscape* exhibition, I created one central viewing point from which almost the whole installation could be seen. That viewing point was located at the back wall of the balcony room, close to the entrance of the room, where I placed an additional field scope behind a wooden bench. Seen from this perspective, the installation became a two-dimensional image. At the same time, one could see from there that the arrangement of the table sequences underscores the depth of the room.

In the *Neanderthal Landscape* exhibition, I focused on alternative aspects of historical works of art. I detached the works from their ‘normative’ contexts in order to question them from the perspective of the present. I was not so much interested in accumulating knowledge as in how I could put this knowledge to work in reproducing a landscape through various artistic techniques and strategies, i.e. to transform knowledge into a visual and spatial form.

RESPONSE/ *Sarat Maharaj (supervisor)* Perhaps I should mention straight away, that Matts Leiderstam’s project was one of the three projects with which the doctoral program at Malmö Art Academy began. The other two doctoral students were Soopawan Boonimitra from Thailand and Miya Yoshida from Japan. The program had a global scope, since we should not forget the worldwide perspective in which the doctoral programs develop. At stake is not simply a little curiosity of the Western art system at a terminal moment of its existence where it has become exhausted. We should look at other parts of the world and their relation-

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Neanderthal Landscape, 2009-2010

Installation view 'Kinosaal', Kunsthalle

Düsseldorf. Photo: *Christoph Münstermann*

ships to contemporary art. We should understand the larger perspective in which the doctoral programs are taking place.

Soopawan Boonimitra's project was very different from Matts Leiderstam's.

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Her project looked at gay and lesbian forms of life and their modes of everyday experience in the city of Bangkok. It also tried to delve into the relationship between migrant workers from Thailand and the arctic rim of Scandinavia. Miya Yoshida engaged in an extremely ambitious project probing the field of new technologies and its forms of listening and looking, which produces a kind of pressure on the world of contemporary modes of looking at and experiencing art.

So, I would like you to bear in mind that Matts Leiderstam's deep scrutiny of some of the classical traditions of looking within the history of Western art was part of a diverse and plural program of doctoral work. What necessitates stressing that diversity and plurality is that we have to keep the field of visual art wide open. We have to remind ourselves again and again that we are not dealing with a discipline already shaped and formed and institutionalized in universities. On the contrary, doctoral research in visual art is an open and emerging field that might or might not end up as geography, anthropology, or sociology. Hopefully not, but that could be its fate from the beginning.

Why this focus on research? Haven't artists always been researching?

Haven't they always been interested and inquisitive? Haven't they always been inveterate scribblers and sketchers? Artists have always had their little secret notebooks with them, in which we often find them furtively and serendipitously doing something or other. We don't know what they are up to. They seem to be observing, researching, jotting down, commenting on what they are thinking about at a particular moment. Why should research suddenly be something new, if artists have always been doing this? We have vast museum collections of sketchbooks and notebooks of artists from the past – as we have of writers and musicians from the past. So, why should we think of research today as something special or different?

This might be a question we need to ponder. Of course, I do have my own thoughts and my own intuitions, but I do not want to give an answer yet. I think we need to ask first, Why is this particular frenzy of interest occurring around the idea of research? As a starting point, we might just draw a distinction between the usage of the word research. For example in everyday English, we have two ways of pronouncing the word research today which is quite confusing. You might have heard it yourselves. 'Research' as I am pronouncing it in the old-fashioned English way and 're-search' in a kind of transatlantic way which is also how it is pronounced in Euro-English. English people are getting used to saying re-search as well.

This is not just a matter of finicky Queen's English. It really has to do with what the distinction in pronunciation might reveal about the kind of field, about the kind of intellectual inquiry that is opening out with it. As in the words re-play and re-do, the word 're-search' means going over something again. Something that exists, something that you might as it were reconnoitre again. But research also means to start anew, to start from scratch, to open out a field. I believe that these two connotations overlap in our general understanding of what art research is. Art research is going over older fields, over older bodies of knowledge, over

older disciplines and, in Matts Leiderstam's case, over an older theory of vision and art historical approaches to looking at and recording of landscapes and mythological scenes.

In today's English art schools, we have a really soft and sentimental kind of supervision. That is a bit of a parody and I do hope you take it in that spirit. There has been a change from an earlier view of supervision, where the supervisor was aloof as a god and completely above any silly and dirty interest in research as such. This view has changed into an over-administrative view of supervisors, where they have started to become terribly managerial. That is the model of supervision towards which we swing today.

The efficient supervisor as manager of research tries to get everybody together. Why should we deal with Matts Leiderstam separately?

Couldn't we just save time by putting all three researchers together in one room and organize one course on methodology and one tutorial where we would say, These are the problems you will face as researchers so get on with it.

Considering the time-intensive element of doing separate supervisions with six students, for heaven's sake, you will be totally exhausted by the end of the day. But I am afraid that that is exactly the name of the game. If you want to think about art research, it is about getting involved in a deeply intensive way in the nature of the project that the researcher is involved in. It cannot be dealt with in the aloofish god method, nor in the highly efficient managerial method of supervision. It requires getting under the skin of the thinking and the seeing and the feeling that the researcher is embarking on.

At the same time, as a supervisor you cannot become the researcher.

So this puts tremendous ethical and existential pressures on the supervisor. How can one be both in and out of the research at the same time? There might only be one person in the history of world writing on art and aesthetics who can deal with that question. That person is Brecht, who spoke about that position in his dramatic theories. How could you be an actor, Brecht asks, and a commentator on your acting at the moment you are acting?

Brecht was deeply inspired by looking at the drama theories of the East, of the Noh theater of Japan, of looking at the Natyasastra, the great Sanskrit work in which the Sage Bharatha asks, How could you act and be the observer of your action at the same time? In this yoga position of acting, we might find a clue as to how to deal with what I called the ethical and existential pressure of the contemporary supervisor. This might sound like a metaphysical exercise, but I do think that the demands on supervision are different and new and have to be thought afresh.

Crucial to today's supervision scene is the business of learning to listen.

We normally believe that as supervisors we have arrived with far more knowledge than the researcher has and we are immediately keen and enthusiastic to impart that knowledge. It seems to me that the main thing is to learn how to shut up in order to learn to encourage the researcher to open up and speak. We have to learn how to listen to that speech in order to begin the joint endeavor that is the research supervision exercise. This alone can allow us the opportunity of saying that the contemporary art research project discloses a new epistemic object, a new object of knowledge, a new terrain of inquiry. If we do not accept that that is what



Neanderthal Landscape, 2009-2010

Installation view 'Emporensaal', Kunsthalle

Düsseldorf. Photo: *Christoph Münstermann*

should happen, then I feel we largely have fallen into the trap of seeing supervision as an academic exercise where often the object of knowledge is known in advance of the actual project being undertaken and done.

So how should I tie all of this up in some sort of statement? I think with Matts Leiderstam we have seen a project which we might call ‘thinking through the visual’. Thinking through the visual has two registers of meaning. One, thinking through by means of using the visual as an instrument, as a tool, as a probe, through which you think. But the second meaning of thinking through the visual is, how can we think through the visual and unpack it. How can we deconstruct it, how can we undo it. How can we unscrew it in order to see its different components, to see how it actually works, to see how it functions from within.

In the thinking through the processes of the visual in Matts Leiderstam’s work, you see this undoing and unpacking all the time. You see there is an unraveling, but there is also a creation out of that. A critique and a creativity exist side by side. So this is that kind of double vision, a double vision in which we are critiquing and creating simultaneously.

That double vision has often been denied philosophically. Philosophers have said, no, you cannot have a position and a meta-position functioning at the same time. You cannot have creation and a meta-position of critique happening at the same time. But I still like to believe in the great Sage Bharata, in the 6th century BC in India, where the *Natyashastra* says, yes, it is possible to be performing and critiquing your performance at the same time. So let’s say that that is open for experiment in the field we call art research in contemporary terms. But again let us not forget how much work Brecht put into this particular job of double vision.

In thinking through the visual in Matts Leiderstam’s doctoral work, he was largely looking at the origins of the gaze, the origins of the connoisseurial way of looking. Connoting to know through looking, the very word connoisseur takes us back again to the ancient Indo-European languages capturing something in the act of looking which is the act of knowing. This leads us to the word *video*, *vidya* in Sanskrit, right down to Greek and Latin and into contemporary forms of vision.

The connoisseurial gaze, suggesting a whole range of ways of looking, emerged largely from the 17th and 18th century onwards and undergoes its own evolution. During the colonial period it is a highly disciplinary way of looking at the colonial other, at the colonial native; of looking at women, the woman native other to use the phrase of the post-colonialist theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha. The marginal figures of the original patriarchal gaze and the connoisseurial gaze come in for review and representation in a particular way. Of course this gaze undergoes development and change and transformation until our contemporary moment.

The connoisseurial gaze which develops in the Western art system could be compared to the gaze of the literati you would find in the Chinese tradition. Many centuries ago, similar to how artists gathered at Neanderthal in Dusseldorf, people gathered at Westlake in Huangzhou where the China Academy is. People gathered here to write poetry and to represent the Westlake which has been represented in about five centuries of Chinese painting. In the great paintings of the Sung and the Ming period of Chinese art, you find the literati way of looking, a way of looking parallel to the connoisseurial system that emerged in the West.

Matts Leiderstam's work is both surveying, working with and working against the grain. He did not quite mention that, in many instances, his work is in contact with the digital age; it is in interaction with the Internet, with the Web. I think he slightly underplayed that dimension of thinking in his work where the connoisseurial gaze comes into interplay with what is the contemporary gaze – the contemporary gaze is something we don't have a word for.

In many ways, I am still researching and trying to write about the retinal in our times, a retinality of the contemporary gaze I should like to call the twitter gaze. Against the connoisseurial gaze, the twitter gaze is a way of looking in which you might be able to capture in 20 characters – not even seconds – sum up, understand, and know the world. Is this possible?

Against the long duration, the long connoisseurial immersion that Matts Leiderstam is exploring in his work, one could pose the question whether his work is against the instantaneous kinds of knowledge production and looking that our age is involved in. Does it question that? Or is Leiderstam's work just simply saying that there is another model evolving in our time.

That we should be aware that there have been other models that required contemplation, immersion, time, duration and intensity as opposed to the instantaneous momentary kinds of capture and captivity we find in what I call the twitter gaze. I love the idea that we slide down the Ice Age to our contemporary times and that we must pose the question of what vision is, what the retinal is in our time. I would like to see that as the open question for art research and knowledge production through art research. – *This text is based on an editorial version of a transcript.*

RESPONSE/ *Juergen Bock* As a respondent, I would like to comment on both the subject of multilayered PhD programs and Matts Leiderstam's presentation opening up many lines of association. I have known Matts Leiderstam for ten years and I also am familiar with the Malmö Art Academy through several collaborations. And I had the opportunity to listen to one of the seminars run by Sarat Maharaj a few years ago, when Matts was still involved in his doctoral studies at Malmö Art Academy. Coming from an Independent Study Program without any confinements at all, we are not only looking carefully at the Bologna Process, but also at the PhD programs currently unfolding all over Europe. In Malmö, what struck me most was a certain non-disciplined discipline, a sort of beautiful naughtiness in one of the largest universities in Scandinavia producing the kind of work which utterly undermines given academic frameworks. In the case of Matts Leiderstam's project that academic framework is Art History – but I do not know what the relationship is with the art history department at Lund University. That reinvention of academia through such processes is probably one of the most interesting possibilities for novel frameworks European Art academies might be able to create and hopefully will create.

That reinvention of frameworks reminds me of other discussions, such as for example discussions around cultural studies addressed by Douglas Crimp in his text "Getting the Andy Warhol We Deserve" where he claims to see cultural studies as a corrective to existing disciplines, not as a discipline on its own or a discipline one needs to substitute. In that sense I would find it very interesting as the non-disciplined discipline



Neanderthal Landscape, 2009-2010 detail

Photo: *Christoph Münstermann*

could become a corrective, where research-based art or art-based research at the same time emancipates from art and also introduces knowledge to other disciplines.

For me, Malmö is a program that is very suspicious of academia. The program is not telling the PhD student what to do, is not merely supervising, but tries to create a framework for looking at methodologies and establishes platforms where these methodologies can unfold to their best potential. Coming from Portugal, where normally the student has to follow what the supervisor thinks that has to take place or has to unfold, I have noticed specifically that in Malmö it is the other way around: one looks very carefully at what is happening. I think the incredibly high standard of participants in that program, including many artists who normally don't want to be supervised but agreed on entering the program, speaks for that type of program.

In the text that I mentioned above, Douglas Crimp refers to a work that Andy Warhol did in 1964 called *The Thirty Most Wanted Men*. The work is often presented today, mostly in an art historical context, while the contemporary history of the work is never told. The story behind it is that the work was commissioned by New York state in order to be presented on the façade of the New York pavilion at the 1964 New York World Fair. Only what happened then was that New York authorities became afraid of being perceived as a queer town. During that time, a lot of queer bars opened, a lot of uproars were going on in the city, and now the whole world coming to the World Fair would see all of that and all the gay bars. So, many of the bars had been shut down. And now this work of the thirty most wanted men with its double connotation of sexual desire and FBI photographs was there. Looking at that work in the context of the Zeitgeist of the time when it was produced of course influences our reading – knowing or not-knowing that story. Very often I feel that art history in its attempt to interpret eternal values and declare humanities heritage is afraid to enter in that kind of Zeitgeist. The contemporary situation leading to that work is considered as a banal story not worth mentioning.

In that sense, I find Matts Leiderstam's work incredibly interesting. He becomes a storyteller and tells stories about art works considered uninteresting or irrelevant by art history. What Leiderstam does is to create installations where one is able to research on one's own. In the Neanderthaler exhibition in Dusseldorf, one could browse through the room, look at all the items pulled out, use books and study. In a time of what some people call cultural capitalism, a time where museums become less and less places to study, I find such a calm and unspectacular, almost laboratory situation very unusual. We spoke about the Sao Paulo biennale. I could never imagine such an installation in that cacophonous, visually overloaded space. Leiderstam's contained and very carefully formulated situation is almost a library situation, where one is expected to speak in whispers.

The Dusseldorf exhibition reminded me also of the distinction Roland Barthes once made in his essay "From Work to Text", where he refers – at a literally level that I like to extend to art – to the reading of works and text in an anti-hierarchical way. So texts are not better than works, and works are not better than texts. Contemporary objects are not automatically texts, but in all works text can be found. Barthes distinguishes

between work and text, between a way of reading and a certain passivity when looking at artworks because of the hermetic way art history presents them to us. One has much higher activity levels when it comes to reading texts, which is often based on the de-codification process one has to do oneself. In reading texts, one has to get oneself involved, one has to participate. For me, the Neanderthaler installation is an excellent example of a work which I would put into the category of reading – except that I do not want to categorize it. An installation where I feel very much enabled and empowered to think through and about the visual, about the construction of significance and how art history is a construction which can be questioned. An immense surprise was to discover the many interesting relationships to other artists I admire – for example Heimo Zobernig. In that respect, I would like to comment on the empowerment of the power an artist has. The initial power of the museum refusing your work, because they are afraid of what you could do and how they might have to censure you. That power artists can empower, since they have a power curators do not have. As curators we often invite artists to do certain things, since we cannot do it ourselves. Artists can make architectonic interventions or remount the collection in a way for which curators would have their heads chopped off if done in the curatorial field. That kind of power artists still have, and hopefully always will have, allows them to act in an institutional framework closed to other people. A similar kind of deconstruction and passion – to continue with other artists I find interesting – could also be noticed in Harun Farocki and his films *As You See*. A similar curiosity towards seeing and how the move from the retina to the brain is constructed. That is definitely not a natural given but very much based on socialization, education, and also the overall aspects of modernity from the Zobernig take on modernity to Angela Ferreira's from a geopolitical observation. Questioning, deconstructing, re-researching, creating a contemporary urgency based on learning through the past. That is what forms access and stimuli of the highest level I can imagine in art.

ADDITIONAL NOTES 6. The Skiascope was invented in the 19th century for visitors to use when viewing paintings in museums. Benjamin Ives Gilman (1852–1933), who used to be a curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, writes about the skiascope in his book *Museum Ideals of Purpose and Method* (1918): “The word means ‘shadow-seer’, the seer from and into shadows ... for a good seeing, it is more important that the eyes should be sufficiently shaded than that the object should be abundantly lighted.” This instrument is a kind of framer or viewfinder that enables the visitor to concentrate on one single object in a museum display – for example, for seeing a certain painting that is part of a ‘salon’ or ‘Petersburg’ hanging, which was the state of the art in the 19th century. I decided to produce my Skiascope and direct it at the Old Neanderthal.

7. Hanna Eggerath, the local historian, took me to the Laubach waterfall in Neanderthal. She pointed out the art-historical importance of the site, and we looked at paintings by Caspar Scheuren (1810–1887) as they are reproduced in her book on this topic. Standing together in front of the waterfall, we compared the view from today with that of yesteryear. On several occasions I later returned to make some drawings and take photographs, since I wanted to make a contemporary work related to



Night image Neanderthal Landscape

'Emporensaal', Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 2010

Photo: Jens Komossa

the historical waterfall. One day, when I visited the ‘Laubachfall’ again, there was no water. I was wondering what might have happened, when suddenly I heard the water streaming. I looked up from my sketchbook and witnessed the waterfall returning. It took no more than ten minutes until it had reached its full power. I then began asking questions about who controls the water, which led me to a nearby quarry – Kalkverk – where I learned that the water was used for cleaning stone.

I also learned that another ‘Laubachfall’ was located nearby, connected to the same brook as the lower one – a waterfall reconstructed in 1984 from another painting by Scheuren, made in 1842. Rickard Bödeker, who lives in the Neanderthal, came to reconstruct the waterfall in a new place after Scheuren’s painting from 1842. Bödeker, “The story begins ca. 1969, when a stone came into my house through a blast conducted by Kalkverk. This stone went through the window and landed in the bed of my two-year-old son Nils. (We still keep this stone in a vitrine) This was about midday when he normally takes his nap. Luckily he was not in his bed. In spite of the intensive crash between the direction of Kalkverk and me over this accident, we became good neighbors.”

This is how Bödeker explains he became the landscape architect hired by the quarry to design the stream Laubach’s new path, and the waterfall in the Kalkverk’s area – I used his e-mail for texts I glued into one of the books in my exhibition. I also produced two films, both 13 minutes long, showing the waterfalls with no water and how they return into full force.

Irene Kopelman

A SHORT STORY OF

A PHD TRAJECTORY

In 2005 I was involved in two large projects connected to the collections of the Geological Museum in Amsterdam. At that time, I had decided quite determinedly that my PhD project would be about doing interventions in collections in Natural Science Museums, including interdisciplinarity as such. But throughout the years of my PhD trajectory, I started realizing that that was only one side of my artistic practice related to a specific process I went through in those years.

Coming from South America, I consider Natural Science collections, museums, libraries, and heritage materials to be very eccentric and even exotic. I am aware that my initial attraction to Natural Science Museums had been triggered by a fascination for their collections which I saw at a vast scale for the first time in my life. During my research in the Geological Museum, I realized that the PhD project also pointed to the philosophical tension between sameness and difference. My second goal became to reopen the category of sameness and through means of representation I intended to make evident that it is impossible to enclose the complexity of things in departmentally tight categories.

