Musical Voices from the Past:   
Maria Bania’s *“Sweetings” and “Babylonish Gabble”*

Stefan Östersjö

**Introduction**

Maria Bania’s dissertation from 2008 is entitled *“Sweetenings” and “Babylonish Gabble”: Flute Vibrato and Articulation of Fast Passages in the 18th and 19th Centuries*. It addresses some highly detailed but central issues related to what is often referred to today as historically informed performance (HIP). The author defines the purpose of her work as follows: “This study aims to disclose and define the execution and use of certain flute-playing techniques that are documented in Western Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, with respect to vibrato as well as to the articulation of fast passages.”1 The thesis examines an extensive period of time and broad geographic areas, which is made possible by clearly delineating the scope in terms of the performance techniques studied. It should be immediately noted that vibrato and articulation of fast passages are not performance techniques that can be reduced to technicalities. On the contrary, these performance techniques constitute fundamental building blocks in the emergence of a musician’s personal sound. For the same reason, Bania’s study never treads on neutral ground; instead, each new source introduces a new polemical angle. An excellent example is how William Nelson James, in his book *A Word or Two on the Flute*, first published in 1826, takes a critical view of the use of double tonguing, making direct reference to the influential and controversial English flautist Charles Nicholson. James refers to Nicholson’s double tonguing as “Babylonish gabble”, a metaphor that lends itself to the title of Bania’s dissertation:

The double tonguing used to be of high consideration among flute-players; but, with all possible deference to the eminent masters who still use it, I am of opinion, that, in this age of refinement, it ought to be entirely exploded. It is, in every point, view it which way we will, a trick of execution, which has as much of quackery in it as any of the wonderful nostrums, which have for their object the renovation of human life. It is also a false and bad articulation; and however well it might have served the purpose of old masters, when the flute was, as it were, an instrument full of quackeries, it is certainly unworthy the professors of the present age, and of the great perfection to which the instrument is now brought. /.../ To hear a moderate player on the flute performing a double-tonguing passage, is one of the most disagreeable noises which the ear is subject to. It is, in fact, a complete jumble of notes, which have neither meaning, articulation, nor expression; and even in the best specimens of it, of our best masters, there is always such a degree of dryness and harshness attending it, that it is much to be wished the means of using it had never been discovered. This articulation is used to an alarming extent by some masters; and whether it be that the evil is contagious, and they cannot avoid using it, I know not, but there is scarcely a staccato passage in any composition, which they do not execute with this “Babylonish gabble”. Such a method must always be derogatory to the instrument, as it presupposes the impossibility of accomplishing the staccato passages in any other manner.2

What characterises correct flute playing and distinguishes it from “quackery” and poor manners constitutes a core question in all of these flute schools. The use of both single and double tonguing and various attitudes to vibrato are discussed with the same impassioned and at times provocative manner by flautists from different stylistic camps. With its carefully weighed selection of such sources, Bania’s dissertation gives an animated picture of how centrally important these performance techniques were, and her work thereby provides a window on the inner mechanisms of several of the greatest musicians of their day.

**Methodological and Theoretical Framework**

The dissertation is largely structured around summary descriptions of instructions found in historical sources. But the work also includes a great deal of the author’s own experimenting with these performance techniques, as well as artistic productions, primarily in the form of two commercially released CDs. Bania’s methodological discussion is strikingly brief and does not address how the author’s own music-making is documented and analysed as part of her work on the dissertation. Nor does she devote much time to the presentation of prior research or the localisation of her work in the broader research field (we must immediately acknowledge that the thesis as a whole is a massive opus of 350 pages). At the same time, Bania clearly indicates the ways in which her work constitutes a contribution to prior research on historical flute techniques, thereby clearly positing the project within a musicological context. My intention with this essay is to contribute to further discussion of how artistic research can contribute to research on historical performance practices, and I hope thereby to also bring to light how Bania’s dissertation constitutes an important reference in the development of interdisciplinary initiatives in music research in which a deep foundation in musical practice and artistic composition offer a new opportunity for the contemporary research field.

My own theoretical premise here is based in part on sociologically orientated perspectives on the research community and the art world, or “art worlds”, as Howard Becker would say. I have previously described artistic researchers as nomads who migrate between an art world and a research world, with both experimentation and the artist’s subjectivity tending to amplify their work.3 The experimental dimension of artistic research in music, which aims not toward aesthetics but rather a particular approach for artists, has been discussed by Paulo De Assis4 and in a large collection edited by Bob Gilmore and Darla Crispin5. But the experimental dimension in artistic research can also have the character of scientific experiments, and thus it constitutes a bridge between the worlds of art and science. In addition, the subjective dimension constitutes an important factor in the evaluation and design of artistic research projects (see Figure 1).

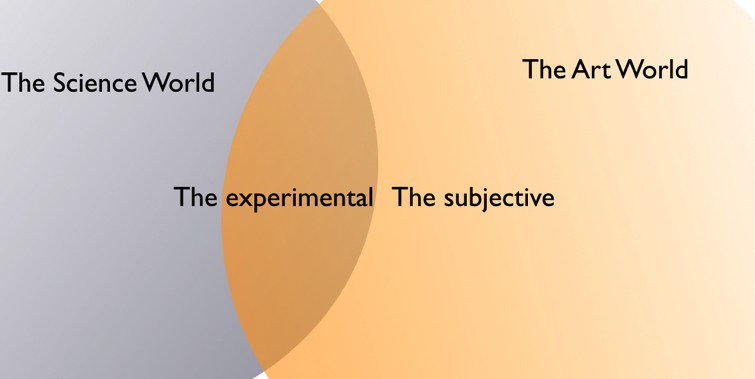


Figure 1. The four fields in which artistic researchers operate.

Another point of reference is a model I have developed together with the composer and researcher David Gorton that tries to capture the embodied interaction between technological and psychological tools that shape the composer, improviser or interpreter’s individual and subjective “voice”, a term that can be traced back to Naomi Cumming’s influential book *The Sonic Self* (2000). The section that follows next is a brief presentation of how this model can also be applied to the study of historical performance practices.

**Musical Voices of Today and of the Past**

Since Elisabeth Le Guin introduced the concept of “carnal musicology” through the publication of her book *Boccherini’s Body* (2006), perspectives from “embodied music cognition”6 have begun to make their way into research on historical performance practices. In artistic research circles, Peter Spissky’s 2017 dissertation, *Ups and Downs*, constitutes an important reference. Le Guin sums up this kind of embodied perspective in musical practice and historical performance practice in the following way:

Just as the composer-performer’s embodied experience informed musical choices on every level, so did that of the listeners, and every bit as constantly and essentially. In this sense, the whole affair of performance is one of repeated mutual confirmation, negation, and refinement of the hypothesis: This is a body, and this is what it means to have one.7

Below I will offer a brief summary of a model that considers musical creativity from a similar perspective. When I formulated the model together with David Gorton, it was as part of a study of musical subjectivity at the Orpheus Institute in Ghent, where we were both working as artistic researchers. Our study was primarily about intersubjectivity in the collaboration between musician and composer. What we were trying to demonstrate with this model was how a negotiation between the subjectivity of a composer and that of a musician leads to a shared “voice” that temporarily dissolves some differences and accentuates others. But this presupposed the observation that a similar negotiation of a musician’s voice is a fundamental precondition for both individual and collective musicianship. For Naomi Cumming, the musician’s relationship to the instrument is transformational, something that is further strengthened in the interaction with teachers, fellow musicians and the score, which in turn is permeated with agency that takes form and opens itself for the reader:

The musician’s work is to master these potentialities on a given instrument and to work with them in accordance with the requirements of a style, drawing out the possibilities of a composed musical moment by making his or her choices of sound, emphasis, and tempo. Something of the musician’s own “character” will be heard in the choices he or she makes, in the patterns of emphasis that constitute a performance style. So it is that his or her own “subjectivity” appears.8

But for Cumming, this “voice” is not just an expression for the musician’s subjective experience of the music, nor merely a representation of the musician’s relationship to his or her own instrument; it is also something with which every musician can identify from the outside: “A relationship with the violin’s sound can include the idea of projecting a ‘voice’ that is one’s own, and also of standing apart to listen to the sound as the ‘voice’ of another.”9 In order to create a deeper understanding of the sociological processes that shape a musician’s “voice”, we turn now to Ouerre Bourdieu’s theory of the “habitus”. A musician’s embodied relationship to an instrument is simultaneously deeply integrated into value systems and relationships, which Bourdieu analyses as cultural and social capital.10 In Figure 2, we see a diagrammatic representation of the various agents that are active in the emergence of a musician’s subjective “voice”. Central to this embodying perspective is the insight that all aspects of these processes are not accessible through reflection and introspection, but rather only through observations and measurements. Our point of departure for this study of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, therefore, was that combinations of reflexive and qualitative methods would necessarily have to be supplemented by qualitative methods of documentation and analysis.

The study was designed as a collaboration between two artistic researchers, Gorton and myself, together with two musicologists at IPEM, a centre for systematic musicology in Ghent. We undertook a detailed analysis of my interaction with my ten-string guitar and Gorton’s score through a combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses of conductors’ gestures, and specifically how they can be related to musical structure. The aim of this highly detailed study of musical gestures was to give us a way of understanding music’s tacit knowledge and how it is formed through interaction with an instrument. But what interested us initially was how a long-term and intimate collaboration between a musician and a composer can give rise to a similar kind of negotiation of “voice” as occurs in a string quartet. We call the shared voice that emerges from such a negotiation the “discursive voice” – not because it depends on verbal agreements, but more as an attempt to capture the negotiation that generates the voice:

The discursive voice can be conceived not simply as a combination of the composer’s and performer’s voices. In almost any performance one may discern an engagement between the voices of composer and performer. Rather, the discursive voice emerges from the process of collaboration. This is most obvious perhaps in pre-compositional collaborative work, such as the Malmö sessions. In situations like these, the composer has direct access to the performer’s instrument, and the performer has direct access to the composer’s notation (at various stages of development), with the guiding and moderating performance and compositional practices shared. What emerges is a negotiation; a coming together of the two voices through the exploration of a situation in the present.11

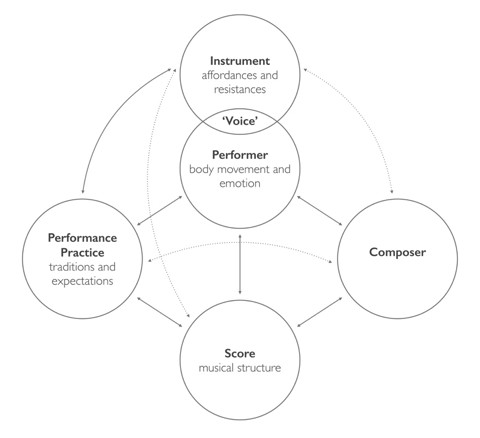


Figure 2. Relationships that are constitutive in the emergence of a musician’s “voice”.15

But similar negotiations occur in every rehearsal of a score – even if the composer is not present. Another kind of complexity enters into this negotiation when a score bears with it several hundred years of performance practices. Here musicological studies of historical performance practices constitute a starting point from which recent decades’ detailed study of historical recordings has further concretised the negotiation between historical “voices”. Mine Dogantan-Dack argues that we ought to view phonograph records “not merely as documents of performances that took place in some specific time and place, in one or several takes, but also as documents of a performer’s musical voice.”12 Sound recording technologies13 have given the interpreter a chance to interact with many layers of such “musical voices” from the collected history of a given work of music. New questions thereby arise about copyright, authenticity and other perspectives on the ontology of a piece of music.14

Maria Bania’s dissertation takes on a similar cornucopia of documented historical “voices” and does so by focusing specifically on vibrato playing and a lively discussion of the use of single tonguing and double tonguing in fast passages. Because the period studied in the thesis pre-dates the era of recording technology, the main source material is made up of flute schools. The dissertation examines a total of 67 flute schools (out of a total of 130 known publications from this period of time). In addition to these main sources, the author has also studied scores, newspaper articles, reviews, encyclopaedia entries and other historical sources. In the next section, we will address the results of the entire study in all its parts before returning to the models introduced above.

**Dissertation Findings**

I will summarise here the findings of the dissertation in three parts, addressing first vibrato playing, then articulation of fast passages, and finally a more comprehensive summary of the work’s artistic results.