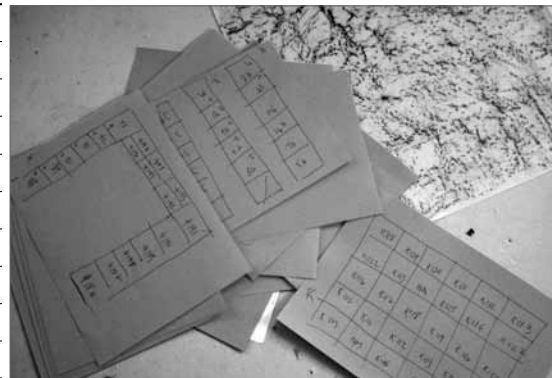
That was quite an ambitious plan leading to one of my projects called *UBX expression*. I will come back to that project later. That particular research fuelled my PhD trajectory until I became aware that representation in the form of drawings grew increasingly important as a research tool. At that point I was forced, so to speak, to also include drawing as a method and drawing as a specific means of knowledge production in the project.

Questions emerged such as, Why is it that drawing seems to be the only way to learn more about certain morphological and physical phenomena?

Drawing cast another light of understanding on the projects I was already working on. I started to pay more attention and thought more thoroughly about the mechanisms implied in drawing. Within my practice, drawing is connected to the desire of apprehending an object, of spending time with an object. It is a tool for understanding what the motifs are about in terms of morphological features. It is a tool for understanding what it means to observe and think through the process of drawing. My ultimate question is, Does one see differently through drawing?

In the Natural Science Museums, I became familiar with scientific drawing. There is a slight difference between artistic drawing and scientific drawing. Slight, because surprisingly enough, the difference is much smaller than I envisioned before becoming closer to scientific practitioners of drawing. Similar to my practice, they also draw to visualize features hard to visualize through other visual means such as for example photography. The major difference lies quite simply in the initial intentions. In scientific drawing, people know what they need to see when drawing. They are searching for certain features connected to a specific research.

A SHORT STORY OF
A PHD TRAJECTORY



Outline process. Process material project

'Scale 1:2.5' (2008)

They most probably know about the subject they are searching for; they have a trained eye for specific qualities in a sample.

Conversely, when I draw I do not have a specific goal. I can focus on any feature, I can use any method, and I can set any parameters. At the same time, during drawing, I am constantly pondering on why and how I draw. My drawing is also a reflection on the medium as such.

Back to the PhD trajectory. Before coming to Europe, my drawings were about natural landscapes. I am from a city surrounded by beautiful mountains and my practice consisted in doing walks and making drawings in that landscape. Artists that influenced me at that time were Hamish Fulton, Richard Long, and Robert Smithson. When I moved to Amsterdam I realized that the notion of natural landscape as I knew it was no longer there. Rather, landscape became an artificial construction human beings could decide to modify.

At that point, my interest slowly moved to natural science collections.

I worked with crystals, fossils, insects, and so on. That led me into quite a number of projects, one of which – *UBX expression* – I have mentioned above as part of the PhD trajectory. *UBX expression* is a project carried out in the Entomological Collection at the University of Amsterdam.

The research focused on the morphology in insect patterns. I basically sat in that collection for a number of months drawing butterflies' wing patterns. The outcome of the project was one hundred and twenty drawings of 8x8 cm.

After quite a number of projects of this kind, I started longing for confronting my work again with the experience of nature as such. So far I managed to do three projects engaged with landscapes.

Lévy Flight is a project departing from a field trip in Hawaii's National Park. The trip focused on realizing a series of drawings of lava formations at the site. After returning from the field trip, I made a series of clay pieces reconstructing fragments of the Hawaii landscape.

Meditation Piece began with an invitation for making a piece based on Allan Kaprow's scores. The project would entail at least two stages: a research trip and an exhibition. I decided to work with one of the Kaprow scores called "meditation piece" in creating my own meditation piece. The parameters were to make a trip to Egypt's white desert with the aim of collecting only one stone. Back in my studio I would draw the same stone every day from the same point of view during one month. The outcome was thirty drawings of 30x30 cm.

Fifty Meters Distance or More started with a trip to the Antarctic. On January 6, 2010 I departed from Ushuaia, Argentina towards the Antarctic territory in the sailboat *Spirit of Sydney*, on which I embarked with seven other people. The trip lasted 26 days all together. During the expedition, I intended to draw landscapes with the icebergs and glaciers I expected to see during the trip. Weather and space constrictions, cold, snow, rain, the boat drifting, the boat changing locations, the reduced space, the impossibility to go on shore by your own will – all of that was part of the process and the project. I did return with a series of pencil on paper drawings and a small series of watercolors.

I would like to mention that during these years I have done more projects than the ones here described. I have chosen a number of projects that I thought could help in discussing a variety of issues present in my work.

The inclusion of works of different nature in the PhD project made me

decide to not force any coherence in the PhD trajectory, but let it unfold in a 'natural' way.

During the development of the research project my work brought about the accumulation of experiences, materials and stories. The research project has grown in dialogue with other artists, with people from a variety of disciplines, with materials and landscapes. What gets in and what is left out of the production processes is hard to quantify. The creation of a system of production seems almost impossible. One is able to know what triggers ideas: Learning from botanical illustrations in the London botanical garden, walking around in the botanical garden, talking to biologists, spending time in natural science collections, reading about landscape theory, working in collections, being in landscapes, being in the studio dealing with the possibilities and limitations of materials.

There is a constant building up of an archive, much of it remains unused or just waits for a moment to be taken into the work. Knowledge on parasite behavior, pollination, pattern formations, evolution, all of it contains information and stories I definitively like to use on one level or another.

Their impact on the work might not be direct or obvious, but there is translation in a variety of ways emerging from a constructed mental space that allows projects to develop into display systems. An archive is like a backstage to the work; it remains hidden while it keeps growing. In a way I like the lack of efficiency in that system as acknowledgement that not everything we do is or can be profitable.

RESPONSE/ *Jan Svenungsson* Irene Kopelman's research project has changed quite considerably since its inception. In a text published in *Art & Research* (NO.2, 2009) she stated,

“My PhD project researches the problem of the tension between sameness and difference. Throughout the upcoming years of research, I am looking to re-open the category of sameness, and using means of representation, I hope to make evident the impossibility of enclosing the complexity of things in departmentally restrictive categories. During the nineteenth century, a scientific project needed to force things into categories in order to visualize the rules they followed and which organized the world in a logical system. This was a fundamental process to schematize how we look at things and simplify it to the extreme, thus overlooking any singularities. My research project concentrates on re-opening some of these categories, and to look upon differences and singularities. The project uses elements from the history of science as resources and attempts to generate, from both art practice and artistic thought, a type of knowledge extrinsic to the field of philosophy or history of science, but still touching upon issues they all share.”

What I understand from this text is that your research project originally aimed to become a critique of a certain 19th century reductionist view of scientific thinking. A mode of thinking where everything has to be placed in categories. Your aim was to open up these categories and to focus on differences and singularities.

It appears to me now, that this ambition has been a useful and productive motivator for your artistic work, which so far I have only seen in reproduction, but which seems rich, interesting and admirable to me. I am looking forward to seeing examples of it in reality.

Having said that, it also seems to me that in relation to the obvious artistic qualities of the artwork, the methodology used for the research aspect now appears rather vague. An example: in order to catalogue or make a statement on the function of minute differences in the visual aspect of butterfly wings, as in *UBX expression*, the medium media of drawing and art installation are very imprecise tools – if the ambition is to say something precise and relevant beyond the immediate artistic experience and not just to generate artistic experience and expression.

Instead, the aim of Kopelman's this research project seems to have changed from attempting a critique of scientific classification systems to instead focusing on registering what goes on in the mind of the artist before, during, and after the process of artistic production. It seems the initial idea of subjecting the scientific institution to a critique has been replaced with an attitude where this institution is seen more as a repository for interesting things and ideas: a source of raw material. An exotic location. This attitude is coupled with an apparent predilection for work projects combined with travels in difficult conditions in faraway lands (ice, desert, etc.)

As a practicing artist myself, I can easily recognize and share both the fascination that these projects hold for you as well as the thoughts and emotions reported in a text like *Antarctic Diary*. Nevertheless, it is unclear to me, where 'diary' ends and 'research' begins. What methodology is behind this writing and this project? What mechanism is there for subjecting your reporting on your own thought processes, while drawing in the Antarctic, to a necessary outside perspective? How is it supposed to be judged?

Neither in the texts available to me, nor in your presentation today, has there been much of an attempt to situate your position as an artist in terms of its socio-political conditions. There has been no, or very little, historical art context provided. There are, however, many interesting fields of inquiry which this work could be put in relation to. What about the use of drawing as a research tool for explorers before – and for some time after the introduction of photography? To take but one example. Nor has there been a positioning vis-à-vis a contemporary art discussion.

I do not wish to see you "tick the boxes" for all possible theoretical perspectives. However, for the reporting of your research I do think it is important that you find a way to take a couple of steps "to the side", in order to be able to observe and analyze yourself in the act of (artistic) observing and analyzing.

There must be a difference between the presentation of a project as 'art' (only), and as a project of "artistic research". This is not to say that one form is ultimately more important than the other, just that they cannot be interchangeable.

Denise Ziegler

FEATURES OF THE POETIC.

THE MIMETIC METHOD OF

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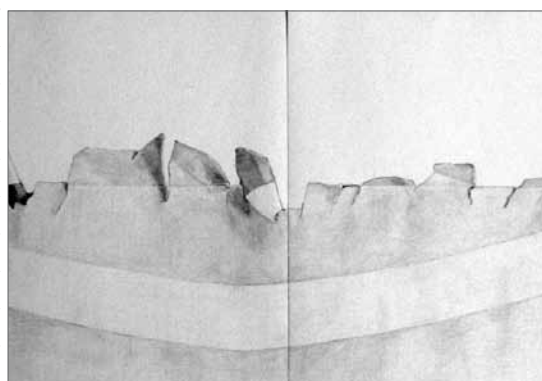
In the spring of 2010, I finished my doctoral studies at the Helsinki Academy of Fine Arts. My PhD work consisted of a solo exhibition at Kunsthalle Helsinki (2010), and the book *Features of the Poetic – The Mimetic Method of the Visual Artist* published in connection with the exhibition. Essential for my doctoral research was that its defense took place in Kunsthalle Helsinki during the exhibition of my works. In that way, the finished art works could support the claims made in the book and vice versa. Yet, the book and the exhibition could function as independent presentations as well.

The topic of my PhD project deals with features of the poetic in visual art. I pose questions such as, What is it that makes my art poetic?

Where does poetic expression originate, and how does it appear in visual art – particularly conceptual visual art? I apply the mechanisms of poetics to my own creative work. Poetics – the theory of poetry – is a literary concept that dates all the way back to Antiquity, when poetry was perhaps the most important medium of mimetic art. In my research, I rely on Aristotle's *Poetics* (384–322 BC), the very theory of art that Western literary theory is based on.

I decided to use Aristotle's viewpoint on mimesis, since he specifically addresses artists in that sense. At the beginning of *Poetics*, Aristotle observes, "Let us here deal with [...] the way in which plots must be constructed if the poem is to be a success [...]" (1447a 8) In other words, *Poetics* offers us instructions on how to create a poem – a work of art. As an artist, I find the text of *Poetics* appealing in that I search through it for tangible lessons for my artistic practice. I adapt Aristotle's theory of poetics into my own practice and more broadly into the field of conceptual contemporary art in general. The principal aim in the theoretical section of my research is to analyze my own mimetic practice through comparison with Aristotle's *Poetics*. I transpose the concept of mimesis in *Poetics* into visual art by applying it to my own artistic research. Thus, I do not approach *Poetics* as a historian or a philosopher, but from my personal perspective of a 21st-century visual artist in Finland.

The starting point of my research is my own artistic practice, where I take mundane, unobtrusive or unintentional situations and turn them into art works. In the series of drawings entitled *Torn* (2007), each of the drawings presents the traces of the opening of an envelope on the upper part of that envelope. The series demonstrate that the traces of tearing are different in every envelope. Yet, there are similarities as well: the upper right-hand corner has always been bent out, and a small hole can be noticed. The envelope is obviously opened by inserting the index finger into the



opening and pulling the finger up along the upper edge of the envelope.

The upper left-hand corner in all envelopes is not torn.

Usually, we are not interested in the traces left by the act of tearing open an envelope. What interests us is what the envelope contains. How the envelope is opened has hardly any effect on its contents. Therefore, the tear in the envelope can be considered the result of an undefinable gesture, or, to be more precise, it is the unnoticed by-product (tear) of an intentional act (opening a letter). The tear in the envelope is an indication of how the envelope was opened. My term for such actions is “undefinable gesture.”

Situations that have served as the starting point for my works often contain poetic features, such as repetition and conciseness, and they also involve elements that can be regarded as signs. I am triggered by the relationship between a place and the event unfolding in it: I observe the general atmosphere of a place and how it is used. My interest focuses on spatially located human activity and its site-specificity in particular.

When walking in the street, for example, one may notice houseplants in the windows of offices or residential buildings. One may imagine how people have, each in their own way, placed the plants on the window sill. After the plant is placed there, the pot is often turned slightly to optimize its position with regard to incoming light and other plants in the room. Putting a houseplant on a window sill is an unobtrusive, mundane, yet very carefully executed gesture. This gesture has been the starting point for a number of works, for example *Field Trip for House Plants*. I will return to that subject below.

Some of the situations that trigger me are related to culture. For example *Window Shutters* is a reconstructed situation. There is the facade of a two-storey house with six windows: three downstairs and three upstairs.

All the windows have window shutters and they are closed. The lamella of the central window upstairs are a little bit opened. In Finland and in the Nordic countries, there are usually no window shutters on the houses.

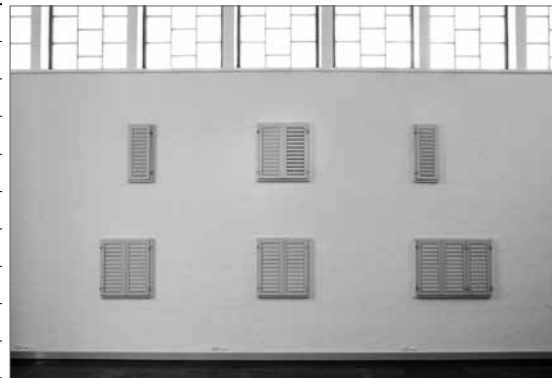
The origin of this reconstructed situation is therefore located for example in central Europe.

In the process of developing this work I asked people in Switzerland and Germany what kind of memories and associations they have of window shutters. Most of the answers referred to the routine of closing the window shutters in the evening or during the time of taking a nap. Many mentioned also that one could observe through shutters what happens outside without being noticed. By reconstructing a facade of a house with window shutters, I intended to point out precisely these everyday actions connected to the use of window shutters.

The working method of reconstructed situations gives rise to the issue of imitation or mimesis. How faithfully should the original situation be reflected in the reconstruction? I started reading about mimesis, which is mostly regarded as an undesirable, uncreative characteristic in the contemporary art scene. The reason for this is the conception of mimesis as mere imitation or copying.

Mimesis stems from the Greek language where it has had a number of meanings. In the texts of Aristotle, the meaning of mimesis is closest to “representation of human action” or “representation of creative fiction”, whereas Plato uses mimesis in the sense of “an action, repeated on a different level”. Ancient philosophers and writers use the concept of mimesis to describe a practice in art, but their primary object of interest is not

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imitation. According to Oiva Kuisma, Aesthetics lecturer at the University of Helsinki, “Mimesis is a relational term that says something about the relationships between objects of art and the models they are based on.”

The interpretation of mimesis has changed profoundly from the ancient times to the present day. Why did this happen? The word mimesis was used and understood as ‘imitation’ when it was translated into the Latin language (verb *imitari*, to imitate). The meaning ‘imitation’ has for some reason been given priority and replaced, therefore, all other connotations. Is an inexact translation the reason why Aristotle’s and Plato’s use of mimesis in connection with artistic practice has been interpreted afterwards as ‘imitation’, even as “imitation of nature”?

But who is likely to reap any advantage from the argument that, in the opinion of classical philosophers, artists produce imitations? Imitations are by and large compared with the original and only the holder of the original is able to estimate the quality of the copy. Why did the Romans distort the meaning of mimesis?

In the 3rd and 2nd century BC, the Roman Empire had highly developed economic and military powers, but lacked a cultural identity and an artistic tradition. Around that same time, the Romans conquered the entire Greek world. Roman war heroes brought home loads of Greek artifacts. In Greek art Roman writers and sculptors found their role models whereas Greek slaves became teachers of children of rich Roman families. Thus, the Roman Empire has been strongly influenced by the Greeks and the Romans made direct copies from Greek originals as artistic expression. Did the Romans have to justify their own practice of copying the Greek culture and cover their own artistic insignificance by claiming that the aim of Greek art has been to imitate as well? Is that the reason the translation of the word mimesis slipped so imprecisely into meaning mere imitation? Could it be that an inferiority complex like this had such fatal consequences that, in fact, an entire cultural inheritance became distorted?

I would like to discuss mimesis from several different viewpoints, since my purpose is to reclaim the original multiplicity of meanings held by mimesis. In my research mimesis not only includes the transfer from one language into another, but also the transfer from one material or medium into another, from plan to realization, and from original to copy. First I will discuss mimesis in relation to my working method; as an activity that expresses creative imagination and as an interpretative and contradictory representation of human action.

MIMESIS IN RELATION TO MY WORKING METHOD As demonstrated above, I became interested in mimesis for the simple reason that my working method of reconstructed situations points to the issue of imitation or mimesis.

In my working method, documentary photographs taken of situations serve as sketches from which I select the ones I process into works of art. In the process of selection, I use a method that contains certain mimetic elements. That method is based on ‘transposing’ the documentary photographs into text. I then read the texts and decide which situations I want to process further into three-dimensional works. My term for this process is “mimetic reiteration”, which is intended to convey the idea of repeated mimetic processing. The purpose of mimetic reiteration is to distance the situations from personal experience and thereby to facilitate the selection

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process. In *Features of the Poetic – The Mimetic Method of the Visual Artist*, I give examples of mimetic reiteration in one of the sub chapters entitled “Istanbul Lecture”, where I discuss nineteen public situations using both documentary photographs and descriptive texts for each situation.

The main point is that those situations will shed light on the “undefinable gesture” from different angles. Through many of these situations, I was able to discover something about the nature of the “undefinable gesture”, even though I have not felt compelled to turn all of them into works of art. The objective of the “Istanbul Lecture” was that the situation or situations where the “undefinable gesture” or its trace appears most directly become filtered for processing (reconstruction).

An example of a situation to be worked into art using the method of mimetic reiteration is the following. Dots were discovered in the streets of Rome on curbstones at about twenty meter intervals. A spring shower had swept away the dust, and the different groups of dots were shining on the surface of the wet curbstones. The assortment of colors was repeated from one site to the next, and the opaque white paint had always run slightly.

The dots on the pavement were in places where there was a storm drain, and it is possible that the dots had to do with the maintenance of the drains. In my imagination I saw the dots as part of a game in which each player has his or her own signature color. By marking a place with the color, the player indicated having ‘found’ the other players. What caught my interest was that I had come across a sign system that was unknown to me. I followed the repeating clusters of dots, without understanding their meaning. For someone the dots were a clear message, whereas I merely wondered at the strange apparitions in the street.

In my opinion, the clusters of colored dots on curbstones are traces of “undefinable gestures”. They are traces of physical human action (the painting of dots). But the marking of the curbstones with colored dots is also a symbolic act. Shining on wet asphalt, the dots seem to belong to a communication system whose purpose is hidden from the passer-by. In my view, it is crucial that the exact meaning of the dots is allowed to (and does) remain unknown. Presumably whoever made these dots was marking a fact unknown to us for functional reasons. For me, the interesting thing is precisely the ‘passivity’ of the dots. They could hardly be graffiti: they are too boring, their message is not declamatory. Whoever painted them does not seem to have had any particular desire to convey anything except some technical or functional message.