**Flute Vibrato**

As we have already seen, the initial parts of the thesis are relatively brief, thus leaving room for a particularly abundant presentation of the work’s findings. Each finding is presented in its own part, each of which includes summaries of maxims found in historical sources, comparisons of various musicians’ contributions and a discussion. The aesthetics of flute playing has been gradually evolving, and it is also characterised by a variety of distinctive national attributes, and this colours the presentation of the debate that provides the basis for many of these flute schools’ rhetorical forms. Once again, this intense polemic is fundamentally rooted in the formative role these playing techniques have had in the emergence of each musician’s subjective “voice” and in the embodying collaboration between a musician’s habitus and the materiality that is the heart of the instrument. To reach the bottom of such a study of a historical musician’s “voice”, it is necessary to establish an embodied understanding of the instrument’s agency through repeated and meticulous practice. Bania gives clear expression to these opportunities in the comparison below between two techniques for vibrato playing used by Charles Nicholson:

Since shaking the flute is supposed to imitate the (ordinary) flattement, the effect of the two techniques should be similar, a fact that can teach us something about the execution of both. According to my practical experience, shaking the flute can be performed slow or fast, although not as fast as the flattement technique, and the speed can easily be changed. The pitch is changed both upwards and downwards, which is the biggest difference between this technique and the flattement technique. (p. 21)

Bania goes on to describe how, in what she calls her “practical experiments” (see p. 78, for example), she found that “there was a significant difference when I tried to move the finger as much ‘over’ the instrument as possible, rather than directly covering a full hole. In the first case the finger touched the flute very gently and softly, and created a smoother fluctuation in the pitch, similar to the vibrato created by covering holes partly. In the second case the pitch changed more clearly and bluntly; the sound was more like a trill with a smaller pitch-change” (p. 78).

In observations such as these, which are grounded in performative knowledge, it becomes possible for the author, through a combination of source studies and artistic experimentation, to address issues of a typically musicological nature. In the dissertation, these discoveries are posited in direct dialogue with prior musicological studies:

In general, my practical examination of the fingerings for the flattement technique printed by Nicholson, Alexander, Weiss, Bown, and Lindsay resulted in only small pitch-changes or none at all. I conclude that the pitch-changes in the flattement technique used by the players of the Nicholson’s school were smaller than in the previous century. This is supported by Spell, who had the opportunity to use flutes by Nicholson, and writes that Nicholson’s vibration was timbral rather than pitch-related, with little or no pitch-change. (pp. 75–76)

This dialogue between musicology and artistic research suggests that a stronger foundation in artistic practice has the potential to contribute deeper perspectives to traditional music research. A broader discussion of methodological development for the design of studies that combine different methods of documentation and analysis, and that unite different knowledge perspectives, is a precondition for the continued development of interdisciplinary music research.

**Performance Techniques for Articulation in Fast Passages**

As we have already seen, various flautists’ contributions to articulation in fast passages using single and double tonguing was a source of lively debate during the period examined by the thesis. As Nicholson concluded in his 1836 treatise *A School for the Flute*:

Double tonguing is an articulation which has had its full share of abuse and condemnation, but like other innovations on the good old style of flute playing, it has carried conviction by its utility: its advanges [sic] are now freely admitted, and clearly developed by the vast improvement which has taken place in flute playing within the last few years; for certainly our predecessors were totally unacquainted with the “railroad speed” displayed in the performances of the present generation.16

At the end of the eighteenth century, leading flautists in France were arguing forcefully against the use of double tonguing, so forcefully in fact as to largely deny the existence (rhetorically) of this kind of playing. An example of this kind of critique may be found in the following citation from a flute school by Mathieu Peraut:

Many people believed and still believe, that there is double-tonguing on the flute; nothing could be more erroneous: I can only attribute this error to their inexperience, because it suffices to consult one’s common sense to be persuaded that double-tonguing cannot produce the effect of two tongue strokes at the same time. To do so it would be necessary to have two tongues, and no one can prove to me that there can be double-tonguing on the flute as long as they cannot prove that one equals two.17

This condemnation of the use of double tonguing outraged many German flautists in particular and incited an intense debate. The first obvious counterargument was that the French flautists such as Peraut had no knowledge of what they were speaking about. But Bania demonstrates how shifts in the use of performance techniques are usually driven by aesthetic forces, and she notes that the use of legato playing became increasingly common among these French flautists, which made the use of double tonguing less critical in fast passages. Single-tongue playing was simply seen as “a brilliant and useful articulation for fast passages” (p. 175). In her concluding discussion, Bania takes up the case of the French flute school as an example, asserting that

… the dissemination of a musical treatise is not necessarily equivalent to the impact of its influence, and practice could differ even from written descriptions in very influential treatises. For example, it seems reasonable to assume that the students at the Paris conservatory were influenced by the treatises used at the school; however, despite the strong position of the methods by Devienne, and Hugot and Wunderlich, both of which advocate single-tonguing, double-tonguing with d-g/t-k soon became the most used technique in France for articulating fast passages. (p. 268)

Bania’s presentation of national styles and flautists’ individual contributions in terms of single and double tonguing is also accompanied by abundant references to the author’s own recordings, which are included as a CD appendix. This appendix is made up of short excerpts and a number of individual movements selected from two commercially released CDs and from a concert recorded by Swedish Radio. This material is the most important artistic result of the dissertation work.

**Artistic Findings**

The dissertation’s artistic findings were already presented in the introduction, and the reader is given further details in an appendix (pp. 8–10). The author’s artistic method in her work with the two CD projects is described as follows in the introduction:

Rather than recording some of the few pieces in which the techniques discussed in the study are indicated, I applied the knowledge achieved from my material to music without such techniques indicated, which is the common situation for flutists. In playing pieces with the techniques indicated my role would have been to solely reproduce the composer’s notation. To exclusively record music examples from the treatises and/or realizations of the technical descriptions would not have been artistic research. (p. 9)

This expanding application of the research findings on another historical repertoire of course constitutes an outstanding contribution. In addition, the recordings on the CDs engaged musicians who have a central position in HIP in Scandinavia. The discs were released by Caprice and Da Capo Records, which were the leading labels at the time. The artistic results are therefore well conceptualised and positioned within a relevant art world, where they can also exert influence and gain distribution on multiple levels. Here there is also the potential for an interaction between discursive communication of knowledge through the written dissertation and artistic communication (material and performative). Just as Bania concludes above, the artistic independence in artistic publications constitutes a precondition for the project’s quality as artistic research. We can now take on the question of how the dissertation's different parts work together by returning to the two models described above (see Figures 1 and 2).

**Interdisciplinarity and Artistic Research**

We have already noted that Bania’s CD projects are integrated into an art world that is centred on institutions for HIP in Scandinavia. Although there is no direct discussion of the scientific world in this dissertation, the work as a whole suggests a clear foundation in musicological practice, a field that has not only been central to the emergence of historical performance practices, but also constituted the foundations for the first artistic research efforts in musical performance and interpretation at the University of Gothenburg dating as far back as 1977.18 In my understanding of this context, the idea of an interdisciplinary opportunity in the form of a deepened relationship between artistic and scientific practices and methods has been a guiding star ever since the first attempts at an “artistic-creative doctoral programme in musicology”, as this first initiative was called in the 1970s. Bania also addresses the question of the project’s significance for further research in a discussion of the role her own artistic practice played in her work on the dissertation:

For further research in historical performance practice, playing might be considered a natural and valuable method of source criticism and a sounding documentation a natural part of the presentation of results. To study flute technique in the area and period investigated in this study is a privileged situation in terms of the amount of source material, compared to carrying out a similar study on most other instruments, including the voice. Furthermore, the subjects chosen in this study are physically easier to study and define than several other matters of interest in flute-playing. Therefore, in building our knowledge about performance practice in the 18th and 19th centuries, the results of this study should be a valuable resource for investigations into, for example, the articulation of fast passages on other wind instruments. (p. 269)

In other parts of the dissertation, Bania writes enthusiastically about the function of her playing as experiments, but the examples we have seen above of more detailed thinking about these experiments are relatively few, and they are not based on any systematic documentation or analysis of her own practice. At the same time the project demonstrates the potential for new knowledge through interdisciplinary and practice-based efforts, the role of the artistic researcher, and especially the development of methods for documentation and analysis of these phases of the work, constitutes an area for further research. This is an abundantly researched thesis in itself, but the potential for interdisciplinary music research that it suggests indicates the future of music research. Perhaps the research environment at the University of Gothenburg, given its long history of collaboration between artistic research and musicology, may be seen as the natural starting point for further interdisciplinary initiatives in research on historical performance practices. I believe that there are great opportunities here for developing methods that can extend beyond the reconstruction of a musician’s historical voice, toward a co-creating transformation, and into the contemporary art world.

1 Maria Bania, *“Sweetenings” and “Babylonish Gabble”: Flute Vibrato and Articulation of Fast Passages in the* *18th and 19th Centuries*, ArtMonitor, 2008, p. 1. Henceforward, page references to the book will be given in the body of the text.

2 William Nelson James quoted in Bania (2008), *“Sweetenings”*, p. 229.

3 Stefan Östersjö, “Thinking-Through-Music: On Knowledge Production, Materiality, Embodiment, and Subjectivity in Artistic Research” in *Discipline and Resistance*, edited by Jonathan Impett, Leuven University Press, 2017.

4 Paulo de Assis, *Logic of Experimentation: Reshaping Music Performance in and through Artistic Research*, Leuven University Press, 2018, see for example pp. 21–24 for a definition of an experimental artistic research effort.

5 Darla Crispin and Bob Gilmore (eds.), *Artistic Experimentation in Music: An Anthology*, Orpheus Institute Series. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014.

6 For a discussion of this theory, see Marc Leman, *Embodied Music Cognition and Mediation Technology*, MIT Press, 2008.

7 Le Guin, Elisabeth, *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology*. University of California Press, 2006, p. 258.

8 Naomi Cumming, *The Sonic Self*, Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 9.

9 Ibid, p. 5.

10 Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard University Press, 1984.

11 David Gorton and Stefan Östersjö, “Choose Your Own Adventure Music: On the Emergence of Voice in Musical Collaboration” in *Contemporary Music Review*, 35 (6), 2016, pp. 579–598: here p. 593.

12 Mine Dogantan-Dack, “Recording the Performer’s Voice” in *Recorded Music: Philosophical and Critical Reflections*. Dogantan-Dack, Mine (ed.), Middlesex University Press, 2008, p. 299.

13 There is not space in this chapter for a discussion of the influence of phonograph records on contemporary music culture, but perhaps it will suffice to quote Dogantan-Dack here: “The critical emphasis placed on two characteristics made possible for the first time by recordings, namely the repeatability and the spatial temporal social decontextualization of the sounds of a performance, are more than likely to have played a significant role of reinforcing a work-based conception of music during the twentieth century.” Ibid, p. 295.

14 For further discussion of these issues, see for example Brooks, Östersjö and Wells, “Footnotes” in *Voices, Bodies, Practices* by Catherine Laws, William Brooks, David Gorton, Thanh Thuy Nguyen, Stefan Östersjö and Jeremy J. Wells, Orpheus Institute Series, Leuven University Press, 2019.

15 Reproduced from David Gorton and Stefan Östersjö, “Choose Your Own Adventure Music: On the Emergence of Voice in Musical Collaboration” in *Contemporary Music Review*, 35 (6), 2016, pp. 579–98: here p. 589.

16 Charles Nicholson quoted in Bania (2008), *“Sweetenings”*, p. 232.

17 Mathieu Peraut quoted in Bania (2008), *“Sweetenings”*, p. 172.

18 Sverker Jullander. *Musikalisk gestaltning som forskningsämne. Ett försök till positionsbestämning*. STM, pp. 70–90.

Otto von Busch’s *Fashion-able:   
The Axiology of Escape Routes*

Karl Palmås

In his dissertation, *Fashion-able*, Otto von Busch demonstrates that design practice is characterised primarily by an interest in tools that work. The designer does not waste energy on critical discussions about poorly functioning tools; the designer’s attention is instead directed at tools that are intended to produce a pragmatic and affirmative effect on the world.1 This assertion may be seen as uncontroversial. For example, it is congruent with Herbert Simon’s well-worn definition of design: “Everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.”2 Using Simon’s terminology, scientific fields may be sorted into two categories: the natural sciences and the design sciences. The former aim to describe the state of things; the latter describe artefacts intended to make the world into what it ought to be.3

At the same time, von Busch’s conclusion about the nature of the design practice is not as innocent as it sounds. It implies a demarcation in regard to – and a distancing from – the critical design practice that works with conceptual objects. Critical design artefacts do not aim for practical utility; they are meant to be interpreted as poetic interventions that challenge and negate a given discursive order.4 This boundary, however, is drawn by both sides: in critical design, non-radical decorative design is known as “affirmative design”.5

The reader will not find the passage about what characterises the designer’s practice until late in the book – to be precise, in the methodological appendix that follows a preface and five substantial chapters. At the same time, this passage is a key to the elucidation of the subtext of the work – an indication of what is at stake in *Fashion-able*. It is productive, namely, to read this work as an intervention in a broader discussion about how art, academia and activism should relate to the world. In this, the politics of negation stand against the politics of affirmation, interpretation against experimentation, and critical distance against a kind of proximity. This proximity is sometimes called “critical proximity”, but a label like that can be misleading, since it is the c-word itself that is at stake. This is where *Fashion-able* is situated – in the midst of the broad discussion about the productivity in the concept of “criticism”.