My monotonous text describing the clusters of dots on the curbstones confirmed to myself their passive character. Therefore, I decided that the passive way in which the curbstones are marked with dots is the main issue to be reconstructed into a work of art.

Mimesis as an activity that expresses creative imagination – contradictory and paradoxical aspects of the representation of human action.

In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the main emphasis is on the literary genre of tragic poetry. According to Aristotle, the essence of tragedy is the representation, or mimesis, of human action. In tragedy, mimesis functions through the narrativity of the manuscript, that is, through plot and the description of the characters. It is on the whole accepted that interpretations of *Poetics* have had a decisive influence on the narrative structure of the contemporary moving image, especially television series and narrative cinema.

In my study, however, I try to demonstrate that mimetic representation is



not associated exclusively with plot and character. I discuss mimesis as a strategy of representation, one which I apply also to representation in non-narrative contemporary art. With the term “non-narrative” I refer to presentations of contemporary art in which plot is not the main consideration. I will give a concrete example of how I adapt *Poetics* into my artistic practice. In the mimetic reconstruction of an “undefinable gesture” into a work of art, my aim is to retain in the final piece the inconspicuousness or unintentionality of the gesture in the original situation. What, then, is the relationship between the processed gesture and the original situation? Can the gesture of setting a potted plant on a window sill be presented in a non-narrative form? Is there some way of ensuring that an everyday, “undefinable gesture” will be conveyed when it is re-contextualized in a work of art? I posed these questions to Aristotle, the ancient authority on mimetic art, and in an imaginary dialogue with him, I tried to discover how the above mentioned idea for a work of art (placing flowers on a window sill) should be implemented.

For Aristotle, the purpose of poetic texts and art in general is to present imagined, potential or even impossible worlds instead of reality.

The purpose of mimetic representation is, according to Aristotle, to awaken aesthetic pleasure in the viewer. This pleasure is achieved by adhering to the mimetic model based on evoking certain emotions, namely fear and pity, and their subsequent catharsis. Aristotle allows any means that makes the representation more convincing and reinforces its aesthetic impact. To achieve this, even impossible and paradoxical events are allowed. In *Poetics*, he says, “[...] a convincing impossibility is preferable to that which is unconvincing though possible.” (1461b 11–13). And, “[...] it is likely that many quite unlikely things should happen.” (1456a 23–24). In Aristotle’s view, the inclusion of a paradoxical improbability in a poetic text may well increase the credibility of the represented event, and thereby also its impact.

Transposed to my artistic practice Aristotle gives the following advice:

- By altering some details, the reconstruction can appear more real than the original.
- Mimetic representation is invariably based on the representation of conflicting and paradoxical situations (for example, my attempt to present inconspicuousness is a contradiction in terms; an inconspicuous gesture can be presented only after it has been noticed).
- In reconstructing “undefinable gestures” one may be inventive and creative or pedantically exact – depending on the situation as such.

I had Aristotle’s ideas of mimetic representation in mind when I was processing the gesture of placing houseplants on the window sill. I made three works on the subject, all of which involved transferring existing objects into a new context. In the first piece, *Autumn Conference of Christmas Cactuses* (2001), cactuses (Schlumbergera) borrowed from people’s homes were gathered for the duration of the exhibition onto a platform standing on the floor, giving the plants an opportunity to exchange greetings and news with their fellows. After the show, each cactus was returned to its own window sill.



In the Second piece, *The Charge of the Spider Plants* (2004), the audience brought spider plants from their homes and offices to take part in a downhill race organized on a sloping street in Kuopio, Finland. At home, the owner of houseplants may decide to move pots from one window sill to another to regroup the plants; otherwise the plants' mobility is restricted to the movement of their leaves in a draught from the window, or motions occasioned by growth.

The Charge of the Spider Plants injected some speed into the otherwise placid potted plants, and the merry competition involved comparing the speed of different individuals.

A crucial element in the two works was that they were based on fantastic ideas, "What might potted plants discuss when they meet in a conference?" Or, "Spider plants are considered fast-growing plants. But how fast are they really?" Neither question has anything to do with mathematical-logical thinking. My works are not attempts to answer such questions. Instead, through their hilarity, the works might draw attention to the unnoticed everyday gesture of placing potted plants on window sills.

I transposed that gesture into the gallery and the street, exchanging the window sill for an imaginary conference table in the case of the cactuses, and for downhill cars in the case of the spider plants. My aim was to dissociate the works from the 'real' world in that they would contain conflicting and paradoxical features – and also they would satisfy the mimetic criteria for a "representation of creative fiction". Through their poetic style, they might bring forth the attitude with which people treat houseplants.

I began the third work on the theme of putting house plants on a window sill by writing an imaginary text, where house plants are using the speed of the gesture of turning the flower pots when putting them on a window sill to take off into the world.

Field Trip for House Plants

I know that some day

The pot saucers of house plants will start to rotate.

They will spin into the air, and nothing can stop them.

A hole will appear in the ceiling, and they will go on

Through the floors of the house all the way up into the sky

Before returning to their place on the window sill.

They simply went on a field trip.



The poem has imaginary and also strange features. It is a part of the work, written onto the floor. Above the text, the house plants are turning in the air – suspended on wires which are attached to electrical motors.

The Field Trip for House Plants presents a fantasy containing impossible features. The work is regardless of this, or even only because of this, a possible realization of the gesture of putting a potted plant onto the window sill.

CONCLUSION All the art works included in my research contain some features of conceptual art, and I regard them as being based on 1960s' Minimalism and concurrently developed conceptual art. In conceptual art, the conceptualization and realization of the work, or even the mere idea for one, is more important than the actual material object. The essential

characteristics of Minimalist art are simplicity and an almost impersonal clarity. The conceptual approach described above has developed over time into a direction I call mimetic conceptuality. Mimetic conceptuality also includes undefinability and conflictual elements.

The conflict and strangeness in the realization of my works can be interpreted as an error, not unlike hamartia, the purpose of which is to draw attention to the ordinary and generally unnoticed action that serves as its starting point. Processed into a work of art and dissociated from their everyday context, these “undefinable gestures” and their traces can evoke feelings of strangeness, conflict or hilarity. It is my contention that these emotions facilitate the experience of a special kind of catharsis. Works of “undefinable gesture” function in that way in compliance with the requirements for tragedy defined by Aristotle.

The perplexing strangeness in the realization of these works is a poetic response to the questions posed in the concept. What do the traces of tearing paper actually look like? Or, what if house plants would gather speed and take off? By transposing a poetic theory, I focus in a new way on my artistic practice, trying to understand it from another point of view. I do believe that my research, which presents mimesis as a working method in visual art, can also benefit other artists and theorists.

RESPONSE/ *Tuomas Nevanlinna (supervisor)* In a seminar on artistic research in Amsterdam some ten years ago, I tried to clarify what I took artistic research to mean. After my talk, an Englishman from the audience remarked, “It is all very well what you’ve said. But why do you use the word ‘research’ to describe it?” Afterwards I realized that that had been the first time I ever used the word research. Ordinarily, I use the corresponding Finnish word *tutkimus*. Not surprisingly perhaps, I find *tutkimus* a better word than research. The Finnish word covers investigation, study, examination, scrutiny and inquiry as well as research. The scientific load is, so to speak, lighter but the scientific connotation is not completely absent.

Yet, there is a sense in the word research that captures something of the nature of artistic research. All artists engaging themselves in artistic research are in a sense compelled to do research for the first time – every thesis in the field of artistic research is a pioneering work. That is why supervising artistic research differs from supervising scientific research work. It is also what makes supervising artistic research highly interesting: artistic researchers and their supervisors are not merely applying pre-existing rules but jointly creating and developing those rules.

Is it promising or scandalous that we are not going to change that in the future? I believe it is a constitutive characteristic of artistic research that every study is ground preparing in the sense that it prepares ground for future ground preparing rather than for a well-established paradigm. In that sense it is like art. Paraphrasing Immanuel Kant, one could say that artistic research obeys the temporality of genius – i.e. rupture and revolution – and not the temporality of science – i.e. continuity and method.

My collaboration with Denise Ziegler began about ten years ago. I hasten to add that I am not entirely sure whether collaboration is an apt term in that context. The outer features of the supervisory process were undramatic and unsurprising: we rarely met; we exchanged some emails and discussions. I was a total sidekick in the process. Denise Ziegler mainly



tried to explain to me what she was doing. If I didn't get it, I asked more questions. So much for supervising, I was rather like the stupid guy in a movie to whom the science content the mechanism of a bomb or the time machine or whatever – has to be explained and who thus acts as a stuntman for the audience. In terms of substance, my contribution was close to nil.

There is a sentence in footnote fifteen in the introduction that may have originated from me. Still it is true that Denise's early drafts inspired some general criticism from me and also from other readers and commentators. In these critiques and comments, Aristotle was in the foreground since his thought was presented in a quasi-history of ideas – a mode which is not necessarily a problem, but as Aristotle happens to be the most examined and commented figure in Western thought, Ziegler seemed to have placed herself in an uncomfortable position.

As a result, important structural changes were made within the text – among other things, the Aristotle part was removed to the appendix. In a sense, this was just a rhetorical change. But that change made manifest what was there from the start: Denise Ziegler did not refer to Aristotle in the academic sense, she was rather 'using' Aristotle as an artist.

I stated "other readers", just like that, off-handedly. But actually, the notion of "other readers" should make us pause. The other readers are the crucial points with regard to the issue of supervision. In the Helsinki academy, every student meets colleagues and fellow students in regular working seminars. This means that the fellow students are the real supervisors. What they do is the essential supervision. What is at stake is not me and the student. What is at stake is a collective process where fellow student/colleagues publicly discuss the progress of the work in both artistic and textual sense on a monthly basis.

Pertaining to my personal contribution as the named supervisor I would only mention one more thing. As my academic background is philosophy, I have a standing piece of advice to artistic researchers. And that is: "Philosophy? Drop it!" Of course, I'm joking, but there is also a point I want to make. I always seem to end up saying things like, "It is all very well, just remove the Heidegger part." Or, "Couldn't you just rewrite this fifty page exposition of Deleuze into a concise footnote?" This is not because I consider Heidegger or Deleuze fuzzy or unimportant. On the contrary, the reason is rather that I love them. "Heidegger is great, but here," – I heard myself once saying – "with regard to what you are doing, these scattered pieces of destruction of ontology do not contribute either to Heidegger studies nor to what you are presently trying to do."

Nor do I mean that Heidegger or Deleuze or any other great thinker are too valuable to be dealt with other than by professionals. I'm not saying "don't try this at home". My point rather is to liberate those students from a burden, to make them stop thinking that it is their duty to go through that difficult and tedious route of philosophy in order to say something academically respectful.

Students often have the attitude, "everybody has read all the books, I have read nothing, so before I'll start the research proper I shall read all those books – could you give me a list?" To this my reaction would be, "You, the artist who has created these works, know much better than anyone what your projects are about. You also have not only a vague initial understanding but also (at least preliminary) articulations of this. Begin with those. After you have a decent version, a first version of the text as



a whole, do some reading. You can do this because then you will have a perspective from which to read. Now you can afford to get rid of the all-too reverent attitude with regard to philosophers. You can use them unashamedly for your own purposes, misunderstand them fruitfully and not misunderstand them just because you are not well-versed in the tradition and imitate the jargon instead. Read the classics ‘sexually’, as it were, rather than dutifully and exegetically: love them, fuse with them, use them to your own enjoyment.”

Denise Ziegler notes that it is insufficient to translate the Greek word *mimesis* as imitation or copying. *Mimesis* means something more general. Every process including some kind of translation or transposition from one register or medium to another is mimetic. But imitation is not just a bad translation of a word. The whole notion of attempting to translate *mimesis* in an exact fashion is misguided. What I mean by this is that the reason is not accidental but transcendental, since translating is itself mimetic.

So every attempt at translation will get caught in the act, as it were.

Thus, the point is not that there would be a better translation available that just happens to have fallen out of use. *Mimesis* is a problem rather than a notion or a category.

What else is artistic research than translation or transposition from one register or medium to another? The textual aspect of the artistic research is mimetic: translation or transposition of the works into a textual medium. Or more importantly, the works and the text transpose the same thing in their respective media and in their own way. They might deal with a different thing, one cannot really decide. The relationship between the text and the artwork in artistic research is always an undefinable gesture, because there is no medium-neutral way to describe neither their common ‘theme’ nor their connection.

What does Denise Ziegler mean by an undefinable gesture? It can be an unintentional sign or an intention without meaning – like the colored marks on the sidewalk. It happens when nature seems to organize a social space – like the shadow in Rome that marks a human space. It can happen when an intentional act occasions something that is not meant, a byproduct. And also vice versa, when what seems a byproduct turns out to be intentional – the strange house that was leaning like the tower of Pisa was originally built that way.

As Denise Ziegler herself remarked, there seems to be a kind of performative contradiction in her work. She intentionally presents and makes events of non-intentional and disregarded non-events. She wants to take notice of something that is constituted by its being not noticed. And this is precisely how she is able to reproduce the original contradiction of the gesture itself. In a sense, Denise Ziegler gives the original situation its own message back in a reverse form. Her works are undefinable gestures with regard to undefinable gestures. But it is not only that Ziegler mimetically produces, i.e. reproduces, these gestures. It is that the undefinable gestures are in themselves, as it were, mimetic.

Unintentional signs and intentions without obvious meaning are “as if-signs”. And “as if” is always mimetic. Traces are mimetic. In case of intentional action it is not clear whether the byproducts should be characterized as actions – e.g as *poiesis* – or not. In this sense they are supplemental or mimetic (c.f. Aristotle’s productive *mimesis* in *Physics* 599a).



As my background is in philosophy, I could not resist the question: what is the definition of the undefinable gesture? After Ziegler had patiently explained her ideas and showed me her works, I came up with the suggestion to put it in Lacanian terms, *a gesture can be defined as undefinable when it is undecidable whether it is symbolic or real.* (This is indeed the idea of which a mimetic trace can be detected in note fifteen in the introduction.)

Thus undefinability does not necessarily imply vagueness. One can define, I thought, fairly exactly what is the nature and source of this undefinability. I noticed early on that Ziegler was somewhat reluctant about this formulation. And I think her point was that one should leave the vagueness there. But not because articulation is bad and intuition is good, I'd gather, but rather because of the openness she tried to preserve.

Sarat Maharaj said yesterday in his reaction to Matts Leiderstam's work that despite of the scepticism of some philosophers we should insist on the possibility of both creation and critique, being and reflection, position and metaposition in the same work. I agree. This is the basic modern (originally romantic) notion. But one cannot or at least should not divide the job between art and text. It is not that creation belongs to the work and critique to the text. The simultaneous doing and reflection applies to the artworks as well as to the text.

Actually, if I had to choose I would say that the works are the critique and the text is the creation. The art remains irreducible. But the artwork does not defy articulation because it is a mute mystery or a hermetic secret.

On the contrary, it defies articulation because it is totally open and all articulation in some sense closes it.

What I find fantastic, in every sense, in Ziegler's thesis is how she quietly and inadvertently shifts the terrain of Aristotelian tragedy. Heroism gives way to the prosaic, epochal historical events give way to the absolute side-show, the unnoticed, forgotten, mundane, less than trivial.

And yet this carnival or turnaround, this travesty even from the perspective of the seriousness of Greek tragedy, is done with all due respect and reverence to Aristotelian theory. Denise Ziegler follows the footsteps of the poetics of Aristotle, without rebellion or critique or hermeneutics of suspicion, to the point where it both fulfills and empties itself. As *hamartia*, the tragic error, is transposed as the unintentionality of the undefinable gesture, the whole tonality of tragedy changes into a melancholic, comical, prosaic post – or anti-oedipal mode of the modern world. Ziegler's claim that her work follows the Aristotelian poetics of tragedy is both preposterous and totally credible at the same time. In this sense, her notion of the undefinable gesture may be seen as an undefinable gesture with regard to the Aristotelian tragedy.

So to make a long story short, I think Ziegler's mimetic reiteration or mimetic machine works very well. The undefinable gestures repeat themselves again and again, on every level of her work. By simultaneously doing and showing this non-logic, Denise Ziegler is able to clarify something that indeed is elusive and vague.

RESPONSE/ *Sarat Maharaj* In her PhD project, Denise Ziegler attempts to give a political/economic reading of mimesis and its emergence in the Roman world in the more restricted and reductive denotation of imitation. As an embryonic suggestion, I find that reading extremely fascinating. When in the late Hellenistic world several empires – Roman, Grecian,



Egyptian, Persian, Indian, and maybe Chinese – come into collision and start moving into the same orbit, a new unit of meaning is produced and a new aesthetics comes into being. That is also the moment Alexander the Great crosses the river Indus, enters the Punjab, and produces the last and most interesting phase of Greco-Roman art.

The question of mimesis is interesting for a variety of reasons. First, it throws a new light on how we read the history of art of the world. When mimesis becomes the central concept of the retinal approach to art from the 19th century onwards, the concomitant colonial view on the non-European world is an issue that comes into being. The non-European world seems to have failed in its mimetic understanding of nature. It seems to have shown an incapacity to be as sophisticated about mimesis as the European world. In that sense, the concept of mimesis is used as a punitive device with regard to reading non-Western, non-European art. This is a complicated matter in how we understand the question of mimesis and why that is important for us today in contemporary terms.

Secondly, Denise Ziegler also takes the concept of mimesis to be understood as a model for the concept of translation. Today we seem to be back in a collision of empires resembling the one from the ancient Hellenistic/Roman world. Again cultures enter a field of inter-orbital spin where cultural translation and the possibilities of cultural collisions are very much on the table. The vital question is how we understand mimesis as a model of cultural translation. Ziegler rightly says that we should not reduce mimesis to imitation.

Once, the mimetic translation was seen as the supreme form of translation. What would be a better translation than the one that imitated the original as absolutely as possible? The huge paradox and contradiction in the concept of translation is that the best translation is as close as possible to the original – ideally it could only be the original. But if that were the case, it would not be a translation. So there is this convoluted relationship between original, translation and the production of difference that comes about with translation.

There have been many translators involved in a deeply mimetic understanding of the act of translation and the mimetic elements of translation. Many years ago, our translation group at Goldsmiths college was called the monkeydoodle project – a word taken from James Joyce. Monkey, monkeying around, aping, copying something to be mimetic, as monkeys and baboons are supposedly always imitating human beings. Imitation works in several ways and I think we need to see translation, therefore, not simply as the production of the most transparent equivalent of the original.

In Ezra Pound's translations from Japanese into English, there is what Pound called translucence, a transparency that is opalescent, meaning semi-transparent or a form of translation where the translator does not know the language from which he or she is translating. Ezra Pound did not know Japanese, but translated great poems from Japanese into English. Yates did not know Sanskrit, but translated the great metaphysical work Upanishad into English. Richard Hamilton did not know French, but translated Marcel Duchamp's writing into English. What was going on there? What mimicry, what baboonery, what imitation, what mimesis?

There is, what Hamilton calls, the activity of the monolingual translator.

For me, the monolingual translation becomes a deeply interesting element in the activity of translation that is imitation, that is mimesis in the most

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shallow and superficial sense. I have struggled to understand Ezra Pound's mind, to understand Yates, to understand Richard Hamilton with whom I have worked for many years even in the translation of Duchamp. I have been deeply puzzled and quite baffled in how this sort of activity takes place. To go back to Denise Ziegler's work, I feel that there is something about the undefinable gesture, which cannot be translated or that is lost in translation. James Joyce's *Ulysses* could be about taking the heroic-epic thinking of the Greeks and submitting it to the dirt of the common place, to the everyday dirtiness of the pavements of Dublin as a city. In Denise Ziegler's work, the sublime emerges in the narrowest sense of the word together with concepts such as catharsis. However, there is a certain danger of deflation in using those concepts.

What is the difference between Aristotle's concept of conflict – tragedy as conflict, tragedy producing out of conflict some deep self-knowledge, or maybe even no-self knowledge – and the Shakespearian tragedies and melodramas such as *Hamlet*? Does tragedy leave us feeling emptied of anguish and filled with pity and compassion and a sense of release at the moment of catharsis? We do not quite feel that today with Shakespearian tragedy. Aristotle has been transformed by every generation and in the last works of Shakespeare the importance of melodrama is taken as beyond the conflict of tragedy.

Tragedy brings us into aggressive opposition where a fatal flaw in a character leads one to a head-on collision with life, with the state, and with death. It can only be resolved by the death of one person. Melodrama is different. There might be a murder along the way, there might be a corpse that you stumble over, but that is just all part of the fun leading to some sense of restoration and resolution in the end. That is why we all struggle, certainly in the English literary tradition, to say whether we deeply appreciate Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or *The Winter Tale*. Melodrama does open a view of life beyond oppositional conflict, beyond the friend and foe division of the world given to us in the writings of Carl Schmitt – who briefly was associated with the nazi view of dividing the world between self and other, between *demos* and those who are outside the *demos*.

Ziegler's presentation opens up a whole range of questions. That brings me to the last point. In talking about opposition, reconciliation, and going beyond opposition, what is the function of the opponent? The opponent is supposed to be the great opposer of the thesis. But can we speak in contemporary times of this adversarial way of understanding the scene of the doctoral assessment?

Opponent is a very grand term; it comes down from medieval inquisition, from older classical traditions of the university. We could submit the role of the opponent under a microscope and bring it under scrutiny in our time.

What, then, is the function of opponent? Simply to oppose all the points of a thesis? Or to extend, elaborate, interpret, and ultimately put into the public domain the ideas being explored and brought into realization?

For research to count as research, it has to be added to and debated in the public domain. In the current debate in the public domain, I feel we need to think more carefully about understanding the doctoral process and how to develop it for the future. The role of the opponent will be a crucial one as someone relaying and, as it were, scrutinizing the claims to knowledge that the thesis is advancing in the public domain. If there is no claim to some notion of the production of knowledge and some contribution to the

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field of knowledge, I think there are still difficult and choppy waters for the doctorate. We are still not entirely clear about the passage of the doctorate into the public domain. How is it to be conveyed and relayed, how is it to be assessed, and how are the knowledge claims to be stated in public terms? I feel this is what each one of the doctorates in their singularity challenges us to do. We not only have to invent a methodology, but also a language – not only a linguistic language, not only a word-based language, but a language as such for passage in the public domain.

When Aristotle was reinterpreted during the occupation of Paris, Sophocles' play *Antigone* was performed and read in a particular way. Antigone resists Kreon's instructions that her brother should not be buried, that his body should be left exposed as a rebel. What she does is to lift a handful of dust and let it flow with the breeze to cover her brother's body, just as a symbolic act of burial. And for this defiance of the state she has to pay a penalty. In that opposition to occupation, to oppressive thinking, to death, melodrama does hold a moment of restoration, where there might be the possibility of resolution, of not ending in annihilation or in complete splattering of the self against the wall of the state.

There is the opening of a dialogue, the possibility of conversation, of exchange. However radical and terrible the differences might be, there is still the possibility of resolution of thoughts within the bounds of civility and civil discourse. For me, that should also be one of the contributions of the doctorate. That it stops artists from murdering each other, that it allows space to emerge. A space where conversation, debate, and an exchange of differences can take place without the threat of violence and aggression.

– *This text is based on an edited version of a transcript.*

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Frans Jacobi

AESTHETICS OF RESISTANCE

A couple of weeks ago, I visited Gothenburg and walking down the central avenue of the city I ran into a demonstration by coincidence. Around fifty young people were marching behind a car. The marching youths were surrounded by a similar number of police and the demonstration was tailed by ten to fifteen police vans.

The amount of police was quite astonishing compared to the rather small crowd of demonstrators and that inconsistency immediately caught my attention. Another strange thing was that the demonstrators only carried two banners – a small velvet flag and a large black banner, both without any text. Neither the music blasting out from the front car nor the occasionally shouts and rants from the youngsters gave away any clues about the goal and content of this demonstration.

I was really baffled by this lack of communication in a situation normally specifically designed for communication. During the fifteen minutes or so I followed the demonstration, two persons were arrested after a very short outburst of tumult: a tall guy in his twenties and a young girl not older than seventeen. Apart from these two minor incidents the atmosphere between police and demonstrators was friendly. Many demonstrators seemed to be chatting with the other part, and a female police officer was running around the edges of the march photographing each and every protester with a large telescopic lens.

What at first sight seemed to be a very recognizable event, soon made me wonder, What was actually going on? Why the massive amount of police? Why the empty banners? Of course I could have asked some of the people – police or demonstrator – what was going on. But by intuition I chose to stay uninformed, keeping my position as casual passerby. I took a couple of photos, followed the march for some time and left, curious and bewildered. Somehow I was aware that there had been something crucial, something important hidden in the situation I had just stumbled upon.

The above story was the beginning of my application to the PhD program at Malmö Art Academy. My proposal took this small event as the starting point of an investigation into what I thought was some new kind of activism centered around a refusal to communicate. Quoting J.G. Ballard, Bernadette Corporation, Guy Debord, the Situationists, Hardt & Negri, Paolo Virno, Jean Fischer and Jimmie Durham, I had some ideas about “constructed situations”, about the exit from the dominating discourses of society, an ‘exodus’ as Virno calls it, about “another world” and becoming ‘another.’

Half a year later – now an official PhD candidate – I revisited Gothenburg to start my investigations into that demonstration. It took me one and a half day to figure out that it had not been a real demonstration – it had ‘only’ been a police exercise. The local police was training how to handle violent protest. They had recruited an entire gymnasium to act as protesters and then marched through the city, rehearsing different modes of conflict.



My project evaporated and I felt quite bewildered – not only thrown back to square one, but, even more, out of the game. From this point zero, nothing is what it seems – a fake, superficial proposal. I have tried to redirect my project back into reality, but as it is with reality today nothing is what it seems to be.

Now choosing a series of real events – three crucial, large-scale moments in the very recent history of Scandinavian protest movements – my focus is still on the constructedness of these events. On how the establishment of a certain regime of pictures and their representation in media becomes the underlying goal of an activism that seemingly aims for something else.

The three moments I have chosen to investigate are:

- The Anticapitalist riots during the EU summit in Gothenburg, Sweden 2001;
- The YouthHouse Movement in Copenhagen, Denmark 2007/2008;
- The Climate Justice Action and other attempts at protest surrounding the COP 15, Climate Summit in Copenhagen, Denmark 2009.
- To create an outside point of reflection/mirroring, I also visited Tiananmen Square, scene of the riots in Beijing in 1989.

Closely linked with the idea of “constructed situation” or “creating another world” is the idea of “becoming another.” In his introduction to “Robespierre, or, the Divine Violence of Terror,” Slavoj Žižek quotes Gilles Deleuze. “They say revolutions turn out badly. But they’re constantly confusing two different things, the way revolutions turn out historically and people’s revolutionary becoming.”

This “revolutionary becoming” or “becoming the people” as Žižek puts it, is the other prime focus of my investigations. How do the scattered crowds of activists and protesters in the three chosen moments “become movement”? What kind of visual and aesthetic strategies facilitates this ‘becoming’?

These activist practices are often inspired by art or resemble certain art strategies, since parts of the contemporary art scene are incorporating activist strategies. My project has been researched through a process of performances, exhibitions, and writing. An attempt at creating a kind of performative research, where the different spatial and symbolic strategies of the activist movements and the opposing agents of power are transformed into speculative constructions of text, performance, and space.



RESPONSE/ *Jan Kaila* Let me begin with the techniques of the research Frans Jacobi calls “performative research”, i.e. the researcher stands up and is a sort of figure in the performance. In Jacobi’s text, I have read about the Brechtian use of the author as actor within the play. It seems to me that Jacobi uses such a strategy as a part of the research. But not only the performance, also exhibitions and writings are to be included in his PhD research project.

My first – pragmatic – question then is, How would people be able to evaluate the entire project? How would Jacobi summarize such a PhD project for a committee? Subsequently, in using the Brechtian model,

is there a transformation to a meta-level for commenting on the project?

Or does it imply writing a meta-text that will go beyond, not in value but mentally, the performance? Is that needed or not?

The project contains a lot of information that is dealing with politics.

The political in the demonstrations, the organizations, the individuals, and the movements is described in an almost anthropological sense.

As part of the scripts for the performances, I find that very fascinating, since it also concerns the question of new knowledge in a documentary sense. However, the image of demonstrations and movements, the political in public space, all emerge as being extremely stereotypical. In the context of what I just called the anthropological sense, the question arises of how much straightforward information should be included in the phenomena under research?

What fascinates me as a result of the anthropological information, though, is how Jacobi researches symbolism and various aesthetic approaches the movements use as strategic and practical tools for their demonstrations.

The movements and the way they operate have never been analyzed in that sense. At the same time, however, Jacobi's project is a continuation of 20th-century political art and, therefore, deals with many elements that have been done and discussed in the 20th century. What would happen if one divides the 20th century into two opposites, one being the political avantgarde, especially in the 1920s and its continuation later on; and the other the fascistic, totalitarian kind of art emerging in Germany and then after the 1930s to some extent in the Soviet Union? If one looks at these opposites and their relation to art and politics, one could use a Benjaminian concept as a tool. Walter Benjamin mentions two different kind of approaches, the one is aestheticization of politics and the other is politicization of aesthetics. So, my question is how does Jacobi see his work in the context of a continuation of the 20th century?

My last question refers to what most of us are familiar with and that is that the political situation in Denmark has been very complicated and of course – from a leftist point of view – very problematic. That situation in Denmark has been going on for ten years now. Therefore, Jacobi's research in the Danish context, I suppose, gets a very specific political dimension. How important is such a situation for political engagement in relation to the research one does?

Maija Timonen

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The starting point for my PhD project is a paradox that could be called “oppressive freedom.” Capturing the way neoliberal rhetoric combines individual freedom with self-administration, this paradox could also be descriptive of an experiential landscape of work in the cultural field.

Consisting of a written thesis and the short film *The Debtors*, the project adopts a self-reflexive approach and considers the possibilities for having a critical practice within this landscape. A specific focus is on what this might mean in the context of making films or doing a Fine Art practice-based PhD project.

The PhD project investigates notions of authorship as they arise in contemporary institutional art environments. A tension can be noticed between forms of collective authorship and a seemingly persistent need for heroic figures of authorship. I will not address the questions of authorship in this presentation, but rather select a specific section of the PhD project to revisit and see how its themes have filtered into the film project I am currently working on.

The first chapter of my PhD thesis attempts to relate the Fine Art PhD project to the broader context of an increasing commercialization of education. I discuss that through the metaphor of suspension derived from Hito Steyerl’s film *Lovely Andrea* (2007) as well as through an analysis of the formal aspects of the film itself. Without going too far into explaining what happens in the film, the chapter starts out with Steyerl’s search for a bondage image of herself taken in Japan 1987. Then it moves onto following the rope bondage of Asagi Ageha, a young woman who practices self-suspension – tying and suspending herself in air with ropes. The chapter contains a suggestion that in a faltering economic climate, education and an academic context could come to be seen as a way of deferring a fall into a state of suspension or perhaps a waiting room of sorts – particularly for artists.

This suggestion of the relative safety of the academy in comparison to depleting funds for artists outside of it has been disproved by subsequent developments. But regardless these developments, there is still something resonant about this suspension metaphor. That has to do with its being



crucially foregrounded in Steyerl's film as self-suspension, as self-administered discipline. This self-suspension or being your own bondage master is a double-edged sword, one that dangles – to quote an article written by Kerstin Stakemeier – in tension between the dependency implied by bondage and the independence the performer experiences through its practice.¹ Self-suspension is an adoption of a position of mastery but also an internalization of authority.

In my PhD thesis, I discuss the model of subjectivity that could be seen to arise from this self-suspension metaphor in relation to Adorno and Horkheimer's description of the bourgeois subject in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.² The chapter on Odysseus's triumph over mythical forces through cunning demonstrates that he gets out of trouble by deceiving his supernatural opponents through feigning weakness or compliance to the rules of his opponent. The story graduates into a form of self-sacrifice that guarantees survival. Odysseus's encounters with mythical beings narrate the inception of the modern subject and how the dynamic of a negotiation with the powers of god and nature persists as the model of domination and subjection in a capitalist society – as humans relating to themselves, but also relationships between humans.

The dual character of the self-suspension that appeared in Steyerl's film *Lovely Andrea* – bondage as offering a sensation of freedom that exists in a chiasmic relation with the freedom that produces a sensation of bondage – is crystallized when Adorno and Horkheimer describe the effective outcome of Odysseus's trickery. It allows him to act as both priest and sacrifice simultaneously. The subject makes itself scarce in order to persist, it is involved in its own destruction as a condition of its existence.

At the time Adorno and Horkheimer wrote *Dialectic of Enlightenment* there was still something realistic about this sacrifice. Today, if it is realistic it is in the sense put forward by Mark Fisher in his book *Capitalist Realism*: a pervading ideology of not having any reasonable alternative to capitalism, however bad everyone would know it to be.³ In the last thirty years or so of financialization of western economies, post-modernity has operated on the inverse logic of sacrificing the future for the present. What is behind the call to defer pleasure now? I would suggest that its purpose has a lot to do with an appropriation of people's nostalgia for an imagined past, and, at least in the case of Britain, an imaginary modernist past with its progressive promises. That covers over the "no future" movement that is actively carrying on from the booming years.

When announcing the plan for cuts in the public spending review last October, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne spoke of "restoring sanity to public finances." He not only exemplified the continuing role the idea of reason plays – and more specifically reason set in a pathological framework – when the economy is spoken of, but also, considering the extreme nature of the cuts announced, the inherently contradictory nature of both such a use of language and the actions underpinning it.

Let's go back to the title of this presentation, and the popular joke it repeats. I have seen that joke more than once used as an economic metaphor and often in association with criticisms of severe cuts to national budgets – punish the patients too hard and they will not survive. It also brings to surface the absurdity of the bureaucracy that characterizes neoliberalism more broadly – just as long as the procedure or performance

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¹ Kerstin Stakemeier Minor Findings and Major Tendencies, in *Afterall* no. 19/2008, p 55-63

² Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1997), *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, London: Verso, p 50

³ Mark Fisher Capitalist Realism. Is there No Alternative? (2009) *Zero Books*

assessment is carried out, it is a success regardless of the outcome. What I am interested in is the subject at the center of this joke, and the subjectification of an entire economic system that it carries out. Who is the patient?

The film project I am currently working on is a loose adaptation of a little known late 19th-century Finnish novel *Aune*, by a writer called Immi Hellén. She is mainly known for writing poems for children, but also wrote a few novels that have been pretty much forgotten. Hellén lived and wrote at the time of the construction of Finnish nationalism and subsequently the Finnish nation state. The book's story is quite a conventional one: a friendship/love story across class boundaries as well as one following a theme popular at the turn of 19th-century literature, i.e. crippled, convalescing or terminally ill children. Aimed at an adolescent readership, I read *Aune* as a parable on the formation of the Finnish nation state and the class relations constituting it. Read in this way, the book represents the delirium and decline of one social order and the transfer of power to another, i.e. the emergent nation state. At the same time, such a reading can be used to anticipate or interpret the contemporary crisis of this new order.

In some ways I have come to think of Hellén's *Aune* as a sort of wendy house equivalent of the 19th-century novel. It is short (small), and horrific, since I always think of wendy houses in their abandoned winter state, filled with moldy toys from a bygone childhood. *Aune* is a simulation of a novel and – as it relates to the time of its inception and the nationalism underpinning it – a construction of a play-home. There is something of this winter-wendy-house suspended state of childhood based on mimicry in the idea of nationalism, which invents an archaic essentialist origin for the population, while sustaining a degree of naïveté.

I want to deconstruct the book's simple pedagogic structure and extract the symbolism it is built around, and read it against its own nationalistic and Christian ideological persuasion. This involves a stylistic shift from the original's youth fiction to a thriller/horror genre, making use of and amplifying the psychosexual undercurrents of the book.

I want to transpose the story of the book to an ambiguous, temporally and geographically shifting setting, so it can form the basis for reflection on the nation state as an aesthetic form. But also and perhaps more importantly for what I have been saying today, for a reflection on a rhetoric of self-sacrifice.

The main focus of my adaptation (which is incidentally quite loyal to the original story, hence I will not elaborate on it here) is on the relationship between two youths: wealthy but incurably ill Aune, and poor but healthy Lauri. Aune's unspecified illness affects her legs, and this means she is unable to walk or leave her room. Lauri delivers papers in her apartment building, he falls over on the stairs and hurts his foot, and is invited in. He begins to visit Aune regularly, and becomes her channel to the outside world. Their budding friendship is underpinned by sexual attraction, which nevertheless struggles to find overt expression. It becomes awkwardly sublimated into Aune's philanthropic urges.

Not only does Lauri himself present an object for Aune's patronage, through him she is also enabled to offer financial assistance to others. Telling her about events in his own life and that of his peers, he narrates an image of the suffering masses that appeals to Aune's interest in the hardship experienced by the poor. This interest becomes revealed as bordering on the fetishistic, when sounds reaching the room from the street and objects

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brought into the room by Lauri become prompts for Aune's hallucinations of what happens in the wider world, beyond her confined space. Sometimes grim, sometimes absurd scenes of life outside are inserted into and expanded away from the narrative's flow of the events in the room.

Aune's hallucinations escalate and, with her speculations on the trajectory of her illness, merge into a ghoulish miasma of the imagined lives of the struggling poor, the presence of the dead among the living and the looming amputation of her leg. As the future absence of a leg becomes an obsessive focus of Aune's thoughts, it is implied that she does not simply desire something she doesn't have, but desires a lack that she doesn't have. With this, her burning desire to do good is further asserted as being caught up in her pathology – she in a way wishes to lose her leg, and this wish, again, has a dual character. It is a sacrifice that would not only ensure the integrity of her status as a subject – someone capable of making sacrifices – but she also sees it as the price she can pay for the privilege of sharing the suffering of others. It is a desire to belong.

As an expression of an absent collectivity, Aune's illness sets itself against the formations of belonging that do present themselves as available: the respective class identities of Aune and Lauri, and their nationality under construction. Aune conjures phantasmatic, but unfortunately feverish and absurd representations of possible forms for the collective. Aune undergoes grueling – but, as we discover, unnecessary – surgery on her legs. Not only is her illness possibly psychosomatic, it also seems that the doctors themselves are effectively exploiting her condition, convening over her fragile body as if around a boardroom table. They operate with murderous rationality.

Aune dies as a result of the operation. As a conflicted figure of the bourgeois subjectivity that negotiates its survival as an administration of its own sacrifice, she comes up against the reason she has constructed herself by and its transformed effects as a condition of late capitalism.

RESPONSE/ *Hito Steyerl* In my response, I would like to endorse the form of the melodrama and focus on the form of the penny theater. A penny theater was a type of theater popular in 19th-century Victorian England and – as the name indicates – a ticket cost only one penny. The penny theater was very popular with the lower classes and often consisted of an abbreviated ten-minute Shakespearian tragedy. In its original form, a Shakespearian tragedy would last four or five hours. Of course the tragedy became reduced to its most affective, spectacular and dramatic elements often articulated through detached, decapitated and free-floating limbs bleeding in space.