This essay will later return to the question of the dissertation’s place, and more precisely its place in a political-historical, intellectual and, not least, technological context. I will also argue that this context can already be historicised: *Fashion-able* grew out of a time that was clearly different from the present in which this essay is being written. Until then, the essay will examine the primary methodological and theoretical features of this dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Design at the School of Design and Crafts.

\* \* \*

Let us continue examining the methodological appendix that includes von Busch’s articulation of the boundary drawn around the nature of design practice. Starting at the end, by the way, is allowable when it comes to a dissertation that has been defended in the clear spirit of Deleuze and Guattari. The dissertation is not unlike Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* to the extent that it invites a rhizomatic reading in which the chapters do not need to be read in any particular order. This is clear from the preface to the thesis, which, like the introduction in *A Thousand Plateaus*, is intended to serve as a user’s guide. This can also be seen in the “contents map” that replaces the traditional table of contents. A tracing paper is even included in the binder between the map pages, along with instructions to the reader to create a mind map based on their reading of the meandering, mycelium-like interconnections in the text.

In the methodological addendum we see another clear influence from Deleuze, who happens to be the most quoted thinker in the dissertation.6 This influence is expressed, for example, in the use of the term *line* in the methodological appendix. The term is mobilised to clarify what von Busch wants to avoid: he doesn’t want to write an artistic research method that follows the dominant linear descriptions of research methodology’s dogmatic sequential structure: research question > design > empirical study > analysis > presentation. The term *line* is also mobilised to describe the alternative method von Busch proposes. The most important thing in this context is the axiological use of the Deleuze-Guattari term *lines of flight*.7 Ultimately the purpose of the research in the dissertation is to search for possible lines of flight – thoughts and practices that break loose, liberate and create the unexpected. Once again, pragmatism leads the way: referring to *A Thousand Plateaus*, von Busch asks not if the research is true, but rather if it works – if it makes possible new thoughts and new design interventions in the world.8

In addition to the line of flight as a comprehensive axiological inspiration, von Busch also describes a series of more concrete, method-orientated “lines of process”. These, in turn, are operationalisations of established methodological approaches, such as action research, interventionism and small changes. Thus, it is based on these two types of lines – lines of flight (the overall purpose of the research) and lines of process (which give direction or concrete working methods) – that von Busch presents how his artistic projects have been executed and how they fit into the dissertation as a whole. Some of the methodological approaches on which the lines of process are based can be viewed as exerting a comprehensive influence: for example, no particular work has been created based on the precepts of action research, but its focus on practical action, social participation and collective learning can be traced in many of the works. Other lines of process can more clearly be linked to particular works. For example, the Dale Sko Hack project, in which von Busch invited in designers to reprogramme the machinery in a shoe factory that was threatened with closure, was a “small change” method. The project is thus described in a chapter entitled “Small Change Protocols”.

The case of Dale Sko Hack illustrates how von Busch chose to present his artistic projects. The five substantial chapters of the dissertation are organised around practices: hacktivism, heresy, fan fiction, small change protocols and pro ams. The presentation of the artistic works, in turn, is interspersed with the textual descriptions of these practices. This choice is significant. It signals that von Busch sees his works as clearly situated in something that already exists. The works are continuations or extensions of pre-existing practices and are created for the purpose of finding and experimenting with the lines of flight that might lead away from these practices. Once again, this is congruent with the Deleuze-Guattari precepts:

This is how it should be done: lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialisation, possible lines of flight [...] It is through meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight.9

In the book’s five chapters, the parts that touch on the practice of hacktivism are central to understanding how von Busch states his problem. The very subtitle of the dissertation – *Hacktivism and Engaged Fashion Design* – gives an early indication that the text is a study of how hacking-as-activism can be applied to fashion design. The practice of hacktivism thus takes the lead in the study, and this is notable in several places. In the preface, hactivism is named as an “attractor” around which the study revolves – the centre of gravity around which the reasoning is woven, and which thus guides the emergence of the rhizomatic network of arguments named above (p. 28). In this chapter, hactivism is further referred to as an “abstract machine” – a Deleuze-Guattarian term for a kind of logic of creation that exists in the virtual realm but can also be actualised in several concrete processes. For example, we know from natural science that both the driving force behind steam engines and the impetus for hurricanes are actualisations of the same thermodynamic logic of creation – the same “abstract machine”. In this way, abstract machines may be said to be “mechanically autonomous”, and it is this that makes possible von Busch's overall project – to examine hacktivism as a general practice, as an abstract machine that can be actualised not only in computers but even in fashion design.

Viewing hacktivism as an abstract machine is one way to theoretically formalise an idea current that circulated among several theoreticians in the early 2000s. Taking inspiration from the conceptual world of computers, they sought to articulate new ways of approaching and changing the world around them. Von Busch quotes the following illustrative challenge from the theoretician Manuel DeLanda:

Today I see art students trained by guilt-driven semioticians or post-modern theorists, afraid of the materiality of their medium [...] The key to breaking away from this is to cut language down to size, to give it the importance it deserves as a communications medium, but to stop worshipping it as the ultimate reality. Equally important is to adopt a hacker attitude towards all forms of knowledge: not only to learn UNIX or Windows NT to hack this or that computer system, but to learn economics, sociology, physics and biology to hack reality itself. It is precisely the “can do” mentality of the hacker, naive as it may sometimes be, that we need to nurture everywhere.10

Another theoretician von Busch leans on is McKenzie Wark, who in her 2004 *Hacker Manifesto* reformulates the power relationships in the contemporary production order.11 A third influence is Nicolas Bourriaud, whose *Postproduction* (2002) posits the hacker as emblematic of a new artistic tactic. Bourriaud stands for an aesthetic ideal in which the artist’s relationship to the world is characterised by the hacker’s experimentalism. This experimentalism, he suggests, should supplant a more traditionally critical approach in which the world is reduced to symptoms that are to be interpreted.12

Computer metaphors – and the search for an alternative criticism – may be found as well in Bruno Latour, who constitutes a fourth influence in von Busch’s categorisation of hacktivism’s abstract machine. In an often-quoted attempt to formulate a concept of criticism, Latour leans on computer pioneer Alan Turing’s early thoughts on artificial intelligence.13 An intelligent machine, Touring believed, must be able to create new ideas, not just repeat the ideas that programmers write into it. Turing compares machine intelligence with an atomic reactor, which must exceed critical mass for the nuclear fission process to get started and thereby release energy. In the same way, a thinking machine must achieve a similar “super-critical” condition in order for the implantation of an idea to generate a chain reaction in which new ideas are released. Latour captures this reasoning and applies it to man’s critical thinking: How can criticism become supercritical? How can it become something that creates something new, and not reduce the complexity of the world to “surface phenomena” caused by the same old social constructs? The critic, Latour suggests, ought not to be someone who uncovers the social reality, but rather someone who puts the world together and creates new arenas for participation. Von Busch expresses it like this: Latour stands for a kind of “construction criticism” that rhymes well with the hacker’s approach (p. 37).

These theoretical currents, which in the early 2000s sought inspiration in the computer world, thus constitute the dissertation’s intellectual and technological context. The thesis emphasises that the history of ideas is intimately associated with the history of technology and demonstrates how different forms of machine metaphor have dominated our view of the world – including our understanding of society and politics. Modernism may be understood as the moment when the Enlightenment’s clockwork metaphors came to be replaced by those of the steam engine. This motorised world view came increasingly to be challenged by the computerised world view during the late twentieth century (p. 40).

This shift in machine metaphors makes possible a reformulation of the concept of criticism. If society is to be understood as a motor, it is productive to work with a hermeneutic form of criticism, based on the interpretation of how a certain phenomenon in society is a symptom or surface phenomenon generated by an underlying motor. If society is instead to be understood as a computer, a hacker-inspired experimentalism makes it possible to not only interpret but actually write about the code that guides our existence. And here I have come back to what I previously described as the subtext of the dissertation. Once again: the thesis may be understood as an appeal for affirmation rather than negation, experimentation rather than interpretation, and a reformulation of the concept of criticism.

The shift from a motorised world view to a computerised world view also creates new opportunities for researchers with transformative ambitions. In a critical tradition, the researcher can hope that one’s interpretation of symptoms contributes to a democratic society, to accountability, to criticism of norms, or to class consciousness. A hacker-inspired practice, on the other hand, beckons with the potential to give people, in a more concrete way, more room for manoeuvre. Projects such as Disneyland Can Wait (p. 100) and Recyclopedia (p. 92), von Busch’s copylefted library of manuals for upcycling of old items of clothing, can be seen in this way. They are tools that give the user opportunities to break free from a passive dependence on fashion’s hierarchies, and therefore become “fashion-able”. The dissertation may be about the project of making the user “fashion-able”, but in principle this programme could be used to liberate people from all forms of techno-cultural dependence on power hierarchies.

In this way, the dissertation’s different parts – the methodological approach’s lines of flight and lines of process, the rhizomatic disposition, the influences from computer-influenced theory, and the presentation of the works – add up to a complete whole. This whole is easily married with the question of how another form of criticism can be formulated and how the role of the researcher in the political can be reconfigured. Here it is worth asking oneself if the field to which the dissertation belongs plays an important role in getting this whole to hold together. And to return to where I began: a pragmatically orientated design science would appear to be well-suited for creating works whose aim is not interpretative but rather aimed at experimentally searching for lines of flight to give us more room for manoeuvre. How might the same intention be expressed in a dissertation in fine art, photography or literary composition?

\* \* \*

Otto von Bosch’s *Fashion-able* project should thus be understood in relation to a specific intellectual and technological context. At the same time, it is tempting to also situate this dissertation in a political-historical context. It was published in 2008, a year that is sometimes described as an endpoint to “the long nineties”. During the decade that followed, the public conversation came to circulate around a series of crises – a financial crisis followed by a crisis of democracy followed by a climate crisis. Is it productive to see *Fashion-able* as a kind of bookend to the period before this time of crises?

During the 2010s, the discussion about alternative criticism did come to be given its own label – “postcritique” – but that discussion lived on primarily in the field of literary criticism.14 At the same time, von Busch’s theoretical influences came to reorientate their interests around the imperatives of the time of crises. For example, the question of how the Anthropocene ought to be theoretised took on a central position for these theoreticians.15 Computer simulation has a new status in climate awareness, and it has taken the place of hacking as the foremost source of inspiration for computer theoreticians.16 In addition, a couple of the affirmative-orientated “post-critical” theoreticians named in the dissertation have altered their positions.17 For example, Bourriaud has returned to a rather traditional critical stance, in that today he prefers works that “lift the ideological veils” created by apparatuses of power to conceal underlying truths.18 Finally, von Busch’s own work too, in conjunction with the darkness that characterised the period following 2008, came to be characterised by a harder realism.

Notwithstanding this reorientation, the axiological direction taken by *Fashion-able* – positing the search for lines of flight as the highest priority for artistic research – continues to be productive. The dissertation’s methodological appendix thus deserves to be read by today’s doctoral students in the field. At the same time, it would also be exciting to see how the same approach could be applied outside of artistic research. For example, the line-of-flight axiology could create interesting outcomes in more technically orientated engineering fields – after all, they too, according to the aforementioned Herbert Simon, are design sciences. In these fields, values such as functionality and efficiency dominate, which leads in practice to technological development often having “anti-invention” or “uninvention” effects: technology can have a tendency to lock in the future rather than opening it up to alternative technological-sociological configurations. A development in which the line-of-flight axiology is spread outside the field of design would mean that something productive can happen in the interface between artistic research and other (design-) scientific fields. In that case, artistic research’s foremost axiological contribution revolves not around the value of “the beautiful”, but rather around the value of a pragmatic approach to making alternative futures possible.

1 Otto von Busch’s *Fashion-able: Hacktivism and Engaged Fashion Design* (2008), p. 244. Henceforward, page references to the book will be given in the body of the text.

2 Herbert Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial* (1996), MIT Press, p. 111.

3 Ibid, p. 114.

4 Anthony Dunne, *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience, and Critical Design* (1999), MIT Press, p. 42.

5 Ibid, p. 36.

6 This influence has been noted by other design researchers. An example is Benedict Singletons dissertation, *On Craft and Being Crafty*, which categorises *Fashion-able* as a Deleuze-influenced work about the relationship between design and politicised participatory processes. See Benedict Singleton, *On Craft and Being Crafty* (2004), Northumbria University.