The penny theater was emphatically despised by anyone regarding oneself member of the cultural elite. They saw it as something feminized; as something overly shallow, affective, and melodramatic. It was associated with the lower classes and women and regarded as a cheap ready made form of entertainment, which it obviously also was. Thus the penny theater turned out to become one of the predecessors of the melodrama, and also of the telenovela – of which we have seen a very fine example in the work Tiong Ang showed. Tiong Ang's *telenovela* is exactly modeled on this sort of affective template: an economy of emotion, which is deeply gendered and class specific.

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My response is modeled on the penny theater: it is a ten-minute presentation in which I will perform a spectacle inspired by Maija Timonen's presentation. The most inspiring element for me was to find myself reduced to an object of inquiry, of investigation, of critique, of study, i.e. reduced to a sort of object in an object-subject position. In Magnus Bartas' film, Kumiko refuses to be filmed, recorded, and represented as an object. What I want to do is to take the opposite approach and really identify with the role of the object. This might also provide a way out of, let's say, replicating the relation of mastery and bondage at work in the relationship between presenter, respondent and academic supervisor which is essentially modeled on SM practices.

When listening to Timonen's presentation and its production of objects, body parts, and amputated limbs, I asked myself what are these – actually – that refuse, that leftover, those objects and discarded parts? What are those former body parts, now becoming objects in surgery? And if I identify with these objects, where can I go from there? What am I as an object after being cut?

We all have body parts, but what is the order in which they could be re-configured after having been taken apart? What could be a possible body politics of dismembered body parts? What could be the contemporary ornament of mass that would arise out of those dismembered body parts, those cuts, those amputated limbs, those victims of cuts?

Then I thought back to a text by Siegfried Kracauer called "The Ornament of Mass" (1930) where he refers to a group of showgirls, *The Tiller Girls* – a very popular dance group. They operated at the beginning of the century and became popular because of their invention of what was called precision dance. Precision dance was a formation dance where female bodies, or rather body parts, as Kracauer emphasized, were moving synchronously and in unison. Kracauer analyzed precision dance as a metonymy, a symptom of a Fordist regime of production. He compared the articulation of *The Tiller Girls* on stage to the composition of a conveyor belt.

In a Fordist factory, body parts were articulated according to the regime of Fordist production: of a planned time-scale, of the temporal regime of accumulation. This was the body politics that Kracauer deducted from the arrangement and composition of body parts in the image of *The Tiller Girls*. For him, there was not only something problematic in this composition of body parts, but also in a strange way something liberating.

That is enshrined in some very cryptical sentences in the middle of "The Ornament of Mass"; sentences that are almost impossible to understand. But I think what they might say is that a body which is artificially recomposed out of body parts is necessarily abstract. Such a body is artificially commodified, alienated and, precisely because of that, it breaks with the traditional, and at that time massively, racially imbued ideologies of origin, belonging, and a natural, collective body created by genetics, race or common culture. Kracauer saw in the artificial body and the artificially articulated bodies of *The Tiller Girls*, the fore of another body, an utopian body, which would be freed from the burden of race and origin.

If we are faced in Timonen's presentation with a whole array of body-parts-after-cuts, what could be the new articulation, the rearticulation of these body parts into a different form of body politics? A body politics which actually would be liberating instead of simply alienating, disarticulating, and disempowering. The model of the metaphor of body politics

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is based on Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, where Leviathan constituting the body politics or the State is composed of a multitude of tiny bodies, which coalesce to form this authoritarian figure.

But what are other options of reconfiguring this body? One option is the body in the telenovela, a spliced together object, which is a product of the massive cuts in the production of entertainment and the dismantling and ripping apart of the economy of the 'weepie' (a cinematic melodrama made within a Fordist studio system). The body of the telenovela is a product of global outsourcing and of global chains of affective labor; of performative labor (Brazilian/Mexican actors and crew), but also of affective labor (maids, migrant domestic workers), which constitute the main audience.

But there is another option, too. Couldn't the dismembered body parts that find themselves splattered all over the place after these cuts perhaps reconstitute in the body of the person who volunteered to sit as a model for a life drawing session during the early stages of the occupation of the Slade School of Art? A response to or a part of the ongoing student protest organized in London against the cutting of basically public services as such? Could that not be a model of another body, another body politics, if you like? An artificial body consisting of all these cut limbs dispersed all over the place reconfigured and finding itself reembodyed in this new, but deeply artificial body of the occupation?

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Magnus Bårtås

YOU TOLD ME. WORK STORIES AND VIDEO ESSAYS

My dissertation (University of Gothenburg 2010) consists of five video works, an introductory text, and three text essays. The video works are based on meetings, conversations, and storytelling; activities not only closely linked to the biographical genre, but also to the dissemination of artworks – as I will demonstrate. As a biographer, I travelled in the footsteps of films while staging different memory acts together with the ‘biographized.’ The method of repetition I use coincides with and is inspired by Chris Marker. In his video essay *Sans soleil*, he calls it pilgrimage or travelling in the footsteps of film and texts which implies many of his key motifs: the return, the search, multiple identities, the connection of memory, situations, and events where pasts manifest themselves in the present.

In my *Who is* project – the background and starting point for my dissertation – I reenact small fragments of a life story together with the person involved. While in the *Who is* series I am working with people I already know, in the video essays I seek out persons I have learned of through film (*The Kumiko Mystery* by Chris Marker) and through media (the story of Choi Eun-hee).

The stories central in the dissertation text are the stories behind and within an artwork. I call them work stories. To use a very condensed description, a work story is a written or oral narrative about the forming of materials, immaterial units, situations, relations and social practices that is or leads to an artwork. The concept of work story emphasizes the process and methods of art; it gives a value to the sequence of making, but of course it also takes into account theoretical and practical considerations as well as biographical elements. In conceptual art, not only the work story is crucial for understanding the work. Also the very order of the sequence of production and action have symbolic, metaphorical, metonymical, political and even epistemological meanings that should be implied.

In the dissertation text, I do not strive to create a coherent definition of the term work story. Rather I propose and examine different forms, functions, and possibilities. Basically I consider the work story to be an integral part of any artwork. First, it is a sequence of makings, a latent story of the process that can be deducted or extracted from any artwork regardless of its medium. Secondly, as a meta-activity, the work story is performative and during the contingent and shifting orbit of its social existence, it aggregates meaning that becomes part of the artwork to which the story refers. As an *employment of experience* (Paul Ricoeur) it gives the storyteller a sense of continuation, coherence, connection, and meaning. In that sense, the work story resembles the function of narrative in life stories. Furthermore, work stories can merge with life stories and create an inseparable unit.



In an extended form, a work story disseminates meaning rather than capturing it. That is the essayistic form of the work story to which I have devoted myself in this dissertation – it is an extended work story. The essayistic mode permits the writer/artist to wander off and touch upon subjects in passing but, paradoxically, give them at the same time a detailed attention and reproduce their neglected genealogy and destiny. Thus the essay is the study of the detail, the unnecessary detail even; a detail that is supposed to be ignored in a documentary report about an event. Life stories and work stories have a lot in common as I mentioned above. They most often seem to share (basically hermeneutic) statements that strive to situate the self, “This is where I come from,” “This is who I am,” and “This is where I am going.”

Storytelling adds or restricts the meaning of the interpretation of the work/life; it can simultaneously frame and disseminate meaning. Depending on the audience, it may have a different form and content and, from a temporal perspective, storytelling will modify and transform. As an activity performed in retrospect, the story functions as a post-construction. It stages the work/life and emphasizes certain aspects and what is excluded is just as important as what is included.

You Told Me, the title of this text, refers to human relations and social practice. But it also points to how the viewer, narrator, artist, and images are intertwined. Harun Farocki once claimed that making a video essay means talking and listening to images. In the practice of a video essay – a practice that to a higher degree than traditional conceptual art has a reciprocal relation with the (filmed) material – the narration is reflecting and commenting on its own process and its practical, relational, and ethical aspects. Thus, in the video essay, the work story is present in different degrees, albeit often fragmented or embedded. It exists in a polyphonic situation, as one story among multiple narratives.

While working with the video essay in a practical and theoretical sense, I distinguished five elements or instances: the subject matter, the images (the representation), the artist/author, the narrative (the text), and the narrator/voice. If in most documentary films the existence and the lack of natural correspondence between these entities often are dissolved or denied, I would rather expose them as separate units. Then the question arises, What alternative roles can be established between these instances, for example, by negotiation and transference between them?

The biographies in these works are the axes that the works revolve around. The stories have in different ways been mediated by themselves and others in installations, documentaries, fiction, articles, and memoirs. My task became to find interconnections, correspondences, openings, patterns, and figures by revisiting and retelling ‘their’ stories and to find connections with social, political, and aesthetic issues in the past and the present. That means trying to find a place in between collective and personal memory.

KUMIKO, JOHNNIE WALKER & THE CUTE Chris Marker’s interest in the function of memory and the personal and political use of history are elaborated in *Sans soleil*, his canonized video essay from 1982. *Sans soleil* was one of the two films by Marker I carried with me during my stay in Tokyo during the autumn of 2006. My idea was to make a close study of *Sans soleil*, to examine the text and research the aesthetic, political, and historical implications of the events, motifs, and geographical places

depicted in the film. Not only by seeing it and reading the text of the film, but also by visiting the places of the film and thereby experiencing the film through travelling, or pilgrimage, to use Marker's term from the film.

By using *Sans soleil* as a map, I came to travel to places in Tokyo such as Shimbashi, Yurakucho, the Go-Tu-Ku-Ji-temple, Harajuku, Namidabashi and the Sony building in Ginza. Some motifs and phenomena described by Marker as part of the city landscape, I found to be still as present as in the beginning of the 1980s. These included the sleeping people in the metro, the ultra-right-wing caravans of cars and even the idea of the city as a musical instrument.

The second film I carried with me was *The Kumiko Mystery* from 1964.

This film, rather an experimental documentary than a video essay, was made during Chris Marker's first encounter with Japan where he was supposed to film the Olympics. After initially marking the political importance of the Olympics as the symbolic opening of Japan towards the outer world and treating the events at the stadium in a rather absent minded way, Marker focuses on a young woman called Kumiko Muraoka, who was 'found' in the audience of the stadium. After Chris Marker and Kumiko Muraoka meet in the Olympic Stadium, they stroll together along the streets of Tokyo. Their walk through the city is the visual leitmotif of the film.

Chris Marker walks close to Kumiko and she plays with the camera's eye.

This is the only film, to my knowledge, where Marker uses his own voice.

He takes on the role of the journalist and poses questions about the Japanese identity and women's roles. The questions go on in succession and the digressions become more specific: about the relationship to animals, about beauty and violence. We learn that Kumiko grew up in Manchuria and we understand that the Japanese identity does not work, that something is amiss. She tries to adapt; it should work, but it is hard.

Sans soleil is in many ways intertextually related to *The Kumiko Mystery*.

They share, for instance, a game with gazes, the hunting of gazes – which is explicitly discussed in *Sans soleil*. I found the main character in *The Kumiko Mystery* gradually being more and more capable of rewarding the gaze of the camera, until she finally reaches the point in the film where she stares back into the camera as if she is a camera herself.

I came to use *The Kumiko Mystery* in a direct way by appropriating footages in my own video essay and by quoting parts of the text. However, the major task I gave myself – following the logics of pilgrimage – was to find Kumiko Muraoka and to repeat one of Chris Marker's questions from the film. The critical question concerns violence: Kumiko actually claims that she is more or less indifferent to violence. "It is a force of nature," she says, "I'm never afraid." "Confronted with violence, I'm never offended. I'm simply dying, or living."

I had arrived in Tokyo in the fall of 2006 for a three-month stay on an IASPIIS fellowship. I had asked my hosts at AIT, "Can you help me find Kumiko Muraoka?" They smiled a bit indulgently at my naïveté. Kumiko Muraoka is a very common name. But after some time a trainee at AIT had discovered a name in the film's credits she recognized the assistant director. He turned out to still be active as a teacher at a film school in Tokyo. I was excited when I heard about this and suggested that we should call the film teacher right away. But people explained, somewhat vaguely, that Japan doesn't work that way. You write a letter – not an e-mail, but a real letter – and then you wait for an answer. After that

you can phone. After this process, which took a few weeks, the film man answered the phone: “Go to the bar *La jetée* in Golden Gai, in Shinjuku district. Ask the owner. She can give you answers about Kumiko.”

Golden Gai is a district with narrow alleys and little bars. It is one of the few places in central Tokyo with buildings that have been preserved from the time just after the war. The bars here are just a hole in the wall. Usually there is room for fewer than a handful of guests and often you are not welcome unless you know the owner. Golden Gai is not big but the bar *La jetée* was still hard to find. Due to the confusion of the alleys and the little signs, I had a hard time tracing the various establishments. You got to the bar via a claustrophobic stairway that led to a room, no bigger than a closet, without any windows. Yet *La jetée* did not feel closed in and the air was not oppressive. The walls were covered with shelves filled with brown bottles, many of them elaborately handpainted with cat and owl motifs. There were cat figures of various kinds, a picture of a cat and a dog sitting peaceably side by side watching something, and two sepia-toned photographs scenes from the film *La jetée*.

In the corner of the bar, a head stuck out above bottles and paraphernalia, a woman of indeterminate age, between sixty and seventy. It was the owner, Tomoyo. The photographs are not sepia colored but nicotine colored, she told me; the bar has existed since 1972. It is redundant to say that she loved Chris Marker’s films. She was also a francophile and a film connoisseur. And Kumiko? Kumiko was a dear old friend and I could have her address. She did not have an e-mail address. It was an address in Paris. Kumiko had moved there almost forty years ago, only a few years after *The Kumiko Mystery*. This was how I began to correspond with Kumiko. She was now 71 years old, and this was how her text from the film caught up with her. She had moved from Tokyo by the end of the 1960s and had lived in an apartment next to the Montmartre cemetery ever since. She invited me to come there.

I spent four days with her, taking walks in the cemetery looking for semi-wild cats, and sitting in her apartment having conversations about the re-enactment of Chris Marker’s film, her life story and her memories from Manchuria – she grew up in Harbin. During one of those days, she told me how Chris Marker had tricked her and how she realized only after she received the written questions in a letter from Paris that he was making a film about her. She found it odd but was not annoyed; she understood that this was one of his artistic methods.

In her letters to me, she had already declared her strong conviction of not letting her face be filmed, a decision she had made many years earlier. But she was willing to let me film her apartment and to record our conversation. This decision was not due to the experience of working with Chris Marker, but her participation in *Grand Prix* by John Frankenheimer; a big production that was filmed in Italy the year after *The Kumiko Mystery* with Yves Montand and Toshiro Mifune in the leading roles. Kumiko told she would never forget the casting director’s gaze on the filming location. In some way it became decisive for her. There were three women who were lined up; the man examined them “from head to toe, from toe to head, and then from head to toe again.” It was a gaze that dehumanized her. The three women experienced the same terror at the man’s gaze. One of them ran away.

For *Grand Prix* they stayed in a luxury hotel during a week without anything happening. Then one day they were dressed in kimonos and made up. They took the elevator down to the lobby and were filmed as they walked up to the reception desk with mincing steps. It took them less than a minute. For this contribution Kumiko was paid enough money to live on for an entire year back in Paris.

On the fourth day in Paris, I re-actualized her response to the question of violence in *The Kumiko Mystery*. Confronted with the same question, she now said that at the time she did not know anything about violence. She later regretted having said what she said. She was ashamed. She hoped that what she had said would have gone unnoticed, or at least been forgotten. Kumiko now decided to write a new text, that is, a new answer to the question of violence. I was happy to incorporate parts of her reading in my video essay; these made up the closing part.

The meeting with Kumiko Muraoka in Paris became an important part of my video essay together with my research of two of Chris Marker's films which dealt with his methods and strategies. The meeting also gave a greater understanding of some of the less explicit motifs and passages in *The Kumiko Mystery*, particularly the parts referring to Manchuria and the colonial situation of the state of Manchuko; the references to the difficulty Kumiko had adapting to Japanese society with its strict gender codes and, not least, the demands placed on the female voice and the required etiquette regarding a woman's voice.

Following the idea that a video essay may be able to establish and elaborate on a horizontal relation between several subject matters (and text and image), I decided during my stay in Tokyo to bring together two narratives or biographies without hierarchical order. The story of Kumiko Muraoka – basically narrated by quotations of texts and images – was edited in layers with the story about Johnnie Walker, a Jewish Japanese man I had met in Tokyo eight years earlier. At that time I had made my way through the galleries and art museums in Tokyo. When I asked questions during my gallery tours about some younger Japanese artist or about some artwork, I often received the same answer, "You better speak to Johnnie Walker." Johnnie Walker? What kind of name is that? People said he knew everything about the Japanese art scene. But who was he? I got very evasive answers. Someone said he was an American, another person firmly declared that he was Dutch, someone else remarked simply: "Jew."

"You better speak to Johnnie Walker." I got the idea that it was a saying or a way to end a discussion. Maybe it meant "You're asking too much." But at a gallery located right next to the Omotesando crossing, the gallery owner handed a business card with the name in elegant script: "Johnnie Walker, Za Moca Foundation." When I called the number, I was met by a sharp voice with an American accent. The man ordered me to come to an opening some evenings later. It was a voice that didn't want to waste time on anything. I found out what time I should be there, then the conversation was ended abruptly.

The name Johnny Walker turned out to be an elaboration of the transcription of the Japanese name Joni Waka and part of Johnny Walker's ongoing experiments with identity and biography. Even though his family had Japanese citizenship for several generations, he claimed that he had always been considered a stranger in Japan. Instead of adapting to the social norms, Johnny Walker used the strategies of confrontation and provocation.



Being an advocate of the Japanese avantgarde art scene in the 1960s and 1970s as a mentor, organizer, and host, he said that the avantgarde, and Japanese society as a whole had been destroyed by consumerism and cuteness (*kawaii*). The first phenomenon is due to American influence, he said, and the second he viewed as a camouflage for nationalism and even fascism. To some extent he shared Takashi Murakami's analysis of the Japanese cuteness culture, which more or less overlaps with the so-called *otaku* culture as a culture of mass alienation. In Murakami's analysis, this historical development could be traced to the Pacific war and the atomic bomb. The naming of the Hiroshima bomb as Little Boy was a fatal name that predicted the castration of Japanese society – and Japanese manhood. When the writer Haruki Murakami published the novel *Kafka on the Shore* in 2006, he made a reference to Johnnie Walker by naming one of his fictitious characters after him. This Mephisto-like character dressed as the figure on the whiskey bottle is a cruel sculptor using his big dog to catch cats he kills. The 'real' Johnnie Walker is very proud of this book and has absorbed this piece of fiction.

When discussing his appearance in my video essay, we agreed to stage a scene where he is reading a part of the novel, a sequence where Johnnie Walker meets Nakata, an elderly man who lost his ability to think in an abstract way. Nakata, not only a holy fool but also illiterate, was played by one of Johnnie Walker's friends, a person he found 'suitable' because of his nervous character and fear of dogs. Furthermore, the quotation from the Murakami book speaking about his name and position as a stranger was, in Johnnie Walker's view, the most authentic and adequate description of his predicament.

By cross-editing quotations from *The Kumiko Mystery* with the sequences with Johnnie Walker's bunraku walk, the existence of two biographies or stories came to create a bridge or common denominator. A common question arose, How did Kumiko and Johnnie Walker manage, each of them in their own fashion, to create an alternative voice, an alternative language, and an alternative ideology for themselves in relation to their society?

MADAME & LITTLE BOY Choi Eun-hee, known by film lovers as Madame Choi, was Korea's greatest film star. She began her career as a theater actress in productions of Shakespeare and Molière during the Japanese occupation (1910–1945). After the Korean War broke out in 1950, she was kidnapped and forced to perform in propaganda plays for the Communist troops. She managed to escape and return to Seoul, where instead of being welcomed she was branded a traitor and brought to trial. The case was dismissed on one condition: that she entertain South Korean troops.