7 “Axiology” refers to notions about what is valuable in a scientific work.

8 Brian Massumi, “Translator’s foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy” in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1998), Continuum, p. xv, quoted in von Busch (2008), *Fashion-able*, p. 245.

9 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1998), p. 161, quoted in von Busch (2008), *Fashion-able*, p. 244.

10 Paul Miller a.k.a. DJ Spooky, “Illogical Progression: Essay on and Interview with Manuel deLanda” (2000), quoted in von Busch (2008), *Fashion-able*, p. 37.

11 McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* (2004), Harvard University Press.

12 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Post-Production: Culture as Screenplay – How Art Reprograms the World*. Lukas & Sternberg, p. 82.

13 Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?” in *Critical Inquiry* (2004).

14 Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (2015), University of Chicago Press.

15 Cf McKenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* (2015), Verso, and Bruno Latour’s later work.

16 Karl Palmås, “From Hacking to Simulation: Periodising Digitally-inspired Social Theory” in *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* (2019).

17 Alexander Galloway, named frequently in the dissertation, has distanced himself from the affirmative attitude of the 2000s toward the “Red Bull sublime”. See Alexander Galloway, “Peak Deleuze and the ‘Red Bull sublime’” (2017) http:// cultureandcommunication.org/galloway/peak-deleuze-and-the-red-bull-sublime.

18 Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Exform* (2015), Verso, p. x.

19 Andrew Barry, *Political Machines: Governing a Technological Society*, Athlone (2001), p. 268. See also Karl Palmås, *Prometheus eller Narcissus?* (2011) Korpen koloni, p. 43.

Magnus Bärtås’s *You Told Me* *–   
Work Stories and Video Essays*

Annika Wik

**Exploring Narratives**

*He says that he wants to bring narratives into art, but also, to bring up narratives from their existence in the undercurrents of art.*

*He says that 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.*

*He says that he considers the work story to be an integral part of an artwork. He says that life stories and work stories have a lot in common.*

*He says that the methodology and subject matter of research in his dissertation project are inseparable.*

*He says that he distinguished five elements or instances of the video essay: the subject matter, the images (the representation), the artist/author, the narrative (the text), and the narration/voice.*

*He says that his videos are grounded in the You Told Me-situation and the different resonances of the act and context of utterance.*

*He says that the foundations of the works are meetings, conversations, and storytelling, activities that are closely linked to the biographical genre, but also – he argues – to the dissemination of artworks.*

*He says that the work story disseminates meaning rather than capturing it.*

The sentences above are maxims that are in line with those that artist and author Magnus Bärtås uses as both point of departure and method for the artistic compositions that are included in and constitute his artistic dissertation project, *You Told Me*.1 These maxims also include the elements that make up the very cornerstones of the thesis structure: study object, purpose, premises, method, material, delimitations and conclusions, as well as the structure of the text in question.

What is Magnus Bärtås saying, then, in his maxims in and about his own work?

**Narration in Art**

*He says that he wants to bring narratives into art, but also, to bring up narratives from their existence in the undercurrents of art.*

Bärtås declares in his dissertation that his intention is to seriously invite narration into art. He doesn’t just want to highlight the narration in the finished works, but also to develop forms for how narrative works get their form and their content. With *You Told Me*, Bärtås contributes knowledge about narration to art and to a potential field of artistic research in which knowledge of storytelling, narratives and narration in art are produced through encounters with others.

**Work Story as Concept and Method**

*He says that 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.*

*You Told Me* is a practice-based research project that comprises three video biographies, two video essays, an introduction providing contextualisation and presentation of the method, and three essays or work stories.

The three work stories are central to the dissertation both as concept and as method. Through them, the reader is invited into the context in which the works are generated. As method, the work story is a way to take the reader by the hand and carefully lead them through a series of events, conditions, details, facts, feelings and encounters that, together in a kind of on-going process, create the meaning of the work. By pointing out small and large phenomena, this meaning creation is revealed through practice. The immaterial meets the material, the trivial meets the fundamental.

By coining the main concept of the dissertation – the work story – Bärtås explores the broader context that surrounds, and is part of, the work. In what could almost be called contextualism, he develops a method that encompasses an expanded space in which the story can act freely within a framework prescribed by the artist.

By establishing the work story concept as central and exploring the potential to form it into a method as well as a compositional practice, Bärtås contributes to methodological development in artistic research.

**The Work Story as an Integral Part of an Artwork**

*He says that he considers the work story to be an integral part of an artwork.*

At the conclusion of each of the three video biographies, we can read: “What I remember from my first encounter with...” followed by the person’s name. That sentence runs like a conceptual streak through Bärtås’s artistic practice, extending over a long period of time. Readers of *You Told Me* get an inside look at an artistic practice that began long before work on the thesis began, and here that practice is given a framework formed by decisions made during the artistic research process. Bärtås has decided to invite us in and reveal the artistic process by allowing the work story to constitute a part of the artwork. The parts that can be invisible in the making of art are revealed here and weigh as heavily as other parts of the work. The work story becomes part of the artwork.

Even the way the process is revealed in the dissertation project contributes to the methodological development of the field – as well as the emergence of a research field characterised by artistic process – or, perhaps more specifically, to artistic research in which the revealing of the process is characterised by several narrative traces.

**Relations Between Life Stories and Work Stories**

*He says that life stories and work stories have a lot in common.*

As both the author and the explicit subject of the dissertation text, as well as the many layers of the stories, Bärtås presents his feelings, his reflections, experiences, thoughts, stagings and processes, and he allows his life story and his work stories to cross-fertilise each other. From the point of view of the reader and observer, one could say that the parts of the stories have been simultaneously pulled apart and forced together. As in a sophisticated weaving pattern, or perhaps an embroidery, there are lines to follow where loops periodically appear as rhythmic elements and as intricate patterns. Almost unnoticed, a new colour is added – a flower, a piece of clothing – contributing to a larger whole. In a web of words, the author brings the reader along through the layers of histories sprung from observations and thereby creates stories surrounded by other stories. Phenomena change their meanings as though at one moment a universe entire – a whole – and at the next a little detail, insignificant from one perspective, decisive and meaningful from another.

Bärtås’s dissertation and art are characterised by experimentation, by collecting maxims from theory and practice and allowing them to be presented as traces woven together. In this there are clear parallels to a kind of philosophical striving to join together theories that are traditionally seen as irreconcilable. Like the philosopher Paul Ricour, who appears as a reference in the dissertation, Bärtås tries to bring together disparate, often dialectical ways of observing.

**Methodology and Subject Matter as Inseparable**

*He says that the methodology and subject matter of research in his dissertation project are inseparable.*

The “you told me” assertion is the basis for maxims that arise from collecting, archiving and presenting (expressing) in accordance with the working order illuminated by Bärtås in his book.

In meetings with Zdenko Buzek, Johnny Walker and others, that which allows us to get close to another person is expressed in literal form. The stories of others are expressed with the same randomness of narrative structure as these meetings. The random is presented in a chronology that accords with the structure of the factual events, something that actually constitutes an unusual or less appropriate form for the classical narrative structure. By challenging the inappropriateness, Bärtås creates stories that come into being through this less appropriate form. He thus reconciles irreconcilable entities, creates stories of the kind a wanderer or pilgrim might accumulate in their travels, and recounts them as though bringing the observer or reader along on such a trip.

Taken together, the writing about various maxims and the video pieces based on them contribute to stories that move through and beyond what had been told and what had happened previously. What is heard takes form in the story about and through artistic expression. Like these video pieces, the book – the dissertation text – constitutes components that become part of the work as a whole.

**Five Elements or Instances of the Video Essay**

*He says that he distinguished five elements or instances of the video essay: the subject matter, the images (the representation), the artist/author, the narrative (the text), and the narration/voice.*

The thesis’s moving materials – the two video essays and three video biographies – are available to readers of *You Told Me* through an included DVD.

In his introduction, Bärtås presents how he distinguishes five elements as central to his way of creating video essays: “the subject matter, the images (the representation), the artist/author, the narrative (the text) and the narration/voice.” As categories, they may belong to a variety of different areas or fields of film theory, but the positions Bärtås takes as an artist, which are linked to these categories, are nevertheless apparent in the divisions.

The video essays make clear reference to Chris Marker’s universe of essay film. With a rigorous artistic compass, he creates film essays that contribute to an existing film genre.

**Act and Context of Utterance**

*He says that his videos are grounded in the* You Told Me *situation and the different resonances of the act and context of utterance.*

The title *You Told Me* encompasses a direction in a communicative act. It could be a one-way communication and, as expressed in the works, it emphasises “the other”. The *You Told Me* maxims leave plenty of room, as it were, for the other’s storytelling. But the assertions encompasses the dialectic between “you told” and “I heard”. This also forms the basis for striving to find a way of expressing, giving form to, testing methods for linking “I heard/experienced/understood” together with “I convey”.

The three video biographies bear similarities with the video essays but have maintained a more restrained form. Like a kind of triptych, they offer the viewer recognition in expression, aesthetic and storytelling. The theme is framed in the same way. Certain image choices stand out in these films, forming a common thread. The artist’s appeal is one, the storyteller’s premise another, and the voice that conveys the story share the same home and expression. We could add to this the films’ endings, music, recurring sounds, underlying humour, choice of perspectives and editing and matching colour schemes.

**Collection and Distribution**

*He says that the foundations of the works are meetings, conversations, and storytelling, activities that are closely linked to the biographical genre, but also – he argues – to the dissemination of artworks.*

Bärtås’s dissertation is made up of stories that have been given form. One layer in the overall story that forms the structure of dissertation itself is the theoretical path – the link between theory and practice. The thesis, its references and its scientific sources have been gathered from many different fields. Phenomenology is but one example.

There is a similarity in the approach to theoretical references like the encounters, or the exploration that occurs as a parallel journey made up of encounters, conversations and stories in the dissertation’s work stories.

**Creating Meaning**

*He says that the work story disseminates meaning rather than capturing it.*

As for the pilgrim or the traveller, the encounters one makes along the way are a large part of the journey. The statement that a work story is about disseminating meaning rather than capturing it is convincingly expressed in *You Told Me.* Like a welcome but unseen third party, there is a role for the reader or the observer between “You” and “Me” in works and stories, a position that illuminates how stories emerge in Bärtås's artistic research projects.

**Epilogue**

Before the time came for Magnus Bärtås to defend his thesis on 28 May 2010, I had the privilege of reading the work in progress. I was asked to respond to the work that was based on Zdenko Buzek.

At the time, artistic research was still in its infancy. In this phase, it was hard to avoid discussions about what artistic research could be and should be, what knowledge production could be and should be. I remember being struck by the lack of discussion and awareness about various research fields that are encompassed by and developed within artistic research. Often it was about the work and practice of individual artists, about knowledge production treated as something separate. I remember wishing that it could be more about how research in different fields together contributes to knowledge production at a larger scale than, to my mind, being locked into a particular project. I thought the comparison with so-called human science research was made on misleading grounds. Instead, there should have been more focus on how research fields develop within human science and artistic research, how knowledge develops when many contribute to a field and how the field thus develops.2

Thus, what I thought was missing at the time were discussions of the research field, the shared knowledge production, what happens at seminars, thesis defences, conferences and exhibitions, and during teaching in academic settings. In a newly published book, Bengt Kristensson Uggla, a professor of philosophy, culture and corporate leadership, writes about the significance of the interpersonal and the ritualistic, and even about the significance of parties for scientific knowledge production.3 He writes about all the important shared contexts that drive the development of knowledge onward. And it is reasonable to assume that this applies to human science and artistic research alike.

A decade has passed since Magnus Bärtås defended his thesis, and when I read it again, it provokes questions of how and which research fields have been crystallised and developed since 2010. My reading, now as well as then, is coloured by how Bärtås forms his methodology based on his artistic practice, which in turn and to a great extent is coloured by a strict exploration of theoretical and practical connections among several layers relating to narration in art. How life stories and work stories are woven together to form a foundation for practices of artistic expression. How storytelling is used as a method and practice for giving form to an artwork.

I sought out Magnus Bärtås and asked him to meet for a conversation. For me it was a way to prepare myself to write this essay and a way to close the circle of our conversations from an earlier phase of his work on the dissertation. It was a rewarding conversation in which I heard about the expectations Bärtås had had for his doctoral project at the time, what it had been like to get into artistic research at such an early stage, and what has happened since then.