Madame Choi is said to be the most photographed figure in South Korean film history. In the 1960s, she took on an enormously diverse set of roles in the films of her husband, director Shin Sang-ok. In the 1950s, the married couple had established Shin Films following the Hollywood studio model. By the 1960s, the operation had grown to dominate the entire South Korean film industry producing everything from period films, melodramas, horror films, and war films to musicals and "Wild East" movies, the so-called Manchurian Westerns. Madame Choi played chaste widow, virtuous housewife, princess, feminist lawyer, and flirtatious prostitute in films centered on life around the American army bases. As one of the pioneers among female film workers she also directed three films.

South Korea was at that time a dictatorship under General Park Chung-hee. The censorship rules within the South Korean film industry were very strict, even though General Park himself was an enormous film fan. In 1961, he had fallen in love with Shin Sang-ok's melodrama called *Sangnoksu* (The Evergreen Tree), a film that he came to regard as the cinematic national anthem of South Korea. Choi Eun-hee played the main role of the young self-sacrificing teacher at a village school. General Park was so eager to see Shin and Choi's films that he ordered that newly developed reels be brought directly to the presidential palace.

The couple became guests of the dictator, who enjoyed playing cards with Shin. But the card games with the dictator came to an abrupt end in 1975 when Park got the idea that the South Korean film director was conspiring against him and Shin was banned from his profession. Shin Films was closed and the staff was dismissed. Around the same time, Shin and Choi divorced.

In 1978, Madame Choi traveled to Hong Kong on business. On her way to a meeting, she was attacked; a sack was pulled over her head and she was taken to the harbor where she was placed on board a little boat and injected with sedatives. After eight days, the boat docked at the North Korean harbor of Nampo. Waiting for her on the dock was a short man with a strange haircut. He greeted her with a smile: "Thank you for being here, Madame Choi. I am Kim Jong Il."

Shortly after her arrival, Madame Choi was dressed in traditional Korean clothes and photographed. Kim Jong Il proudly displayed the pictures to his father, Kim Il Sung, at the time the dictator of North Korea. Thereafter, Madame was invited to the Friday parties at Kim Jong Il's personal palace, where she was expected to appear as if stepping out of one of her films. The parties would always include a film screening, followed by backgammon and mahjong, punctuated by enormous glasses of cognac. There was dancing to an all-female combo band, which played jazz and disco. In the small hours of the morning, Kim Jong Il would get on stage and direct the band.

Kim Jong Il had an enormous archive of 35mm films, probably over 15,000, and was eager to discuss film with Madame Choi. He could not emphasize enough the importance of film as a propagator of national identity and community. The archive was only accessible to the "royal family," but Kim considered Madame Choi as part of the family. He seemed to forget that she was there by force. Five years went by. During the last three years, Madame had fallen out of favor and was no longer invited to the Friday parties at the palace.

Then on 6 March 1983 an invitation arrived to a huge banquet. Madame Choi was seated as the guest of honor and Kim Jong Il was unusually excited. He made a speech in which he appointed her to be the mother of North Korea, the mother of *Chosun*. He talked about how Korea consists of one people, with the same history and the same culture. And then the unbelievable happened: surrounded by dignitaries, Shin Sang-ok arrived. Dumbfounded, Choi stared at his emaciated face. Finally Kim Jong Il exclaimed, "Why are you just standing there? Go ahead, hug each other."

It turned out that soon after Madame's capture, Shin himself had been kidnapped. A failed attempt to escape his kidnappers landed him in a forced-labor camp, where for four years he survived by eating salt, grass, and bark. Now, Kim Jong Il wanted to crown them king and queen of the

North Korean film industry – and declare them husband and wife.

They had no choice but to accept. And so it was that Shin Films miraculously reemerged in North Korea, with Shin and Madame once again a married couple. They were given an enormous budget and a newly constructed film lot outside Pyongyang; they had access to as many extras as they wished.

Choi Eun-hee and Shin Sang-ok directed seven films in North Korea and assisted on ten others before they managed to escape. In 1986, Madame and Shin were invited to serve as jurors at the Vienna International Film Festival but soon after their authorized arrival in Austria, they evaded their bodyguards and fled by taxi to the American Embassy.

The last film Shin worked on, though he never managed to finish it, was called *Pulgasari*. The film was Kim Jong Il's idea; the dictator had many opinions about cinema and was deeply involved in the country's filmmaking industry. *Pulgasari* is based on a folk tale, but now reworked according to revolutionary ideals and modeled on *Godzilla*.

Gojira, the original Japanese name, is the mother of all film monsters.

The first *Gojira* film from 1954 is a dark, melancholy elegy characterized by sophisticated visual language and sound design. There is nothing kitsch or ironic about it, even if the special effects can no longer impress a public that has grown up with digital imaging.

In the North Korean version, *Pulgasari* is an iron eating monster joining villagers in their uprising against the feudal overlord, culminating in an attack on the imperial palace. Ultimately, the monster's enormous appetite for iron makes him increasingly difficult to feed. The film's heroine destroys *Pulgasari*'s iron rapacity.

The monster *Gojira* was a product of the atomic age; the film begins with scenes of a fishing boat hit by a devastating light, alluding directly to the American test in March of that year of a 1.5-megaton hydrogen bomb in the Bikini Atoll in the Pacific Ocean. The Japanese tuna-fishing boat, *Lucky Dragon No. 5*, found itself in the vicinity of the test site and was enveloped by the radioactive fallout. The crew fell ill with radiation sickness and the incident triggered an international crisis. In Japan, fear of radioactivity once again took hold – the so-called “tuna fish” horror.

In the film's story, *Gojira* emerges during the Jurassic period and survives at the bottom of the ocean only to have his habitat destroyed by the American test. After absorbing the radiation, the now homeless monster begins to wander. The Japanese fleet lays down depth charges and the military erects a high-voltage line to protect the coast, but nothing can stop *Gojira*. The scales on his back glow and a beam of radioactivity, transmitted from the monster's jaw, makes buildings and houses melt.

Shin Sang-ok died in April 2006. In July the year after, I travelled to South Korea to meet with Choi Eun-hee. After long negotiations, she had agreed to meet us at the Marriott Hotel in central Seoul. Choi Eun-hee told her story of her life methodically and chronologically. She became immersed in her own narrative, losing track of time; the hour that we had been promised turned to be five, extending to lunch at a *bulgogi* restaurant and drinking *soju*.

In the video essay *Madame & Little Boy*, I decided to dwell on the historical lines and the circles of repetition in the life story of Choi Eun-hee and her role (and presence) as a witness of historical events. In the video essay, the genealogy of the monsters is interpreted as deliberate messages about atomic weapons, not least by situating the story at a certain place: the Nike

Missile Site, outside San Francisco. This is a place where nuclear weapons were kept in secrecy during the Cold War. The missiles were meant to defend San Francisco Bay, two of them carried bombs equivalent to eight Little Boys. But the missiles reached only 19 miles, the shock wave would only have blown San Francisco away. The story in the video is narrated by the American musician Will Oldham (aka Bonnie ‘Prince’ Billy) in a studio building next to the Nike Missile Site at Headlands.

In my video essay, I refer to the *kamishibai* of Japan. *Kamishibai* is a form of Japanese storytelling dating back to the 1920s. The *kamishibai* was carrying a miniature theater, picture cards, and candy. He would enter a village on his bike, dismount and loudly strike together two wooden clappers. The sound was a signal for children to run from their homes and gather around him for story time. If they paid him a little they got stories and candy. The rhythm of the text and mode of writing is created for Will Oldham based on my interpretation of his deeds as a musician and actor. In this context, he represents a contemporary carrier of the tradition of *Americana* – a tradition I trace to the poetry of Walt Whitman to which a line in the text also refers. Thus the story is distanced from my own subjectivity and filtered through Will Oldham’s presence and intonation. (In the text essay I give the background of Oldham’s concepts of collaborative practice, pseudonyms, acting career, and music.)

In *Madame & Little Boy*, the voice-over is underlined in an almost naive manner as a means to comment on images. The word “picture card” is rendered in an expanded meaning as well. Since the narrator Will Oldham is commenting not just on the simple and static picture cards, but also on the moving images from diverse geographical places and temporalities (my own sequences filmed in North Korea and the Nike Missile Site, archival material, Shin Sang-ok’s films as well as the views from the studio building) the notion of the word “here” and the imperative “look!” are addressed and questioned and thereby supposed to establish a reciprocal relation. The site of narration – the studio building – functions as an intersection of the present and the past and is also the meeting place with Choi Eun-hee’s gaze filmed in a hotel lobby in Seoul.

RESPONSE/ *Tom Holert* In his 2010 Gothenburg dissertation *You Told Me. Work Stories and Video Essays*, Bærtås offers an extensive, if latent, tableau of figures of mediation, go-betweens, communicators and facilitators, witnesses, griots and storytellers. What is my role as someone who is not exactly a “critic” nor an “opponent” (two positions fused in the figure of the “critical opponent” which was allocated to me by the organizers of the conference *As the Academy Turns*), but perhaps something/someone else, something/someone more akin to what Bærtås discovered and elaborated upon in the figure of the *Kamishibai*? What is my position compared to Bærtås’ travelling storyteller narrating stories and fairy tales through an enchanting use of picture cards?

I would have loved to be able to work – like a *Kamishibai* – with picture cards or other less restricted and formatted performative devices than those of a conference paper – thus addressing Bærtås’ project less in the conventional mode of commentary or criticism, of scrutiny or even inquisition, and more as a story, a report, a travelogue. Moreover, I asked myself what might be of particular interest for an audience only partially informed about work and practice, but interested in relating it to perhaps



the only common ground we share in this situation and this space: the problem of artistic research considered as an epistemological, institutional, and arguably political issue.

What I learnt from Bårtås' writings and film work is that the mode of address and the imagined audience of this address are of extreme importance. The telling of a story about a work, i.e. in his terminology narrating a "work story", differs significantly from a critical analysis – for telling a story is far more about disseminating the work and its meaning than explaining it. What would happen if I tried to explain to you the meaning of Bårtås' work particularly in a setting such as this?

I agree with Sarat Maharaj's comment during the *As the Academy Turns* conference stating that the alternative to the adversarial, antagonistic way of opposing a thesis could be a relaying function which scrutinizes the claims to knowledge a thesis is advancing. But what if the claim to knowledge production is one intrinsically linked to telling stories – of lives and of works? What Bårtås is proposing – and now I am admittedly retreating to a somewhat hermeneutic, even over-interpreting mode – is that stories are actually constitutive of art and artworks. The stories told by art and the stories told about and around art form the core matter of art. This is of course a strong and far-reaching claim. With a somewhat daring nonchalance it does away with any ontology of art based on the art work's material and/or immaterial independence. Instead it suggests an aesthetics according to which any art production is deeply entangled in the receptions, translations, feedbacks of a work which antedate its material creation and follow its public presentation, constituting it by framing it, mostly in illegitimate, 'low' communicative modes such as rumor and gossip. In this perspective, inspired by philosophical epistemology and conceptual art as it is, the discourse generated by art, constituting and determining its course (and shaped by the narrative strategies deployed by artists and public), becomes the true matter of both art and criticism. A story, however, is something very peculiar. It shouldn't be confused with the systemic force of discourse but acknowledged in its specificity and materiality.

In Walter Benjamin's view, story telling is about sharing experiences; and as experience itself has dropped in value, "[...] the art of storytelling is coming to an end," as Benjamin wrote in his 1936 essay *The Storyteller*. "Less and less frequently do we encounter people with the ability to tell a tale properly. More and more often there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed. It is as if [...] the securest among our possessions [was] taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences."¹

Why did experience (and therefore storytelling) diminish so radically?

For Benjamin it is the contradiction between individual experience and the nullification of "strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power."¹ Benjamin was referring to the First World War and its aftermath. "A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body."¹

The destructive forces of capitalism, militarism, industrialization, nationalism and fascism had dismantled earlier modes and models of experience. More precisely, what had been lost, in Benjamin's view, was a tradition of speak-

¹ *Walter Benjamin The Story Teller. Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov (1936)*
In: *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt ed.,
(1968) New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.

ing from the center of a knowledge or wisdom that had been stored in and transmitted through individual as well as collective bodies. This former praxis-knowledge was immediately linked to the workshops of the Middle Ages where the experiences of locality and mobility, of tradition and travel intersected, “The resident master craftsman and the travelling journeymen worked together in the same rooms; and every master had been a travelling journeyman before he settled down in his home town or somewhere else. If peasants and seamen were past masters of storytelling, the artisan class was its university. In it was combined the lore of faraway places, such as a much-travelled man brings home, with the lore of the past, as it best reveals itself to natives of a place.”¹

The vectors of the temporal and the spatial thus intersected in the acts of storytelling which took place in the ‘university’ of the artisan’s class where the archives of past and distant knowledges could be accessed via a culture of physically and sensually (mainly orally) produced and transmitted knowledges.

Storytelling, in the words of Benjamin, has thrived “for a long time in the milieu of work [...] it is itself an artisan form of communication, as it were. It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of her/him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.”¹

Benjamin sees storytelling as deeply integrated in what he calls “practice,” even though it is a lost practice, the practice of craftsmanship, and of amateur craft production, of the interaction, as he says referring to Paul Valéry, between words, soul, hand and eye. It may be worthwhile mentioning, and nodding in the direction of a story about Bårtås, that the Valéry quote in Benjamin’s essay involves silk embroidery where, in Valéry’s words, “artistic observation [...] can attain an almost mythical depth. The objects on which it falls lose their names.” Valéry continues, “Light and shade form very particular systems, present very individual questions which depend upon no knowledge and are derived from no practice, but get their existence and value exclusively from a certain accord of the soul, the eye, and the hand of someone who was born to perceive them and evoke them in his own inner self.”¹

As it happened, I discovered Bårtås had worked extensively with embroidery in his earlier career. In an interview in 2000, Bårtås announced, that from 1997 on he had embroidered the 25,000 stitches each of his tapestries required at the time and in so doing had forced upon himself a slowness. “It was only when I started doing the work myself that I really gained a true feeling for the time aspect. [...] Either it is a matter of luxury – of wasting enormous amounts of time and energy – or that the tapestry captures and materializes all the time that would otherwise have ‘disappeared’.”²

The interesting thing about stories, in Benjamin’s understanding, is their specific temporality, as it differs significantly from the temporality of information. Information is communicated for the purpose of immediate processing by the reader, and necessarily contains its explanation so it be taken in right away; but a story is maintained – just as necessarily – at a distance from explanation. Benjamin writes, “[...] The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to her/him to interpret things the way she/he understands them, and

² Magnus Bårtås in discussion with Niklas

Ostlind (2000). www.magnusbartas.se/ostlind.html

ostlind.html

thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks. [...] [A story] does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time.”¹

And this release is not merely verbal, discursive, it is on the contrary highly charged with aspects of embodiment, of incorporating the word. In his Storyteller essay, Benjamin muses on “the role of the hand in production” that “has become more modest, and the place it filled in storytelling lays waste. (After all, storytelling, in its sensory aspect, is by no means a job for the voice alone. Rather, in genuine storytelling the hand plays a part which supports what is expressed in a hundred ways with its gestures trained by work.) That old co-ordination of the soul, the eye, and the hand [...] is that of the artisan which we encounter wherever the art of storytelling is at home.” “In fact,” Benjamin continues, “one can ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman’s relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way.”¹

These last three words – “solid, useful, unique” – do they indicate the qualities we are interested in, as artist-researchers? Is this what Bærtås proposes when he suggests, at some point in his dissertation, to turn the implicitness of storytelling in the art world and in academia – the gossip, the anecdotes, the rumor – into the explicitness of a research that can be shared within a community of fellows and to a wider audience? I think the robustness of the storyteller’s creation, the story as the result of a solid, useful and unique fashioning of the raw material of experience, that is, of human life, as well as the life of non-humans, could be a measure or model of artistic research work, as long as it does not become mixed up with a stabilizing and normative knowledge of this alleged raw material, which was probably never that raw in the first place. What Bærtås calls the “work story,” this entirety of narrations about the production and postproduction of art and artworks, is organized and driven by contingency and desire, by necessity and affect – but whose desire and whose necessity?

The storyteller in a post-Death-of-the-Author perspective, coming after the trenchant deconstruction of the authorial voice as the origin and guidance of the art work and its reception, cannot be simply extracted whole and intact from beneath the ruins of modernity. Rather, it needs to be treated as a function or effect, distributed across a particular practice, a particular work or set of works. Bærtås proposes for the video essay – quite clearly and declaredly his most favored mode of operation – to distinguish the positions or aspects of subject matter, of images and sounds, of artist/author and of narrative and the narrator’s voice. All of these positions should be interchangeable and may feed and transform each other. Hence, the narrative is not the dominating force; the narrator’s voice is not the voice of authority and truth. In the place of distancing devices, alienation effects, disjunctive synthesis of sound and image, we have the disruption of narrative linearity.

The way life stories and work stories are being spliced up and put together again in the video essay’s procession and assemblage of disparate modes of address, varying aural and visual textures, narrative jumps and conjunctions follows the compositional (or even poetic) maxim of organized disparateness, association through disassociation, distrusting the grand narratives in favor of the smallest, while exploring the consequences and

possibilities of naming and renaming, of identification and disidentification.

One of the preconditions of the kind of meta-documentarism that Bårtås pursues is the methodological strategy of using travel, going places, criss-crossing cultures and geographies. Referencing Chris Marker, he dubs his way of moving and proceeding a “pilgrimage.” Thus he slips into the position of the peripatetic, itinerant follower/worshipper engaging in a quest for truth or epiphany through acts of repetition and ritual. Or even more so in that of the amateur or fan whose search for any minor trace may assist the coming closer to the actual material existence of the idolized hero or star. The research here becomes the time and space-consuming, virtually never-ending activity of completing a puzzle, the final or finalized image of which is constantly and inexorably receding, thus never attained. At the very most it is grasped in parts and fragments that are then configured into video essays such as *Madame & Little Boy* or *Kumiko, Johnnie Walker and the Cute*.

In the process, editing assumes to be the central modality of production. Images and sounds are searched and found, combined, separated and recombined, as well as followed and explored at the editing desk or in Final Cut Pro to convey the very secrets they may hide. The occupation of telescoping, zooming in and out of the material, and discerning the detail resembles the activity of a detective or forensic specialist. Such focus on the seemingly undefined margins of the image can be thought analogous to exposing oneself to the other (while producing the other as such) in travelling, moving through foreign territory, undertaking a field trip with the camera, and meeting all the ghosts and forerunners of the documentary tradition and its adherence to colonialist conquests. At some points in his work though, probably most apparently in the conspicuous absence of any self-reflective stance towards his own Markeresque fascination with Asia and Asian women, Bårtås’ critical awareness of the ethnographic or anthropological gaze’s complicity with (neo-)colonialism seems oddly underexposed.

While studying Bårtås’ works (and also those of his models such as Chris Marker or Harun Farocki) I sometimes wondered how not only the material, but also the political resistance of the raw or not so raw (even cooked) material of their documentary investigations is being dealt with. For these ardent investigations and trajectories in their respective research endeavors appear, on a certain level at least, quite effortless. The fantasies of the traveler and the editor, and of the researcher for this matter, are imbued with a particular, ultimately experimental permissiveness, permitting the unexpected, the accidental, the other to occur and becoming a potential candidate for inclusion (or exclusion) in the work. Naturally the question remains, what is – in the final analysis – entering the edited work and what is not; and for what reasons and to what effect?