*He says that at the time he had no particular expectations about what research contexts he would be working in after finishing his thesis.*

*He says that he imagined that when he was done he would return to his regular artistic practice.*

*He says that through artistic research, we (artists) have been given a chance to describe our practice. He says that he wished he had had a concept for the work story at the time.*

*He says that after defending his thesis, he was part of a research effort about “microhistories” that could be seen as a consequence of his dissertation.*

*He says that after his doctoral studies, he was invited to show, exhibit and talk about his work in a variety of different contexts.*

*He says that it is interesting to think about and talk about what research fields his dissertation has contributed to.*

In my reading of his thesis, both in advance of the aforementioned seminar and now, I think I can see that Bärtås contributes to and develops a field of artistic research about narration in art, a field in which the concept of the work story has given (and will continue to give) artists methodological tools for how stories take form during the artistic process, and also that these will become a prominent part of the work. It is distinct from artistic practices in which the path leading to the work of art is not of decisive importance for the viewer and reader’s experience of it. In *You Told Me*, the relationship between reflection and composition is given form on a kind of meta-level, and the way this is done constitutes a powerful contribution to the field of artistic research – one that artists who work in or around the borders of the field ought to know about and study in order to understand how the new research relates to and contributes to new knowledge of storytelling as a methodological practice.

1 Magnus Bärtås, *You Told Me – Work Stories and Video Essays*, ArtMonitor dissertation no. 19, 2010.

2 Examples of how exploration of narration in art contributes knowledge production that is transferred over from artistic research to human science research. Here some examples of transmedial storytelling. Annika Wik

3 Bengt Kristensson Uggla, *En strävan efter sanning: Vetenskapens teori och praktik*, Studentlitteratur, 2019.

Lars Wallsten’s *Notes on Traces.*  
*Photography.* *Evidence.* *Image.*

Fredrik Nyberg

**I Turn Against Myself**

To begin, perhaps a bit audaciously: I perceive Lars Wallsten’s dissertation in photographic expression – *Notes on Traces* – as itself “photographic”. I should follow up on this assertion.

As I write this, the trial of rapper ASAP Rocky and two of his sidekicks is in full swing in Stockholm. The media coverage has been intense, to say the least, and the event has taken on strange, magnified proportions. At the centre of the court case and the media reports is a collection of images. A number of video sequences are available, and much of the negotiations in Stockholm District Court deal with what happens in these images. What do we see? What is actually happening? Is that someone striking someone else with a broken bottle or not? And if so, who is doing it? Ultimately, it’s about the evidentiary value the images have. What do they show? This is also a question Wallsten discusses in his “photographic” dissertation. Very early in the introduction to the thesis, he writes: “Photography plays an important but often blurry role in the presentation of what something was like on a particular occasion.”1 In this introduction, which is not especially voluminous, Wallsten presents, almost as though in passing, two potentially methodological premises that are important for the work, and possibly for the field of artistic research in general. The researcher, who is constantly trying from different directions to return to one point – to a condition – which in this case is that of the photographer, states frankly that the Swedish words for *image* and *wild* rhyme. And immediately after this statement comes a somewhat less enigmatic declaration of intentions: “My intention with the dissertation is to show what the conditions are for determining photography’s evidentiary value. I am trying to understand the implications of this from my own practical perspective” (p. 9). The dissertation maintains that these questions and the method or way they are then addressed have grown out of an on-going practice-driven perspective. That is important. And this is also a situation in which the thinking (and the actions) at least in part are dependent upon a specific tool that is external to the body (i.e. the camera). In her essay “Voices Out of Bodies, Bodies Out of Voices”, the American literary critic N. Katherine Hayles writes about the tape recorder and about the decentralising of the subject that the new electromagnetic recording technology brought on during the 1950s and 60s. With the help of the tape recorder the human voice, subjectivity and therefore also thinking came to be localised in both the human body and in the machine (camera or tape recorder). That led to “an externalising of thinking”.2 And this kind of castling, I think, is also important to Wallsten’s dissertation, to the thinking that went into it. The question of who/what does what and “where the responsibility for the results actually lies” also arises from the argument that is formed by and through the thesis (pp. 106–07).

Thus, Lars Wallsten’s dissertation in photographic composition is entitled *Notes on* *Traces. Photography. Evidence. Image.* And the four periods and capitalised words endure in my consciousness throughout my reading of the text. Perhaps one could say that they have remained like traces in me ever since I met them – since I encountered them. “How does one read something so typographical and mute as a punctuation mark?” asks Arne Melberg in the book *Reading Slowly*.3 Melberg believes that the modern poetry tradition deeply questioned the different punctuation marks (not least the period), and his latest book, which treats the comprehensive work of author Göran Sonnevi, is entitled *Not One Mark*. Early in the book he writes, “My first observation is that in this enormous poetical universe there are no marks. Sonnevi won’t make a mark.”4 Nor does he rhyme particularly often. In Wallsten’s dissertation, however, the period recurs frequently. These dividing marks, these little black dots that create breaks and turns recur frequently, not just in the title but (as I soon become aware) in the body of the text as well. Apart from the introduction, his thesis comprises 173 numbered and generally brief blocks of text. Just like its title, the work as a whole is punctuated by, penetrated by, and thereby also structured around, dividing elements, interruptions and pauses. This approach, Wallsten writes, “leads onward in a tracking manner” toward, among other things, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s low-key “and numbered pieces” (p. 19). And Wittgenstein comes up and is quoted quite early in the main body of the dissertation. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes, “The term ‘see’ leaves a messy impression.”5 Wittgenstein is also held up by Wallsten as a thinker who, through his “toned-down, searching reasoning about seeing and language”, seems relevant or “related in his visual, photographic way of approaching a conceivable subject” (p. 28).

Ludvig Wittgenstein not only founded two competing schools within modern philosophy, his writing (and thinking) has also been a generative force for a series of authors and artists. In her poetry collection *The Reproduction of Profiles*, for example, American poet Rosmarie Waldrop turns a great many Wittgenstein phrases on their heads, and the result is a philosophical prose poem that rages against and confounds rather than constructing and resolving philosophical problem statements. Wittgenstein’s aphoristic “style”, arranged around notations, has had a formal impact on literature. The “pointillist novel” is an example of a modernist sub-genre that is structured, according to the *Norwegian Academic Dictionary*, “into short, independent texts like prosaic lyrical moments in a fragmented story”.6 Paal-Helge Haugen’s 1968 novel *Anne* is usually considered a pioneering and tone-setting work for this genre. It is worth noting in passing that Ebba Witt-Brattström’s *Love/War*, her controversial coming to terms with her former husband Horace Engdahl, a permanent member of the Swedish Academy, is subtitled *A Pointillist Novel.* Should Wallsten’s dissertation be regarded as a “pointillist thesis”? And if so, what would the consequences of that be? It is in any case clear that Wittgenstein’s spirit hovers over the dissertation's form and attitude alike – a not overly dramatic searching. The first poem in *The Reproduction of Profiles* begins, by the way, as follows: “I had inferred from pictures that the world was real and therefore paused.”7

The dissertation *Notes on Traces.* *Photography.* *Evidence. Image* comprises two parts in addition to the elements to be expected of a thesis, such as the abstract, preface, introduction, summary and list of sources: a rather short part entitled “My Thought Process” and a substantially larger one entitled “Notes on Traces”. “My Thought Process” is described as an “overview” intended to make it easier for the reader to follow the main text, i.e. “Notes on Traces”, which the thesis’s author describes as comprising “a sequence of many parts” (p. 22). Thus, “Notes on Traces” should be regarded as a suite or an ordered sequence that is broken up into smaller parts or pieces with the help of interventions – the points, or periods. In “My Thought Process”, Wallsten orders these 173 pieces (or parts, or paragraphs) into 19 larger units that are then graphically or visually articulated in some way. “Notes on Traces”, by contrast, runs along with its full stops and periodic interruptions. It adds up to a rather flat text. And I place no judgement in that statement. It is tempting to see – to perceive – the dissertation as 173 separate photographs that have in turn been collected into 19 folders or albums.

The work of creating an overview in “My Thought Process” could be described through a quotation of two parts Wallsten dusts off that I perceive as entirely central to the overall theme of the dissertation:

55–74.

Photography is interwoven with conceptions about memory and, as I see it, about traces as well. Together they constitute a mysterious philosophical question about how something can be experienced as being both present and at the same time absent. The concept of traces is heterogeneous. Wallsten touches on several examples of older as well as contemporary meanings for traces in psychoanalysis, philosophy and media theory.

75–81.

Forensic science has a long shared history with photography. They share a common interest in traces, evidence and the claim of offering a true verdict. The foundations of photographic credibility are established early in the thesis (p. 23).

The first paragraph (or part) of the main text is also worth quoting in its entirety:

1.

I begin by looking into the camera’s viewfinder. At the scene and at this study. At myself. Through and with the viewfinder, my gaze seems to mount a resistance against the edges, against the temporary limitations. I see. I believe. (p. 26)

The thesis and the study and the main text, “Notes on Traces”, thus begins by focusing on seeing, on the gaze. Seeing is seen and observed. This feels all but self-evident in a dissertation on the topic of “photographic composition”. Seeing occurs through a filter that is equally given in this context, namely the camera’s viewfinder, and the gaze falls immediately on three specific phenomena: “the scene”, “this study” and – not least – “myself”. The study thus has three focal points: one photographic (i.e. artistic), one meta-reflective and one self-reflective. And these are all in play simultaneously. The filter to which seeing is applied through the viewfinder means that the gaze seems to “mount a resistance against the edges, against the temporary limitations”. That condition makes itself known particularly in the paragraphs of the thesis, with their compressed or “condensed” mood. Like the photographic subject matter, and perhaps like the meta- and self-reflective elements as well, the text itself seems to “mount a resistance against the edges”. There is immediately a feeling that the subject matter and the questions addressed, what the dissertation covers, are much broader than the format or the scope of the thesis. And that is an attractive notion. What the dissertation’s author has to see, Wallsten writes in an explanation of his intentions, should as much as possible be seen “through the viewfinder”8 (p. 37). And further on in the thesis, in paragraphs 42 and 43, Wallsten suggests “condensation” as something useful for the study in many ways. The text is characterised, like Wallsten’s pictures, by condensation: “I have begun to speak about my pictures as condensed instead”, the author asserts in a maxim that is itself condensed (pp. 55–56).

Thus, the dissertation says in a number of different ways that it is important for the results of the study that the one gazing through the viewfinder does not forget he is a photographer. The view is only available through a viewfinder. There is another similarly condensed process, inherent in practice, that I believe is important to the relevance and survival of artistic research.

Wallsten’s task, the task of the dissertation, is about “showing what the conditions are for determining photography’s evidentiary value”, and this is demonstrated for the reader by marrying a theoretical argument with experience, and the experience may be perceived, I believe, as closely related to the theory (p. 9). Wallsten suggests that this study is relevant because “the function and capacity of consciousness and the picture” are “extremely limited” for the people who utilize them in acute situations – like the police, prosecutors and jurors (p. 119). This is a convincing point. This intra-family marriage – between the experience and the theory – is arranged so that four case studies that deal with (present and discuss) four of Wallsten’s “photographic projects” (*Turn-Yourself-Around*, *Grazing Light*, *Field 100* and *Re-reconstruction*) are woven together with a more generalised discourse on photography and image theory. And I believe it is correct to say that the work with and presentation of these photographic, artistic projects constitutes a precondition for the more traditional theoretical part. As I pointed out previously, the questions posed by the dissertation stem from an artistic and photographic practice. From his experience working as a photographer, as an artist and as a police officer. That’s great!

The 19 folders or albums share an ideological centre, but they can encompass or contain a variety of motifs or arguments. They can be constituted by a case study. Folder Four is an example, comprising just two paragraphs (27–28), but they can also include longer and more theoretical arguments, as does Folder Three (paragraphs 18–26), in which the concept/term “understanding” is discussed. “Understanding is seeing patterns”, Wallsten writes (p. 35). For me, the analogy between Wallsten’s organisation of his text, his paragraphs, into larger entities and the photo album is obvious. The album on which it says “Understanding” on the spine includes theoretical arguments about, for example, the post-structuralist concept of text, unremarked quotations, lists of names, experience-based conclusions such as “My intention is to see as much as possible through the viewfinder”, and so forth (p. 37). Thus, these albums/folders comprise various objects, various motifs, that nevertheless are held together by one centre. Just like the pictures in the album I find in my mother’s bookcase that’s marked “Skagen 1977”.

The “Understanding” album is set beside other comparable albums in which are discussed other and diverse concepts or terms or motifs – such as “index” or “causality”. The concepts are twisted and turned, and not all these twists are equally urgent. At times this thesis seems to be running on fumes. In some of the photo albums, too many of the pictures are nearly identical to one another. That impacts the experience of them.

The first of the four photographic projects around which the dissertation revolves is called *Turn-Yourself-Around*, and this work comes up even before the main text begins, thus providing a discussion that itself does not turn itself around in order to somehow look backward into the dissertation’s thought process. On the contrary: the fact that the description, the presentation, of this particular work is given so early in the dissertation is likely to do with its meta-reflexive character. *Turn-Yourself-Around* is, in the words of the author himself, “a photographic project about reflexivity in the work of research”, and its placement in the introduction to the dissertation thereby takes on a pedagogical and perhaps methodological function (p. 13). In short, the case study becomes part of an explanation of the author’s method and purpose. And, as Wallsten notes, it is this that is backward – after a half-turn forward. To introduce a scientific work that addresses the scientific application of photography, among other things, by turning oneself around is likely to have some advantages. The five pictures from the *Turn-Yourself-Around* project that are reproduced in the dissertation book are blurry, but the motifs feel familiar, universal. One can discern apartment buildings and grassy lawns. *I turn myself around to face myself.*

However, perhaps the most important methodological maxim in the thesis otherwise is formulated later in the main body of the text, which is called (lest we forget) “Notes on Traces”: “I understood that I could use traces in my work on the thesis both as a study object and as a method that led me onward – for tracking” (p. 57). The tracker is driven by curiosity, and this desire in particular, the urge to discover and uncover something formerly unknown, is a very important quality of *Notes on Traces*. In Gunnar Broberg’s newly published biography of Carl Linnaeus, one of the chapters is called “Curiosity Research”, and in it he describes how Linnaeus’s writings are brimming with (mostly visual) revelations. Linnaeus was astonished, amazed and enraptured, and these emotional states, concealed in curiosity, was a fundamental driving force in his work as a scientist. Broberg writes, “Man becomes a Homo sapiens by being curious. Thus, man could very well be called Homo curiosus.”

Paragraph 46 of the dissertation says simply “Traces”. And further down on the same page, Wallsten traces the etymology of the world *trace* back and discovers a kinship with the Swedish words for spurn and inquire. Wallsten concludes, “The origins of the word thus deal with resisting and questioning. That could constitute a straightforward formulation of my view of artistic research” (p. 57). In my reading, I can translate resistance and questioning into “compression” and “curiosity”. There are then two movements that largely define *Notes on Traces* and that also make the study, the research effort, horseshoe-shaped, bent in such a way that one cannot simultaneously see “the beginning and the end” (p. 132).

The other artistic project presented in the dissertation is called *Grazing Light*. The presentation is limited to two lengthy paragraphs, the first of which (no. 27) is made up of text and the other (no. 28) of five pictures placed side by side. In this project, Wallsten has primarily photographed outdoor scenes in the Bergslagen region. The scenes – at least those that are reproduced in the dissertation – are uninhabited and barren, and an important condition is the waning blue light of dusk that gives the scenes a cold and hard presence. Asphalt, concrete and dark vegetation are visible in several of the pictures. Just as important as the specific place and time of day (Wallsten writes, “I like to be there and I find inspiration working in the blue hour”) are the lighting conditions – the grazing light – that “gives form” to the pictures (p. 40).

The vanishing daylight and the specific external light source that “is almost parallel to the scene”, which itself is nearly “empty” or deserted, creates an aura of secrecy. Grazing light is a method, Wallsten writes, that is “often used for analytical photography in scientific and technical contexts”, such as archaeology or criminology. And as I look at the five pictures, I realize that I (the observer) am also searching for some find, a trace or an offering (p. 40). Wallsten’s “case studies” are brief and compact. They chafe against the edges, but nevertheless provide the reader with important keys that give us an opportunity – not to mention the desire – to go deeper into the works. Since he’s working with compression here, each word becomes important, perhaps more important than it might otherwise be, and that makes the text periodically jarring to read. At one place in “CASE DESCRIPTION: Grazing Light”, Wallsten writes, “The term grazing light has an expansive poetic dimension, and the photographic practice of using grazing light creates associations with a kind of scientific credibility” (p. 40). What does it mean in this context that something “has an expansive poetic dimension”? I ask myself.

Working with grazing light is composing, and in the discussion of the term “grazing light” there is also a description of what composed photography, or “photographic composition”, is or could be. Wallsten writes:

The fact that the referent/light source lies outside of the picture suggests the idea of representing not just what is visible in the picture but the other as well. It is like a larger picture that has only been partially exposed. One thing is like a trace of another; one part is visible, another not. A long chain of traces (p. 41).

And as observers of the pictures, we are left to keep searching for traces, searching for “something” in the dramatically illuminated zone that might give some indication of what is no longer visible.

The case study of the photographic project, the artistic work *Grazing Light*, gives way to a discussion of the research site, of the doctoral work. This is followed by five pictures from *Grazing Light* and then by thirteen paragraphs that discuss artistic research in various ways. These thirteen paragraphs and eight pages create a whole, but they also imply a transformation. Given the dissertation’s condensed nature, a more general and comprehensive line of reasoning, e.g. about artistic research, becomes hard to handle. Wallsten realises this and quickly abandons his scrutiny of the case to focus instead on, if not details, then at least phenomena that stem more self-evidently from his work as a photographer. In a coda-like formulation, Wallsten writes about “the experience” being an essential function for artistic research, and he also writes that experience first reaches its “full potential” when combined “with critical reflection” (p. 49). He writes about the *bricoleur*, i.e. “someone who uses whatever is handy”, and I think something Wallsten has handy is in fact this experience. All those years as a police officer gave him – or so I think, and so he writes – “some good life experience” (p. 52 and p. 20). The text moves quickly from the general, where it is obviously less at home, to the specific, to the detailed. To the detail. This kind of movement can be seen and sensed in this otherwise so notably level (or, as I put it earlier, “flat”) dissertation. This flatness is part of what makes it possible, I think, to perceive the dissertation (as I said initially) as photographic. Wallsten carefully addresses Roland Barthes, who writes in *Camera Lucida*: “I can’t help but let my gaze sweep over [the photograph] as though over a level surface. The photograph is flat, in every sense of the word, and I must accept that.”10 Wallsten writes, “This shouldn’t be exaggerated.” It also says, “Flatten” (p. 116 and p. 132).

Lars Wallsten’s style is, as I’ve mentioned, concise, condensed. In one place it says, “Ideology. Often lacks discussion” (p. 47). And in another place, we can read that Freud, Lévinas and Derrida are authors who are “worth long explications”, but “I don’t see that as my job” (p. 3). This compact – elliptical – use of language, in combination with the reluctance to write long, perhaps more general (and thus perhaps also more familiar) explications forces us to read slowly. I have no problem doing that. But it’s harder to understand (and accept) that the references in the dissertation often lack page numbers. That means that something that one could reasonably expect to be a “sign” (i.e. something that tells us something) becomes instead a “trace” (i.e. something that suggests or points to something).11 I could have done without this type of congeniality.

In linguistics, an ellipsis is when a clause is shortened without changing its meaning. To write, “Ideology. Often lacking in discussions” is to work elliptically. With concentrations.

Wallsten’s thesis, on the whole, is not at all theory-laden, as a number of other artistic dissertations are. On the contrary. It leans forward. Curious. When Wallsten returns later in the dissertation to the project (or “case”) *Turn-Yourself-Around*, for example, he writes:

I declined to reconnect with the Roland Barthesque photographic death, sorrow, longing and what had once been. Or to the absent component of the trace and the lost referent. A double death, both in the depiction and in the medium itself. It was already a balancing of the emotional against the loss/losses. It shouldn’t be exaggerated (p. 116)12.

To not exaggerate or overstate your claim means, in this case, that the theoretical reference must take a back seat. That it nevertheless comes up again later undermines the dissertation’s innocence, which I believe is a highly conscious choice.

In her comments on a preliminary reading of the thesis, Jenny Maria Nilsson writes that we “have been given an outstanding start to the establishment of photographic composition as an academic discipline”, and I think she means primarily as an academic research topic.13 One question that comes up for me as I read these hopeful words is about what the subject, the field, the science has since then done with this “outstanding” foundation. And this is a question that I ask myself from time to time regarding the progress and self-image of artistic research. Good and important things are being done. But how are we building on these “good and important things”?

What conclusion, then, does Wallsten’s argument about photography’s evidentiary value come to? Toward the middle of the dissertation – in paragraph 57 – he describes memory as something “reconstructive”, i.e. changeable, associative, while lying is repetitive and static. Like a photograph (p. 61). In this context, the concept of traces becomes (once again) totally central for Wallsten, and he lets the concept come to the fore through the way Freud, Lévinas and Derrida have dealt with and made use of it. The brief explications of these thinkers’, or authors’, thought processes lead, somewhat surprisingly, to Wallsten making the declaration that, “I understand traces as concentration” (p. 68). A trace that is later filled in, that is concentrated to become a pattern that is similar to a chair, for example, that is recognisable as a chair. A *trace of* has become in this process *proof of* (p. 139).

The dissertation’s next-to-last verse is a list of the 123 keywords, or trace-words, in the thesis – from *viewfinder* to *irresistible*. This index constitutes the dissertation’s real summary and demonstrates a non-diachronic movement from the searching to the indisputable. And consequently, the final verse reads: “a) Photography is a condensed trace. b) The trace is a necessary condition for photography's evidentiary value. c) The photographic evidence is a pattern. // Which should be shown” (p. 148). Trace thus becomes proof, and it does not say, “Which should be proven”. Wallsten writes, “To show is to ‘let someone see something’”. Showing is an indirect maxim (p. 146). Which itself ought to be shown.

1 Lars Wallsten, *Notes on Traces.* *Photography.* *Evidence.* *Image*., ArtMonitor 2011, p. 9. Henceforward, page references to the book will be given in the body of the text.

2 Ibid, p. 32. Cf. N. Katherine Hayles, “Voices out of Bodies, Bodies out of Voices: Audiotape and the Production of Subjectivity”. In *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*. Chapel Hill, NC. 1997. 74–96.

3 Arne Melberg, *Läsa långsamt. Essäer om litteratur och läsning*, Brutus Östlings Bokförlag 1999, p. 25.

4 Arne Melberg, *Inte en punkt. Snitt i Sonnevis Dikt*, Bokförlaget Daidalos 2018, p. 6.

5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953.

6 [https://www](http://www.naob.no/ordbok/punktroman).naob.no/ordbok/punktroman (accessed 24 July 2019).

7 Rosmarie Waldrop, *The Reproduction of Profiles*, New Directions Books 1987, p. 5.

8 It might be important here to once again recall the maxim I brought up in the introduction: “The point of departure I’m always trying to return to, from various different directions, is that of the photographer.” See note 1.

9 Gunnar Broberg, *Mannen som ordnade naturen. En biografi över Carl von Linné*, Natur & Kultur 2019, pp. 285–86.

10 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections of Photography*, Hill & Wang 1980.

11 Here I am following a line of reasoning in the dissertation that in turn follows one by Sybille Krämer that can be found in the essay “Das medium als Spur und als Apparat”, which in turn is included in the book *Medien, Computer, Realität*. Ibid, p. 68.

12 In the book *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes writes recurrently about death as a central necessity for photography. For example, “When we look at a photograph of ourselves or of others, we are really looking at the return of the Dead. Death is the eidos of the Photograph.” Barthes later returns in several places to the Photo’s relationship to death. For example: “[H]owever ‘lifelike’ we strive to make it [...] Photography is a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of Tableau Vivant, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead.”

13 Jenny Maria Nilsson, “Förståelse är att se mönster”, *Fotografisk Tidskrift*, no. 4/2012.

Mara Lee’s *When Others Write:*   
*Writing as Resistance, Responsibility and Time.*

Annelie Brännström Öhman

**Prologue**

The conversation begins in the margins.

The whisper of a pencil recalls the dizzying buzz of a first reading. There is:

A heart (holds pain; bleeds). A question mark (*écriture féminine*)?

Triple exclamation marks (“cyberspace, as it was known in the twentieth century”). And a question that is actually three; I asked them then, and I repeat them now: Where are we headed – and in what time? What is it that’s happening? Who is it happening to?

Perhaps this is a glimmer of hope, an opening for a potential meeting between a body of text and a reading and writing body, both in movement. Between me as a reader and her who writes, wrote, has written. She who is and is not Others. What happens to Others can happen suddenly, violently: a look, a taunt in the subway. Shibboleth. A password, but spat out like a gritty gob rather than words. Spit and swallow.

She is not me. But one way or another I am pulled in, participating, contributing, commiserating.

How should I approach her? Will she listen to me if I try?

I’m only even asking myself these questions because this is a text that won’t let me get away. It’s counting on me – or is it counting me in?

To begin with, I perceive this like a dance. (Is it a dance?) But also a masquerade and a game of hide-and-seek. Neither of the alternatives are harmless. Something is at risk here. (Life? Writing? The writing life?)