The determining factors of the selection processes of artistic production are intelligently addressed by Bårtås’ concept of the work story. The odd and often nerdy quest of the pilgrimage is supposed to change into the register of artistic research via the systematic consideration of the narrative’s practical, material, economic, historical and theoretical conditions and restrictions informing each decision along the way in producing an artwork. But since, in Bårtås’ case at least, the terms of operation are entirely established by the artist-researcher himself, he has created himself a niche, a world, a cosmology of his own. Here everyone and everything seems to



have or will have its place and function. The entire project evolves and moves along according to the artist-researcher's changing occupations, interests, and desires.

What Bærtås leaves for someone like me, acting as a commentator or respondent, is to become another narrating figure in his, *pace* Benjamin, artisan class or "university. Not necessarily a storyteller, but someone waiting to be either invited or rejected by the real and imagined discourse society which constitutes this project – a project that has been art and research long before it was promoted (by the institutions of the higher education in the arts and by Bærtås himself) to the status of artistic research. It will continue to connect these odd, porous entities of 'art' and 'research' and even leave the institutional stage of artistic research proper behind it.

Arguably the inevitable question at a conference on artistic research in Europe seems to be, to what extent has Bærtås' work been affected and redirected by having passed the zone of doctoral studies? But is that question in itself really interesting? I feel much more compelled by how this work and its discursive framing enables others to respond to it as artists, researchers, onlookers, or bystanders in very specific, informed and at times irritated ways. At the same time a strong contradiction persists between what could be called the work's inclusiveness and exclusiveness, its exoteric, sometimes didactic layers and its realms of private language and esoteric lingering. Are Bærtås' peculiar embroideries of images, sounds, texts, thoughts, and experiences accessible in and by their very idiosyncrasy? And, lastly, could the work connect with an outside world in a way comparable to its internal connectivity?

MANIFESTO OF PLEASURE.

PARADIS A-Z

My doctoral project started in the Department of Postgraduate Studies at the Finnish Academy of Fine Art in the autumn of 2009. In that same year, I had a solo show called *Playground – My work is my Pleasure* at the Korjaamo Gallery, Helsinki. That was the first public part of my PhD project, the prologue to my research so to speak. My original research question dealt with the structural and theoretical basis of narrative painting installations. My question was its own obvious answer and dealt with “the open meanings of narrative painting in space.”

My solo show *Playground – My work is my Pleasure* had been pre-examined and accepted as part of my research. I was happy about that, but decided to go deeper into my question by throwing doubt on it. I realized that I got so many invitations to participate in group shows with my painting installations, that I needed a specific path to follow – a yellow brick road or a red thread. Otherwise I would fall into the boredom of meaningless repetition.

So I have woven a pink rope to follow: a series of installations called *Paradis a-z* – yes, I translate paradise into French. Now I am on my way and I will tell the truth and nothing but the truth. I promise I will not add any word to make myself sound more academic, more philosophical or more theoretical than I am. I am an artist and I will always be a person who buys more books than she will ever read. I promise I will not do a single act where my goals are not the goals of an artist.

PARADIS A (PETIT L’OBJET A VS. AMERICA) I will start with America and Lacan because their single but wide concepts have fed me. The dialogue between intellectual text and the images of popular culture are the things I like “to put on my table.” I surely am a professional in the field of images and a dabbler in the field of Lacan – but I am the daughter of a psychotherapist.

PARADIS B (BACCHANAL) When I wrote on the wall of the gallery “My work is my pleasure” a friend asked “does that refer to the profession of a prostitute?” “Well, I don’t mind if my work is your pleasure too,” I replied, “but I refer to the work of a painter.” Frankly, I admit I have a kind of bacchanal in my studio with my paints and my canvases.

PARADIS C (CAPITALISM VS. COMMUNISM) When I was invited to make a painting installation for the Oulu Art Museum, I had to think what to tell. Clearly, my art is cute and girly and I wanted to look closely at the disturbing content. After having bought Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* – both subtitled *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* – I noticed I am more interested in Dolce & Gabbana. So I looked into

fashion design that is close to the art market system, where market values are added on top of the artefact's real production costs. I like Karl Marx's theory of the surplus value, because it is so true. I made a painting series with bored girls. A girl arrives riding a unicorn and says, "Rise up babes, Louis Vuitton is for everybody!" Other girls look disappointed at the empty bags and in the last panel they say "Never mind, let's do something stupid."

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PARADIS D (DISCOTHEQUE PICK-UP LINES) One and a half years ago, I was invited to make an exhibition in a bar. My first reaction was "Oh no, been there done that!" The truth was I really had done that ten years ago, at the very same Café Bar No 9 in Helsinki. The difference was that 1. Fanny Tavastila and Aura Seikkula were now curating the exhibition and 2. my increasing ambition. After some months of hesitation, I decided to make my fifth neon tube light work and to approach the bar space similar to how I approach galleries and museums.

In August 2010, I installed my neon light work *Paradis d* – ten paintings and six silk screen prints in candy cane colored frames – in the bar.

The bar turned pink. At one special evening two weeks after the opening I played disco music and turned my show into a discotheque. That same evening a man came up to me and said "I'll buy all the left, unsold works from this exhibition of yours, plus the neon light". During half an hour I kept saying "That's only a lame pick up line". But it was not, he bought the whole exhibition.

At this point between the d and e, I started my blog *Katja Tukiainen:*

Paradis a-z online.¹

¹ katja-tukiainen-paradis-a-z.blogspot.com

PARADIS E (EXTENSION OF MY PERSONALITY) I had my first Russian solo show in St. Petersburg (September 2009). The exhibition was not part of my research, but during the opening discussion someone asked whether Mademoiselle Good Heavens was my alter ego. Mademoiselle Good Heavens is a figure I created more than fifteen years ago to play a role in my art. So I replied, "No, she is much more. She is an extension of my personality. You might have a red Jaguar but I have my art. I get quite fast and far with it." That answer pointed to letter e.

When I was invited in October 2010 to make a solo show in Tallinn, Estonia, I decided that each one of my exhibitions should offer a new challenge. Otherwise there is no point in making it. I thought, What are my exhibitions if not extensions of my personality? They say more than I can ever say. So, I named the Estonian exhibition, *Paradis e (Extension of my personality)*.

PARADIS F (FAKE) This was my first solo exhibition in Latvia in a gallery in Riga. The exhibition should have been called *Paradis f (Fake reality)*, but I was very busy and, thus, made a mistake in the title. But the space of the gallery came to my rescue. My method as an artist is simple and strictly disciplined. My brain works chaotically and, therefore, I need a routine. That routine entails that I plan my installations for galleries, museums, and various exhibition places in advance. Yet, when I start my installation work in the space my disciplined plans turn nine out of ten times into something totally different. I love when that happens. That is the peak I climb on.

The gallery space in Riga was especially interesting because of the window in between two rooms. I included the hole of the window in my installation.

I skipped the original idea of two sitting girls and changed it to one pointing to the hole. Through the hole you can see the other side of the gallery with a copy of my own painting. It is not a fake, both paintings are done by me.

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PARADIS G (GRÄFENBERG SPOT) For January 2011, I was invited to participate in a group exhibition called *Mazzano!* in Amos Anderson Art Museum in Helsinki. The show is curated by Timo Valjakka, who gave me a challenging space in a sort of balcony. I plan the exhibition *Paradis g* to consist of 66 magenta-painted light bulbs. Under the light, I will place the chair of the empress, on its seat an open book with “(Gräfenberg Spot)” written on the cover. On the wall, I will paint red curly ribbons encircling seven landscape paintings of mine. Gräfenberg is not a landscape; he is the man who invented the notion of G-spot in the female vagina.

PARADIS H, I, J, K AND L *Paradis h, i, j, k and l* are all booked and planned.

PARADIS K will be in Kiasma, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki.

PARADIS M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y AND Z *Paradis m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, x, y and z* are the letters for the future.

After all the letters from a to z are accomplished, I will proceed to obtain my PhD.

Meanwhile I promise to continue to:

- turn exhibition spaces into realms of pleasure and escapism;
- create places for my pretty and disturbing paintings;
- keep loving to read *Colette's* life story and the travel guides of Venice, where I have lived the most enchanted year of my life;
- keep on working, i.e. repetitively and obsessively continue to paint and build installations;
- repeat my rituals in alphabetical order, since that order gives me the framework I need for working in always different exhibition spaces.

With pleasure I mean:

- the adrenaline peak I get when starting to work in a space I've never seen before;
- the sweating hands when I rise with the hydraulic lift to 12 meters to paint the wall;
- the moment I realize I have to skip my plans and change my ideas;
- the peaceful moments at my studio when I face the oil paint on pink and mint-green canvases;
- the motivation driving me to always build my *Paradis a-z* installations in new spaces.
- the question what is my work.



RESPONSE / *Marquard Smith* My starting point is two short statements from Katja Tukiainen's presentation: 1. *My Work is my Pleasure*, the subtitle

to her 2009 solo exhibition Playground in Korjaamo Gallery in Helsinki.

2. “The research (question) is my work” written by her on the wall of the gallery in that same exhibition. The notions work, pleasure, and research are the main notions I will delve into and I will turn to them in reverse order; I will be spending most time on the first, and less on the second and the third.

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1. RESEARCH First, I want to foreground the subject of research as a legitimate topic in its own right. It is, after all, an integral, necessary, ubiquitous, and yet frequently unacknowledged or undeclared component of the activities of all scholars, academics, curators, and artists. Even if many artists, including Katja Tukiainen like to play down this fact, as is evidenced in her refusal to “add a word [to her presentation] to make [herself] more academic, more philosophical or more theoretical than [she] is.” ‘Just’ an artist, then, albeit one who, in performing either false modesty or a willful ignorance, nonetheless reads Lacan, knows enough to know she prefers Dolce & Gabbana to Deleuze and Guattari, and smart enough to substitute one D&G for another.

I am interested, then, in our shared commitment to the problems, the challenges, and the delights of research in art history, visual culture studies, and curatorial and visual arts practices. And I want to flag up our personal, political, aesthetic, creative, and emotive curiosity with and attention to the process of doing research in the archive, the library, the studio, the gallery and museum, in alternative environments of cultural praxis, the street, and beyond. To do this is to consider critically the pleasures and dangers of our obsessions and encounters with the incoherence, chaos, and wonder at the heart of the process of doing research, the act of searching for the not-yet-known, and how this doing – the encounter with and the enactment or performance of research – is itself a thinking, a writing, a teaching, a curating, and a making.

Katja Tukiainen, when she speaks of her chaos, her routines, her careful planning in advance, and her awareness that such disciplined plans go out the window, as we say, because something new and different and unexpected and previously unanticipated and unimaginable emerges: for sure, she too is doing practice-based research.

I want to say, briefly, that exposing in general the limitations and possibilities of such practice, draws attention to the fact that the idea of research has about it “the invisibility of the obvious”, as the socio-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai writes in his still very prescient article “Globalization and the Research Imagination”:

What do we mean when we speak today of research? (...)

Like other cultural keywords, [research] is so much part of the ground on which we stand and the air we breathe that it resists conscious scrutiny. In the case of the idea of research, there are two additional problems. First, research is virtually synonymous with our sense of what it means to be scholars [and I would add critics and curators and artists] and members of the academy, and thus it has the invisibility of the obvious. Second, since research is the optic through which we typically find out about something as scholars [and again I would add critics and curators and artists] today, it is especially hard to use research to understand research.

I do like the prospect of submitting the idea of research to some conscious scrutiny, making its practices visible, and thinking about what it means to use research to understand research – all things I think EARN and its members have been committed to over the years.

Underpinning these issues related to research, there are a whole series of epistemological, methodological, and even pragmatic overarching questions to raise and keep in mind, that might include, Why does the idea of research obsess us? How might we think of the activity of research, the practice of doing research? How does the process of research make meaning and misunderstanding, furnish belief and disbelief, knowledge and faith? Why do artists, philosophers, historians, curators, and theorists continue to imbue the objects of research – be they archives, documents, paintings, artifacts, displays and cabinets of curiosity, collections, libraries, living rooms, and so on – with animistic qualities, giving them powers of autonomy, animation, life itself? And how do we reconcile our belief in the intrinsic properties and capabilities of such meaning-making objects encountering the things themselves – with the very impossibility of this?

Does this have something to do with their being imbued with aura, because they function as markers of authenticity, uniqueness, and novelty, or are filled with possibility because of the idiosyncratic and eccentric ways in which they are or can be arranged, displayed, and mobilized? And the questions continue, How might other models of research from other fields and disciplines influence and shape the future of visual arts research? How are we to view the awkward arrangement of histories, ideas, taxonomies, images, objects, and environments in interdisciplinary projects such as Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Walter Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*, André Malraux's *The Voices of Silence*, Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*, or Jorge Luis Borges's *Chinese Encyclopaedia* referred to in the introduction to Michel Foucault's book *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*? What do we make of such arrangements – or living methodologies, as I like to call them? And who is responding to and building upon such projects, such traditions? Or initiating alternatives? Can art history, visual cultural studies, curatorial strategies, and fine art practices themselves initiate new strategies for doing research? How might they change our notion of what actually constitutes research? How do our encounters with art and visual cultural practices provoke the emergence of new objects and subjects of research, thereby forcing us to return to the question of research anew? In light of recent curatorial activities and fine art practices, aren't they already doing this?

And here, more recent instances that come to mind of this kind of practice might include the curatorial, programming, publishing, and educational activities of EARN, the writings of W.G. Sebald or Tom McCarthy, and the art of, in addition to Richter, Christian Boltanski, Sophie Calle, Mark Dion, Jimmy Durham, Susan Hiller, Fred Wilson, and any number of younger artists such as Jeremy Deller, Thomas Hirschhorn, Susan Pui San Lok, Multiplicity, The Otolith Group, Uriel Orlow, Olivia Plender, Walid Raad, Raqs Media Collective, or Jamie Showlin. And, of course we must now add Katja Tukiainen.

So many questions! This is a crucial point to note. For underpinning this whole endeavor is the belief, following the cultural critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, that, "[i]t is the questions that we ask that produce the field of inquiry and not some body of materials which determines what questions

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need to be posed to it.” Asking questions of the subjects, objects, media, and environments of our visual cultures, and the particular kinds of questions we pose, produces, as Spivak remarks, the field of inquiry, whether that field of inquiry is grounded and well established, like art history, or still emerging, like visual cultural studies or fine art research. As Spivak declares, there is no body of preexisting materials that shapes wholly the questions that might be put to it. To raise questions, then, is also to demonstrate a commitment to a questioning of the politics of knowledge and the conditions of the production, dissemination, and utilization of that research.

The subject of research, the idea of research itself, is thus a key issue for those working in art history and visual culture studies, and curators, educators, and artists in the visual arts, the art and design school, and the university. This is the case because – as I hope I have begun to make clear – research, and the process of doing research is that essential point at which we begin to ask – in discursive and self-reflexive ways – certain sorts of questions.

Which is why of course research is so important an issue for artistic research and practice-based research, and why daring to speak about it is such a big deal, and why embedding it in postgraduate curricula, as so many of you here have done, as I have done myself, is so significant, but also so dangerous: because the situating and potentialities of these things in the art and design school, exposes the fact that the academicization of the art and design school is both the end of artistic research and its very conditions of possibility.

In doing these things, in asking these questions, in foregrounding the question of research as a question, we begin to mold the future shape (as well as the past) of a discipline, interdiscipline, or area of study – artistic research for instance – or the subjects and objects of study, and even new types of curatorial and art practices.

2. PLEASURE Where is the pleasure in all of this? Let’s remind ourselves, as Katja Tukiainen writes, “My work is my pleasure.” Well, after the last five minutes it is obvious: what could be more work than research! And, by extension, what could be more pleasurable, what could bring greater pleasure, more pleasure, than research!

Where to find such pleasure? In the space of the studio, and the practices therein. An imaginary Garden of Eden. Pre-lapsarian. Before The Fall. Where artists feign ignorance. Before they come to knowledge, before they decide, as Michel Foucault put it a long time ago, to become curious, to admit to curiosity, to submit to it, to begin to evoke concern, to evoke the care one takes for what exists and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular in what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things; a fervor to grasp what is happening and what passes.

In these spaces of practice, such as the artist’s studio, curiosity impels, compels. Research takes place, acts of searching for the not yet known; and it may or may not look or sound or smell like research: it is in day-dreaming, procrastinating, putting the kettle on, having a smoke, having a drink; it is in staring at the white page, the blank canvas, the empty wall, and being consumed by the anxiety and the doubt, and the conflict and the chaos, and the helplessness of beginnings; it is in the failures and

the tears and the frustrations and the tantrums and in having another cigarette; and in the realizing that such failures are inherent to projects, in one way or another to all practices of researching, looking, writing, making, coming to know and to comprehend; and it is in the pleasures of play, absorption, serenity, reverie, distraction, imagination, luck, associations, accidents, serendipity, desires, will, demands, memories, musings, and wonder; contingent impulses one and all. There is pleasure in all of these things for sure. And curiosity. Curiosity in research. Curiosity as research. And there is labor too.

All of this puts self-reflexive practices to the fore; the studio as a space of self-reflexive practices, that is, the artist's involvement in their work as part of that work. All artists are implicated in, and implicate themselves in the process of production; how could they not be. This is a research. There is always already an autobiographical element or angle to them. They all start in some way from the artist's life, experience, or history. Because of this, it is possible to consider on the one hand, the stories that we make and re-make for, on and about ourselves; and on the other hand, to reflect upon how the work that we do involves an understanding of the practical, intellectual, emotional and psychological relationship that we have to our various practices.

In Katja Tukiainen's case, reading Collette? Reading Lacan? Reading Barthes? Wallowing in American popular culture? Pawing over travel guides of Venice? Escaping? Her sweating hands, themselves are evidence of research, of pleasure perhaps, certainly of labor? And, I think, although she does not say this anywhere reading and thinking about and looking at Finnish folk culture and Japanese popular (kawaii) culture because what she calls the "cute and girly" qualities of her work are surely from here or there.

3. AND, SO, FINALLY, AND RUSHING TOWARDS A CONCLUSION, TO LABOR, OR, RATHER WORK. OR, RATHER, THE WORK. What is it that Katja Tukiainen said? "My work is my pleasure"; and "the research [question] is my work."

Finally, then, to labor. To intellectual labor; made invisible to some extent. To psychological labor; made a little less invisible. And certainly to physical labor itself, to the work of the artist, the artist's work – Katja Tukiainen's sweaty hands attest to this. There is pleasure to be found in all such labor. Pleasure also, especially, not just in the labor that the artist does, the work the artist does, but in the work that is the work, the art work. Pleasure in the work that that work does. For, in the end, surely it is – or at least it is meant to be – the work that the art work does that articulates its existence as practice, and as practice-based research. It is the work, that work, in the end, that articulates, evidences, proves the work. And not just as work per se, but as research as such.

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, consciously or unconsciously, by design or chance, will and desire or contingency, the work works. And it is put to work. It works to embody, to fold back into itself, to disassemble, to annihilate, to translate, to transform, to render, and then to articulate in a wholly different tongue the very questions, the research questions – conceiving these questions, asking them, dwelling on them, mulling them over and over and over – that brings it into the artist's grasp, that brings it into being, that gives it shape, an activity, and intrinsic quality; a vitality that gives a question form. And which is then, in turn, turned towards the



asking of further questions, and so on and so forth. This is, I think, why, in the end, and from the beginning, Katja Tukiainen's work is her pleasure, and why her research question is her work.

When Katja Tukiainen says that she is interested in pleasure and escapism, I believe her, but I only half believe her. Part of me wants to reclaim, perhaps on her behalf, whether she wants it or not, the work – the intellectual work, the psychological work, the physical work – that she does, that we all do, as work. It is, after all, the work that is, somehow, in the work, that is the work as such. Her refusal to “add a word to make [herself] sound more academic, more philosophical or more theoretical than [she] is” is, as I have suggested, a display of false modesty, or perhaps a performative wilful ignorance, or perhaps even, and even more so, simply an acknowledging of how an artist carries or wears their academicism, their philosophy, their theory, their reading habits, and an articulation of the sensibility, that elusive sensibility, of the practice-led researcher as they go about doing what they do.

Sometimes, not today but sometimes, such reticence from artists annoys me. And that is when I ask my practice-based graduate students: why do a PhD at all? Why not just be an artist? And then we talk about the differences between these two things; because there are differences, significant differences between them – academically, pedagogically, conceptually, aesthetically, practically, and of course professionally. And all this talking? It is a researching, and a pleasure; and it is hard work too. Katja Tukiainen does this kind of thing, I know, even if she doesn't want us to know she does it.

APPENDIX The absence of definitive guidelines on practice-based research – at universities, art colleagues, and elsewhere – means that the terms of reference and criteria for assessment are up for discussion. Such elasticity allows for a whole series of fundamental, pressing questions to be asked: What is practice-based research? What is a practice-based PhD? How to conceive of such a project? What kind of research training is useful and appropriate for a project such as this? Should an artist or designer be familiar with existing published academic research that pertains to his or her practice, and why should he or she need to demonstrate this familiarity? How and why should his or her practice develop a position in relation to that research? What counts as investigation and evaluation and an independent and original contribution to knowledge? How is this project meant to demonstrate its original contribution to knowledge – can it or should it have to, even? – And is this knowledge as a means to an end, or knowledge as an end in itself? – Should the practice-based PhD be accompanied by some kind of written supplement? And, if so, should it be a commentary, an explanation, or a contextualizing that enables it to demonstrate the research? Or should it have another kind of written accompaniment that is somehow alongside or in dialogue with the practice? All of which is to say, how does practice-based research make explicit – if it should even have to – the process of research that is integral to its practice?

And then, of course, we get to the question of judgment: How do we conceive of the criteria for awarding such a contribution? How should such a project be presented and defended to satisfy examiners? And who would these examiners be, anyway?

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When it comes to judgment, I would hope personally that the point is not for the examiners to judge the extent to which the practice-based research confirms the preexisting regulations and guidelines, but rather that they imagine how it is an opportunity to rethink what the university is capable of supporting, of doing, and of being, what its role is as a site of education within the context of a critically reflexive pedagogy.

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PARADIS A-Z

Janis Rafailidou

CULTURAL TRAVELING,
MIGRATORY MOVEMENTS
AND THE TRACKING SHOT

CULTURAL TRAVELING,

MIGRATORY MOVEMENTS

AND THE TRACKING SHOT

This paper aims at a parallel reading of a brief description of examples of my practice and a retrospective analysis of my work highlighting key points of my theoretical research.

I produced three major projects during the three years of my doctoral practice-based research: *2755 Miles* (2008/2009), *TAXIing in the City* (2009) and *Under the City* (2009/2010). Each project consists of a stage in the research during which I explored methods of entering, documenting and investigating a territory (physically and visually). Through my experimentation in the three projects, a method of filming and narrating that falls between an objective map and a subjective experience of motion and site-specific encountering was developed. In this presentation, I will concentrate on the first project, *2755 Miles*, as an initial example of my visual research and juxtapose it with the context of my theoretical work.

2755 miles is a 17-minute video narrative that engages in issues of migration and displacement by concentrating on the cultural and communal worlds of semi-legal Pakistani refugee workers living on the outskirts of Athens. Its title refers to the geographic distance between Pakistan (Islamabad) and Greece (Athens), the two locations that constitute the start and end point (even if temporal) of the networks that smuggle economic migrants from the subcontinent into Europe. The narrative is located within a horse riding club next to Athens airport where the men live and work.

The geographical location within which the community finds shelter and withdraws from visibility in order to work semi-legally is subject to a recent reconfiguration of space due to the city's expansion into rural areas. My visual investigation focuses on this liminal space between city and country, where the newly constructed private highway Attiki Odos (a toll road) fringed with billboard adverts connects the city's center to the airport. The migrants, with no permanent legal status or passport, reside in this area surrounded by transportation zones with cars, trains, and airplanes in transit and horse riders from the horse riding club. Within this peculiar geographical environment, the men (largely from Pakistan) have formed a strictly male community.

The phenomenon of continuous migration over the last decade has introduced a new wave of refugee communities settling in the area. My visual research examines this through a series of personal and site-specific encounters that I will address below and relate to fieldwork,



2755 miles, Video narrative, 17 min.

2008/2009

documentary, and spatial practices producing simultaneously documents what Jörg Huber terms “physical geographies.”¹

MIGRATION AND THE POST-MODERN URBAN MILIEU

From 1989 onwards, new migration waves have entered the new highly restricted zones of Europe. These waves consist predominantly of clandestine economic migrants seeking labor and asylum seekers who have migrated due to war and low quality of life. During the 1990s many of the migrants came from the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia, while during the last decade they mostly arrive from Africa and the Middle East. With new migration and illegal mobility, new destinations have emerged. The shifting socio-economic conditions of the Mediterranean, along with its geographical location, have made that region the primary destination for new migration.

The formation of groups of young, predominantly male migrants in the cities of Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal have been a steadily developing phenomenon in the late 20th century. Favorite tourist locations and once the source of migrant labor, these countries have become permanent destination or transit zones for migrants who attempt to enter European space in an unsanctioned way. Political and economic problems in their home countries and the lack of support for a legal stay in “host” nations have resulted into large numbers of undocumented migrants who seek residency without any permanent permit, refugee status or potential for asylum protection. This is an urgent and growing phenomenon of our era that “makes the line between old and new migration, and between travel and migration, very thin indeed” as Ginette Verstraete puts it.²

The present era could be understood in terms of a dichotomy between pan-European transnationalism on the one hand, and obsessive migration control and strict border policies on the other. This has produced a new geography of migration and the formation of new divisions of urban migrants largely consisting of semi-legal communities and marginalized groupings in the large cities of Europe. These populations form a type of unregistered citizen, whose displacement results in a refugee existence outside the norms and hierarchies of society. The citizenship gap, meaning “the legal discrepancy between citizen and human rights” as Uta Staiger explains, is particularly evident at national borders and at the periphery and marginal spaces of the urban.³

TERRAIN VAGUES AND PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHIES The city of Athens, one of the many examples in Europe that could be linked to the notion of the post-modern urban milieu, is a city that is gradually experiencing changes on its terrain. This urban re-formation is a product of national economic and socio-political factors that results in the emergence of new social relations and cultural formations in particular areas.

When the city expanded into its outer margins around the beginning of the new millennium, it was subjected to the construction of the private highway in 2001. Simultaneously, Athens’ opening of the newly relocated Athens International Airport and the increased transportation modes (metro-train and buses) connecting the airport to the center effected a major transformation of the area and its visible and invisible population. The topographic transition resulted in a clear segregation of

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¹ Jörg Huber 'Getting To The Bottom of Vision: Theory of Images – Images of Theory, The significance of Ursula Biemann's Video Work for a Theory of Culture' in Ursula Biemann Mission Reports, Artistic Practice in The Field, Video Works 1998-2008, ed. by Ursula Biemann and Jan-Erik Lundström, Sweden: Bildmuseet, Umeå University (2008: 170-177, 173)

² G. Verstraete Tracking Europe: Mobility, Diaspora, and the Politics of Location Durham and London: Duke University Press (2010: 56)



Terrain vague depicting the Roma settlement next to the private highway. Athens. 2010.

³ Uta Staiger Visualizing the Citizenship Gap: EU Borders and Migration in Cultural Productions, in Ursula Biemann: Mission Reports, Artistic Practice in The Field, Video Works 1998-2008, ed. by Ursula Biemann and Jan-Erik Lundström. Sweden: Bildmuseet, Umeå University, (2008: 142-154, 143)

the urban and rural landscapes and the production of in-between spaces and gap-zones meant to be acknowledged by the state and native locals as sites for migratory life in the 21st first century. The transformation at the fringes – the terrain vagues – became even more explicit as new waves of illegal migrants began to reach the country. In view of that, it would perhaps be appropriate to understand the formation of irregular spaces and liminal structures from the geographical and architectural perspective predominant in urban theory from the late 1960s onwards.

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SUB-NARRATIVES OF MOBILITY IN THE URBAN Within this territory, where 2755 miles is located, air flights, highway routes, metro, taxi and bus services all consist as visible journeys traversing an area that is directly connected to travel. In juxtaposition to the evident manifestation of mobility, another invisible system of travels co-exists on the fringes of the urbanized landscape. Male refugee inhabitants residing in the area, most of whom are asylum seekers with no permanent judicial permit, are the people performing what could be characterized as non-legislated or invisible travels. Arguably, the particular area hosts both regular travel narratives corresponding to the established social system and sub-narratives of mobility of an invisible social and cultural reality co-residing in the terrain.

Unlike the rest of the narrative in 2755 miles, the opening and closing scenes of the video take place inside a car and document the journey that some of the migrants and I made to the center of Athens to covertly receive a newly arrived Pakistani family member, who reached the country through smuggling networks after a month in transit. Positioned on the dashboard of the car, facing in, the camera captures the event in an observational manner within the confined space of the vehicle.

A different sense of motion altogether is explored when the camera, carried on horseback in parts of the narrative, is used as a hand-held device. In this case, the horse, like a camera-dolly, allows the filming to stay in motion and produces a kind of hand-held tracking shot. This technique of direct documentation allows me to explore the landscape through a series of journeys as observed from this elevated position. Hence, both horse and car appear in the project as tropes for transportation and as “camera positions” where the video can capture a more direct and intimate aspect of my experiences.

DRIFTING In order to understand the creation of a contemporary notion of geography and of belonging (or non-belonging), we need to search for a definition of geography beyond the charting of inhabited terrains, national states and border lines, bodies of waters and masses of land, climate zones, earth features and phenomena.

Drawn from the activist practices of the Situationists in the late 1950s, *dérive* (meaning drift or drifting) presents a method of passing through and behaving in space opposed to the classic notions of journey or stroll. The means to travel as an attempt to register and diagonally cross a terrain were considered physical experiments. *Dériving* under Situationist practice could be a study of the landscape or an emotional disorientation of oneself “drawn by the attractions in the terrain and the encounters” that one finds there. The data and diagrams of movement produced act as surveys of a psycho-geographical articulation of the modern city.



Documentation of the men climbed on billboard adverts and overlooking the area and the departing planes. Video stills. 2755 miles

As Guy Debord explains in his *Theory of the Dérive* (1958), “it is no longer a matter of precisely delineating stable continents, but of changing architecture and urbanism.”⁴ Accordingly, the long walks in the abandoned areas of the city of Rome by the Italian collective Stalker in the 1990s are all practices describing methods of geographical mapping, physical tracing and traveling in situ with an attempt to forge a different kind of geographical discourse.

CULTURAL TRAVELING,
MIGRATORY MOVEMENTS
AND THE TRACKING SHOT

NEW CARTOGRAPHIES AND TRAVEL IN VISUAL PRACTICE

There is an urgency to re-think and re-define notions such as geography, cartography and human mobility in order to take into account the transformation of space occurring on a local and global scale.

My theoretical and historical research responds to this necessity by concentrating on particular art and visual practices concerned with documenting social reality and re-writing geography from the perspective of the contemporary mobile body. See also, for instance, the extensive researches and mappings produced by the collective Multiplicity or the numerous video essays by the Swiss artist Ursula Biemann.

Contemporary migratory experience and the global and local socio-economic processes have generated a type of migratory geography on the world map where the specificity and immediacy of fieldwork (as in ethnography, documentary, journalism, activism) and the role of digital technologies propose new modes of vision and knowledge. Mobility, visibility/invisibility and the matter of encountering between differently positioned subjects in the spaces of uncertain geographies require an art practice placed in the intermediate position between new documentary modes and digital video essayism. That is an issue acknowledged by politically aware, contemporary practices that unify film, art, and theory today.

Current art practices and moving image works concerned with the social and liminal places of geography use fieldwork and travelling as one of their most common research methods. Consequently, it is appropriate to talk about the mobile artist and the travelling camera as significant aspects of this study. Examples of such video works engaged in travel, the use of the mobile camera and the tracking shot, which I examine in my thesis, are: *Route 181: Fragments of A Journey In Palestine –Israel* (2004) by Michael Khleifi and Eyal Sivan, *Crossing Surda (A record of going to and from work)* (2002) by Emily Jacir, *3 MPH Horse to Rocket* (2002) by Ann-Sofi Sidén, *The Green Line* (2004) by Francis Alÿs, *Ten* (2002) by Abbas Kiarostami.

2755 MILES VIDEO INSTALLATION Exhibited in a gallery context, *2755 miles* was presented in the form of a video installation. The work is composed of three elements: the live inhabitation of the horse in the gallery space, the wall of straw, and the video narrative *2755 Miles* projected in the room created behind that wall. The exhibition was a collaboration between Project Space Leeds and Whitechapel Art Gallery (London).

RESPONSE/ *Mika Elo* In her presentation Rafailidou showed visual material that illuminated the central themes of her artistic work: cultural traveling and diaspora. Clearly, these are not just any themes but her themes in a strong sense. Born in Athens, studying in Leeds,

⁴ *Guy Debord 'Theory of the Dérive' was published in Internationale Situationniste #2 (Paris, December 1958). This translation is from: Guy Debord 'Theory of the Dérive' in Situationist International Anthology, ed. by Ken Knabb, Revised and Expanded Edition, (2006: 50-54)*



Closing scene of the video, the return journey. Video stills. *2755 miles*

and developing her projects in multicultural environments, Rafailidou is a cultural traveler herself and an emigrant, as so many artists in our globalized world today are.

Already before starting her PhD project Rafailidou realized some art projects dealing with themes of immigration, cultural difference, and intercultural encounter. In a project from 2007, she created a kind of cultural bazaar in a gallery space in Leeds. Besides video installations engaging in immigrant communities in Leeds, she organized an intercultural meal in the exhibition space with Chinese, Asian Muslim, Sikh, Polish, West Indian and Greek groups. In another project, it was Rafailidou's own Greek grandmother inhabiting the exhibition space, who played the role of an exponent of the cultural difference by just being there.

In the three art projects making up the backbone of her PhD project, Rafailidou continues studying migratory experiences and cultural geographies in the urban environment. In *2755 miles*, a decisive shift takes place in regard to her own position: the project dealing with illegal Pakistani immigrants is set in Athens, her city of origin. She is now approaching her topic as someone belonging to the dominant culture and not as an immigrant. The status of herself and her video camera as agents crossing the borders and limits appear in a new light.

In *TAXIing in the City*, Rafailidou puts herself in the position of a taxi driver in order to be able to collect visual, auditory and experiential material of transitory encounters in a multicultural environment. In this project, she also does experiments in what she calls digital essayism, a method of combining drawings and animations with video material.

With the third project entitled *Under the City* Rafailidou ends up using an installation format in order to thematize spatial aspects of narration in the very viewing situation. She claims that she is aiming in this way at a "physical extension of narration." I see in these shifts in approach an indication of an ongoing research process that constantly seeks new ways of articulating the central questions motivating the whole process.

Borders, territories and negotiations concerning access and exclusion as well as appropriate distance constitute a multifaceted question to Rafailidou both in terms of art and research. In my view, a kind of culmination point of these thematics becomes visible in her attempts to negotiate between the two poles of her double role as an artist-researcher. This is an unavoidable task for every artist-researcher.

In Rafailidou's case this double role, however, finds its articulation also in her artworks. In *2755 miles* Rafailidou appears herself in the film in a role that is not easy to define. She is the narrator and the filmmaker as well as a fictional figure, whose clothes refer to different cultural contexts. This brings an interesting tension to the otherwise documentary-like aspirations of the film. Rafailidou herself sees her ambivalent role in the video as 'non-autobiographical.' This self-reflexivity is thematized right at the beginning of the film: the voice over (her own voice) states at the start of the film: "If this film were just a documentary, it would start like this..." And the film starts – and moves on.

For me, the most intriguing feature of Rafailidou's work is the way she manages to raise questions concerning bodily aspects of narration. In the three art projects belonging to her PhD project, various vehicles of narrative movement form something like metonymic chains; and their



Walk About Rome. Stalker. 1995.

relative velocities, distances and proximities become almost tangible. In *TAXIing in the City*, it is the car that functions as the mover of the narration. This brings into my mind Abbas Kiarostami's films such as *Taste of Cherry* where the car plays a central role in the visual organization of the narrative space. Even closer to Rafailidou are Kiarostami's *Ten* and *Life and Nothing* more... where also her way of embedding fictional stories in a documentary setting finds a point of reference.

In *2755 miles* the car initially establishes the space of narration, in the next turn, however, multiple spatialities are introduced: the velocities of a walking body, a horse and an airplane intersect with the non-places of mobile communication, TV screen and the transitory refugium of the illegal immigrants. The narration emerges through particular places, rather than encountering a preconceived space. Rafailidou's vehicles of narration are like the vessel that constitutes an image of place in a famous passage in Aristotle's *Physics*: what counts are the contact points between the container and the contained.

This kind of search for points of departure for narration is, in my view, both interesting and relevant in our globalized world that does not have any transcendental order anymore. I can't help relating this approach, that foregrounds particular encounters and places, with a philosophical theme that constitutes one of my own main interests: the rethinking of the relation between time and space. This complex theme exemplified by Heidegger's *Kehe* can be put into terms of deconstructing ideas that give priority to time and to interiority. Events, literally, *take place*.

When speaking of a group exhibition, where *2755 miles* was presented in the form of an installation that included a living horse, Rafailidou suggests that the horse could be considered a "signifier to its virtual presence." This stunning statement makes me wonder if something similar happens to the video camera in Rafailidou's video works. How to conceive of the agency of the camera? In what ways does it present itself in the visual organization of the narration?

Rafailidou seems to be clear about the objectives of her PhD project.

She says that she intends to develop new forms of documentary filmmaking. She puts this in terms of video essaying and new narrative forms. When formulating her goals Rafailidou refers to Angela Dimitrakaki, a Greek documentary filmmaker, according to whom video essay is a work in which the artist-essayist makes efforts to re-articulate the relationship between structure and agency. In my view, this is an apt description of Rafailidou's work, at least when it comes to her videos and installations, both in terms of narration and self-reflexive artistic positioning.

To conclude, I would like to take up some notes I made on the temporal structure of Rafailidou's research. In her case, the artistic work comes first. Her written reflective discourse builds on already existing artworks. Rafailidou characterizes her writing in terms of re-evaluation and retrospective understanding of her artistic practice. When describing her research process she also speaks of artistic translation. This makes me curious. Does this notion apply only to her way of processing her materials during the conception and realization of her artworks, or can we conceive of her reflective writing, as well, in terms of an artistic translation?

A temporal relation often turns into a hierarchical one. A secured opposition between a subject producing knowledge and a distanced object to be illuminated by that knowledge is close when making is

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Video still. *Europlex*. Ursula Biemann in
collaboration with Angela Sanders. 2003.

succeeded by reflecting and when the latter, thanks to its posteriority, succeeds in making this relation sound clear and simple. I hope that Rafailidou can resist the temptations of this kind of mastery and that she finds ways of pushing her artistic processes further on the level of her writing as well. In my view, her ambiguous use of the somewhat clumsy terms practice-based research, practice-led research and research-led practice hint at a fruitful entwining of the different levels of her work. Far more interesting than the adaptation to this vocabulary dictated by the institutional frame, however, is the tuning of various elements of the research process to match each other. Artistic research is at its best when it does not just bring artworks into a research context, but when it *works* in its own right – not unlike artworks when they touch us.

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2755 miles, 2008 -2009 Exhibition at the

Project Space Leeds, UK. Documentation

view. Installation: horse, wall of straw.

Room on the left: 450cm x 400cm,

wall of straw: 430cm x 620cm x 40cm

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