Rubrics and keywords create space in the text. The first part opens up “entrances” and points out “doors”. But she who is writing warns us:

Sometimes I say, “Welcome in” at the same time I myself am sneaking out the back door. At the next moment I’m slamming the door in your faces. Perhaps we might some time be united in a treacherous feeling of harmony.1

I think it’s about conjugation patterns, a deeper layer of grammar, of embodied temporal dimensions, a presence in the language that is not visible on the surface, that becomes accessible only when both the one writing and the one reading dare to cross that threshold into that space. It could be a time-space where time and space are alternatingly bent and straightened out. Or a text space in which prepositions change places and pronouns are perpetually changing their bodies and the direction they’re looking, in which the footnotes conscientiously respond to the text’s ethical claims, but not without first having been tickled by the ostrich plumes of the masquerade ball: “If I were Anne Carson, I would perhaps have expressed it like this: Akribi is sexy” (p. 41).

The threads of conversation rest in the traces of graphite left in the margins (diamond dust mixed into the graphite makes them shimmer slightly in the darkness). It is at “the eleventh hour” that I read again, and that I approach the text in my first reading through the graphite, through the letters’ loops, the stems, the shoulders, the tails....

Writing at the eleventh hour emphasizes the writing as a place for real risk, perhaps even sacrifice (p. 81).

There is an Orphic element here, a Eurydicean drama. One who looks back risks losing what he loves forever. If the same holds true for reading as for writing, then I too must weigh this risk. I do, and I take the risk: I retrace my own tracks, taking up every graphite trace again, carefully unravelling them, one after another. Tie them like good-luck strings around my fingers, like strands of hair from my beloved. Or like an armband of red woollen yarn tied seven times around my left wrist. But this is not cabala, not an incantation.

It is a body and it is in the movement of the writing. In free but conditional movement. My conversation with her is just one of many possible.

(What happens to me if Other, when she writes, turns around?)

I think that I move into a book and an oratorio. Voices are bent and raised, the different parts woven together, deepening the resonance, breaking loose into dissonance.

Or is it an herbarium?

Will my reading voice be lost between the pages, my reading body become pressed flat and entered into the book like flower, leaves and stem?

Now I open the door, go in – and return.

**“To make theory, poetically.”2**

Two thoughts (or, perhaps more accurately, memories of thoughts) come to the surface when, after several years, I reread Mara Lee’s dissertation, *When Others Write: Writing as Resistance, Responsibility and Time* (2014). One of them is about Lee’s powerfully formulated desire to “make theory, poetically”. The other is about how she demonstrates the urgency of doing just that by turning the scientifically ingrained causal chain upside down and presupposing, rather than trying to prove, poetry’s legitimacy as a path to knowledge. In other words, this is a dissertation that explores questions generated by a primarily poetic logic, which marks its independence from the requirements of traditional science – but rather than eschewing them by shifting them, it enters into an engaged, at times impassioned dialogue with them.

It does so, for example, through problematisations of linguistic positions or concepts that bring together lived and embodied experience of otherness, or Other-ship, in the context of contemporary Swedish political history, which is usually simplistically referred to as *Folkhemmet* (the People’s Home), or the Welfare State. This is most striking in the chapter devoted to the astoundingly exuberant use of the terms *home* and *at home* in Swedish language usage – and how this constitutes a poetic-political practice that exposes a multi-branched system of secondary meanings stemming from *home* that includes the words for *horror* and *horrible*.3

It is these two interlinked ideas that I will focus on in this essay. The keywords that are captured by the subtitle – resistance, responsibility, time – are obvious linkages between them. But what is in the foreground for my reading is really the space and the movement and the writing body through which these positions are manifested and how I as a reader succeed (or fail) to address them. Also foregrounded for me is how these components become building blocks for a dialogical gap between literary research and literary composition research.

Both of these ideas – the poetical theory-making and the multiple, shifting meanings of home – are for me linked with the clues that are formed by pencil notations in the margins of my worn and well-read copy of the book. I go forward, backward, side to side and out into the darkness of the eleventh hour, following in my own footsteps and in the Other’s.

But just as you can never set foot in the same river twice, it is not possible to completely return to an earlier reading. A very few people perhaps have that ability – a photographic memory that holds not only the words on the pages but also the place and time they read them for the first time. Personally I have only occasional fragments from such localised memories of reading. But I do recall now that almost all of them, strangely enough, are about poetry. Or is that something that should be regarded as a given – because poetry in its origins is all about making? This is the kind of layer of meaning that I see set loose in Mara Lee’s book: *poiesis*, as place and action: making or bringing together something that did not previously exist. Juxtaposing with it the sister word *theoria*, in its original meaning of observing and contemplating, would seem perfectly natural – and quite promising. There is a tendency, particularly in scientific contexts, to treat etymologies as fossil thought structures, encapsulated in the bedrock of the language. This, instead, is a reading that wants to make them visible, like the teaming loam – to lift the stone and peer beneath.

**Literary criticism as a detour or a main route?**

I must also say something of my own reading movement and position. Mara Lee declares that she “has to take a detour by way of literary criticism” in order to make visible the knowledge route whose stopping points, among other things, can be followed in the dissertation’s footnotes (p. 34). For me, however, literary criticism has been the main route. As I write this, I am immersed in the subject as a teacher, researcher and professor. But my insatiable curiosity for writing’s many possible genres, in and outside of academic spaces, is, if not a detour, then at least a choice of route that might be seen as rather peculiar from certain points of view within the field of literary criticism – or at least somewhat unusual.

My infatuation with Mara Lee’s book therefore resonates with my own feeling of alienation when confronted with the way theory is often written (rather than made) in literary criticism writing. In certain periods (and particularly in the wake of post-structuralism’s heyday in the 1980s and 90s), there has been an unfortunate scientistic tendency in field. At times it has resulted in theory discussions that have capsized into agonisingly extended and introverted terminological exercises. I was reminded of it quite recently when I read an interview with the author and critic Hanna Nordenhök, another PhD in literary composition. The occasion for the interview was that Nordenhök had been awarded a critics’ prize, the motivation for which proclaimed her expertise in literary theory and her exemplary use of it without adopting an “excluding vocabulary” in her criticism. Nordenhök herself maintains that the reason for this is that the writing of literary fiction is always the point of departure for her, explaining, “I can’t escape a literary criticism approach.”4

Thus, like Lee, Nordenhök defines her position and her choice of perspectives by adopting a posture of negation, or a distancing, from “literary criticism” – which implicitly becomes more or less synonymous with inaccessible, stodgily theoretical writing. Or, in the words of the award jury, writing laden with an “excluding vocabulary”. It is likely not an entirely untrue picture, nor an entirely accurate one. As for me, I agree whole-heartedly that it is literary fiction, not theory, that must be the point of departure – just as theory must be illuminated as a visible aspect even in the writing of literary criticism, i.e. in the reading of literary fiction. Thereof my eagerness to join the procession, to take part in the making, and to arrive at the place where theory becomes poetry. And perhaps the converse as well?

However, it must be emphasised that the system of norms and the stylistic conventions that surround the writing of literary criticism, it goes without saying, are not the same as those that are now being tested and established in the field of artistic research. The research questions can in certain cases appear related, but the direction of travel taken in the search for answers is of necessity different. As Lee points out, artistic research cannot without friction shoulder scientific research’s conveyance of knowledge and communicative responsibility – it has, quite simply, an entirely different purpose (p. 30).

With this reservation in mind, it may nevertheless be said that the question of knowledge, like the making of theory, is a unifying link – and a shared challenge, even if the literary critic usually approaches it from a different place in the room. An example from my own research that can shed light on both the similarities and the differences may be found in the book *Genus och det akademiska skrivandets former* (*Gender and the Forms of Academic Writing*), which I published together with a group of feminist researchers a little more than a decade ago. The reciprocity between theory and style was a core point in the vision we wanted to formulate. We pointed out its direction by bringing to the fore the often repressed relationship between the research question and the writing manner:

“What is your research question?” is the classic starting question for any scientific project, from the secondary school paper through the doctoral dissertation. To simplify somewhat, you might say that we have expanded the question, entered into the rarely visited shadowland behind it and asked ourselves, Which manner of writing does your research question demand? And no less important: which manner of writing was suffocated by what you came to learn were the demands of your research question?5

This can also be illustrated with the writing manner that I have allowed to emerge in this essay from my reading, and rereading, of Mara Lee’s book and the questions it provokes in me. It is a conversational and essayistically experimental kind of style, with openings for a compositional element in the work with language. Nevertheless, it is not an unproblematic or risk-free style choice for a literary researcher. In some regards, it could be seen as breaking with the distance convention that is assumed in literary criticism, according to which the author and the work are to be regarded with reservation and suspicion rather than sympathy, something the researcher can conveniently acknowledge by not mixing in either feelings or literary style features when writing her analysis.

At the same time, it must be emphasised that literary criticism today holds its own teaming loam of entrances and directions, theories and writing manners. The incorporation of the subject branch of creative writing has done a great deal to vitalise the discipline, both in education and in research.6 In other words, there is a greater openness for alternative genres and writing manners. With that comes an increased interest in composition and experimental writing. All the more important, then, to make the distinction clear: scientific composition is not literary composition and vice versa. The kinship in expression should not be confused with the matter at hand: the “difference” in artistic research is also, as I will soon explain, so much more than a question of style and vocabulary.

Literary critical reader that I am, therefore, I go a little bit warily into a thought space that is also an interstitial space to read Mara Lee’s book. For it is my hope – my conviction, even – that there is truly such an interstitial space where an encounter between scientific research and compositional research becomes possible.

But before I get there, I want to first pause for a moment at the points of departure, the frameworks for the thought space that artistic research is in the process of constructing and where Mara Lee’s dissertation makes a contribution that is as original as it is important.

**Literary composition as method or theory?**

Literary research, or literary composition, as the doctoral programme subject is called, is still quite young as an academic discipline. It is less than ten years since the first Swedish dissertation in the subject was defended.7 That explains why various aspects of method, i.e. the making of art as research, have come to dominate the staking out of the research field. Mara Lee’s dissertation was second in order when she presented it in 2014. But in her case, it is perhaps less about method and more about making space – about creating a place for the search for literary knowledge. The distinction is not merely splitting hairs. In fact, I would see it as a decisive shift in points of emphasis, expressly highlighted in the dissertation’s statement of purpose, to “make and write theory”, and its two primary questions: “First, how should theory be made in artistic research? And second, what kind of space opens up when we do that?” (p. 30)

I recall that at a seminar Mara Lee once characterised her own doctoral studies as an exercise in occupying and moving through a space without furniture, sometime even without walls. That experience is reflected in the dissertation space’s mobile, transformative character. It is a space in movement, in continual remodelling and refurnishing, from chapter to chapter. And of course it must be so. In an academic discipline that is so young that it lacks its own tradition, norm systems and conventions have yet to solidify in taken-for-granted structures and claims on form and style. That confers a great deal of room to manoeuvre, but also a heavy responsibility. For each new book or dissertation that is written and printed, the well-trodden paths become wider and smoother underfoot, for better and for worse. That Lee has shown such resolve in mounting a resistance against literary criticism to formulate what she wants and does not want to do must be seen against that background. An academic discipline’s identity is always dependent upon this kind of dynamic between conversation and resistance, between tradition and the breaking of new ground and testing of new directions.

Thus, the dissertation’s shift of emphasis from method to theory also contributes to establishing a dynamic potential through the distinct turn it marks vis-a-vis what is, in my mind, a surprisingly persistent preoccupation with method in artistic research. Lee’s choice of direction is exacting, since it presupposes a mastery of theory at a high level. Lee does undoubtedly have that expertise, and it gives her the main key to the potential interstitial space – the space between composition and science. What happens there is not alchemy but a poetically expressed demonstration of how the question of method must be assimilated in the making of theory if it is to have any claim to relevance. *Poiesis* and *theoria*. Making and contemplation.

There are interesting similarities here with Toril Moi’s problematising of the practically obligatorily distinction-drawing presentation of “theory and method” that has been found for decades in nearly every paper or book on literary criticism. Moi asks herself if it is at all necessary, or even possible, to speak of a method within a discipline in which reading is key to most of what we do:

In my view, literary criticism – by which I mean what we now call “reading” – doesn’t have anything we can plausibly call competing methods, at least not in the sense widely used in the sciences and social sciences: a set of explicit – and repeatable – strategies for how to generate new knowledge. This is why literary critics often have trouble explaining their “method” to colleagues in other disciplines.8

What Moi asserts is that reading is never “only” reading and that consequently it cannot be considered reductive or in some other way disparaging to assert reading’s primacy and assign it scientific legitimacy – assuming that we recognise its value as a path to knowledge. And, conversely, that we also recognise literary fiction’s corresponding capacity.

A similar line of thinking can be discerned, in my view, in Mara Lee’s insistence on recognising artistic creation as a knowledge process in its own right, “which itself produces new ways to approach and take advantage of the surrounding world”, and which, through acts of creative making, can address phenomena and contexts for which other knowledge models lack the tools.

This means that artistic practice can constitute a method for reading and distinguishing formerly illegible political and bodily practices that the dominant discourse otherwise misses (p. 118).

The rotation of crops between prose and poetry in and between the different chapters of the dissertation makes possible a mobility between these “illegible” practices and dissolution of the divisions between them. It is a stylistic strategy that establishes its own distinctive type of theoretical-poetical elasticity characterized by perpetual overflow and leakage between different style and language types. Suddenly curse words can seep into a sentence: “None of these categories is original or eternal, but damned if they don’t hang on tenaciously anyway” (p. 23). The style oscillates between grandiloquent and vulgar, alternatingly slapstick and sorrowful. There are no solid boundaries between text and body, between language and reality. To borrow an expression from English, what emerges is more like a “body of text” than a book in the conventional sense. The materiality of a sheet of paper and the vulnerability of the human skin are incorporated into “a writing in which death leaves its scars upon the language” (p. 100).

***Hem hemsk hemskare folkhemskast* (Home horror horrible people’s-home-cast)**

The writing’s “as” both confounds and attracts. In keeping with the subtitle (*Writing as Resistance, Responsibility and Time*), these “as” similes become markers for stopping points, force fields in the embodying text’s movement among situations, places, spaces and times in which the shadow of the Other is deepened, transformed into “being a body instead of having one” (p. 128). There is the door, again. A door that swings between opening in welcome and shutting again in the face of the reader.

The point of opposition continually punctures the reader’s security in the text. It is mobile, like everything else. A glittering sequin in the gravel and a wandering point, like the laser beam from a rifle sight. A moving target. When the momentary becomes fixed, the gaze that is directed at you is severe: did you see it happen? Now we understand the difference when the Other writes: “Embodiment compels a double strategy – writing with the body, but also against it” (p. 128).

Resistance depends on responsibility. Patience with unfolding and unpacking the baggage that comes with place, origins, skin colour and the power and powerlessness of words. This can be expressed like this: “I come from a place in Sweden that is known for its rapeseed and its racism.” The wind from the metonymy of the where-are-we-headed question and its implicit comedy (we can laugh now, can’t we?) carries us along with it, but it presupposes, straight out from the quagmire: “This is home. My home is the gap between the yellow flowering fields and the dispossession. I am always in that gap, no matter wherever I live” (p. 137).

Time embraces the place, opening a historical space where the tension between the Swedish words for *home* and *at home* haunt, condition, and burn holes in the preconception that writing’s “as” can offer a home: “Writing is not home, but rather a negotiation of home” (Ibid). The Swedish language’s distinctive preoccupation with different configurations of the word *home* is exposed with almost shocking clarity. The “horrible home-words” are so embedded in everyday Swedish usage that they become fully visible in their cruelty and absurdity only when they are lined up together:

only in Swedish can a person who has never had a home say that she has had homes (*hem*) throughout her life: *barnhem* (orphanage), *fosterhem* (foster home), *daghem* (daycare centre), *familjehem* (family home), *gästhem* (guest house), *sjukhem* (hospital), *vandrarhem* (hostel), *hotellhem* (hotel), *avlastningshem* (cargo port), *behandlingshem* (rehabilitation clinic), *ålderdomshem* (assisted living centre) etc. (p. 155).

The shudder that runs through the sentence composition in these portions of the text continues in a formidable uproar in which the masses of words attract to themselves all the nearby variants of the word’s roots: *hemlig* (secret), *hemsk* (horrible), *hemskhet* (wickedness).... The echoes resonate on in an intelligent rereading of Per Olov Enquist’s *Captain Nemo’s Library* (1991). Mara Lee perhaps extends the reach of the novel’s portrayal of the exchangeable children and their deep loss of home and belonging to home and unites it with Freud’s ideas about *das Unheimliche* (the uncanny) and finds that Enquist both answers and alters Freud’s theory by anchoring it in the Swedish twentieth-century version of wickedness that so long ruminated unseen in the shadows behind the politics of the “people’s home”. The corrective to Freud’s *unheimliche* must be understood as the mundane “continental plazas or fashionable spa resorts” that surround it. With Enquist, as also with Brigitta Trotzig, the darkness seeps through between the syllables in a more stringent existence:

the Swedish “wickedness” is deeply rooted in the mire of the clay fields, in the cold deep snow, in the depth of the lake beneath the ice. The link to the home is at least as strong as in Freud’s eerie but different work – it is Swedish, horrible and human (p. 153).

The quotation gives a beautiful illustration of the subtitle in Lee’s linguistic work. The internal rhymes (in the words for Swedish, horrible, human) are so straightforward that they are hardly noticeable, they meld with and open up undetected precipices (deep snow, the depth of snow) in the reading. What we are witnessing here is the moment when theory is turned into poetry, when literary criticism reading is successfully incorporated into a work of literary composition. The implication of living in a language that excludes the opportunity of owning and recounting lived experiences of homelessness through an infinite number of variations of false home-words is disturbing. It is just here that the “people’s home” idea of the good home in which all are afforded a place to change form and become *folkhemsk* (literally “of the people’s home” or “people-horrible”):

When homelessness has no place in the language, it moves restlessly among various temporary homes and afflicts them, becoming a source of infection, something that destroys, sabotages the proper use of the language that of course is meant to afford everyone a home (p. 157).

In passages such as this, Mara Lee’s dissertation provides a luminescent demonstration of what artistic research can achieve, how it can at once enrich and undermine the great scientific conversation by disturbing its preconditions, recast the list of whom is invited to participate in the conversation and who is excluded. Literary research’s habit of reading the poets but thinking like the theoretician leads inevitably to brevity, juxtaposed to the oratory presented here. To “make theory, poetically” is in a way also an agitating manoeuvre. Or, to borrow Lee’s own concluding words:

This space is not like most others. Because the more people that stream in, the bigger it becomes, the colonial logic is temporarily disrupted. And the more of us there are who share the language, the richer it becomes (p. 250).

**Epilogue**

Every reading selects some and sorts out others. I have chosen, with just a couple of exceptions, not to name the many authors and theoreticians who are included in the conversation in Mara Lee’s dissertation. Jean Genet, Michel Foucault, Gloria Anzaldúa, Gertrude Stein, Toni Morrison… and many more. I think of their voices as preconditions built into the composition of the book. Their lines of thinking are the spirit level the carpenter uses to plumb the walls of the rooms the Other is written into and moves through and between. Or, why not, room-bearing sisters, to borrow words from the Norwegian poet Gro Dahle:

Just thought that  
The wall is a kind of sister,   
for the wall holds up the roof,   
day after day.9

But I must, in conclusion, also explain my choice of vantage point in the margins. Not least because the dissertation text’s body and authorship is set in perpetual motion and expressly avoids the margins. The risk of getting stuck, of sinking, of being dumbfounded there must never be underestimated, that’s true (*ah, Eurydice!*).

Normally the margins are a silent place – a snowdrift outside the walls of the text. But they can also be seen as a kind of sanctuary – a place for exchange of voices and experiences, which falls outside of the daylight and the insight of the everyday and ingrained. Or, to use Mara Lee’s words again, a place where the shadow realm of the eleventh hour can be sensed, where the everyday sheds its skin to reveal “everynight”.

However, it was another thought picture that first came to me and that determined my choice of position in the margins. It is one I took out on long-term loan in my own writing from the Palestinian poet Suheir Hammad. For her, the margins of every book offer a potentially subversive place – a place for resistance. Therefore, she sees the margins as a strategically well-chosen place to make a stand, for example for anyone who wants to explore the dynamics and power play between centre and periphery in various knowledge traditions. Notations and scribbles in the margins of the pages of the book break the silence between reader and author, she says. To “lift over” the margins to the middle of the page can thus function as an invitation to conversation between voices that seldom meet, but also a challenge to the structure of power that keeps apart and divides. Hammad suggestively unfolds this meeting’s metaphors and gender-imprinted body politics through the beautiful English word “outskirts”, synonymous with periphery. She writes, “Women writers have practiced our craft from the outskirts. [...] And yet, we also write from the ‘in-skirts’ – from our bodies and the intimate space around them.”10

Seen from inside/from outside the fabric of the skirt, the margins become a transgressive textile/textual interstitial space where body, words and movement interact. A meeting place, a dance floor, where the reader in brief moments becomes part of the embodying rhythm between words and silence.

The movements of the margins are those of initiation – and undulation. Like the pleated skirt fabric of the northern lights, rustling over the edge of the forest. Yes, in Mara Lee’s words, it is a “writing lined with death”. A linguistic dress in which seams and scars, fabric and skin overlap. It is a language of becoming, a text in weaving –

1 Mara Lee, *Writing as Resistance, Responsibility and Time*, Gothenburg: Glänta Produktion, 2014, p. 21. Henceforward, page references to the book will be given in the body of the text.

2 *When Others Write*, p. 30.

3 Cf *When Others Write*, Ch. 4 (“Shifts 1. The language is our home, a home in motion”) for an exploration of the term *hem* (home) and its many implications in the Swedish language.

4 “Expressens Hanna Nordenhök får pris” (unsigned), *Expressen* 5 Nov 2019. Nordenhök received her PhD in literary composition at the Valand Academy in 2018 with the dissertation *The Black Block in the World: Readings, Conversations, Transcript*, Malmö: Rámus 2018.

5 Annelie Bränström Öhman and Mona Livholts (eds.), *Gender and the Forms of Academic Writing*, Lund: Studentlitteratur 2007, p. 9. My italics.

6 At Umeå University, the Literary Criticism faculty has for several years been offering a bachelor’s programme called “Literary Studies and Creative Writing”, which has graduated a healthy stream of students. The little “and” between the two subject areas is of great importance. For us, it has meant that we strive to integrate (instead of separating) creative writing with the teaching of literary history. A natural component of the programme is to provide students with training in writing in the literary as well as scientific and cultural journalism genres.

7 Fredrik Nyberg, *Hur låter dikten? Att bli ved II*, Göteborg: Litterär gestaltning, Akademin Valand 2013

8 Toril Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies After Wittgenstein, Austin and Cavell*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2017, p. 178.

9 Gro Dahle, *Søster*, Oslo: Cappelen Damm 2016: p. 18.

10 Suheir Hammad, “From the Margin to the Page”, preface to *Word: On Being a (Woman) Writer* (ed. Jocelyn Burrell), New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York 2004, p. xiii.

Helga Krook’s *Memory Movements   
and the Dilemma of Artistic Research*

Sven Anders Johansson

**The Author**

What is an author? And what is a dissertation? When I was invited to contribute to this anthology, my assignment was to write about Helga Krook’s dissertation, *Memory Movements*. When I receive the book, I see it includes a slipcase containing six smaller booklets, the slimmest of just 25 pages, the thickest of 156. The six booklets are by five different authors in addition to Krook herself: Elise Adrian, Linda Beel, Hilde Lindroth, Anja Nachaum and Greta Wiedrow. In Libris, Krook is credited as the author, while the other names are listed as “contributors”, and it is the same in the Regina, the catalogue of the Royal Library.

When I search further under the names of the other authors, they don’t seem to have published anything at all apart from Krook's dissertation, or at least not outside of Krook’s writing. In one edition of the journal *Ord & bild* in which her dissertation project is featured, it says that “One of the methods for this project has been to assign some of the work on the dissertation to other authors.”1 Linda Beel and Anja Nachaum also contribute to the issue – in the list of contributors, they are described as a “freelance writer” and a “poet”.

For some reason I don’t believe it – probably because I had heard rumours that the co-authors were made up, rather like Fernando Pessoa’s imaginary characters. Krook is the only one of the authors who exists outside of the thesis text. What happens then with her status when she takes her place alongside these apparently fictive authors? How real, in fact, is “Helga Krook”? Can one even defend a thesis without declaring oneself to be the sole author?

This last is an academic and legal question – one that I assume has been addressed in a meeting of the examining committee – which assuredly has literary theoretical as well as philosophical and artistic dimensions. But while the literary theory issues of the author’s name (Why is it so important for us to tie the writing to one author? Does there have to be one unique individual from the start of the process?) lead outward to even larger questions (What is an author? What is a subject?), I sense that Krook and her adviser are also grappling with more concrete questions (What name should it say on the cover? What do the various author names do to the status of the text?).

*Memory Movements* brings these questions to a head even before we begin reading – and that, in my opinion, is a quality. Provoking questions is to a great extent what research is all about. Nevertheless, for a critical reader assigned to understand and evaluate a given dissertation, one acute question arises: Why this game with the names? What is it for? And what does it lead to? Whether the name game is a problem or a strength depends on which answer the dissertation gives to these latter questions.

**The Title, the Whole**

*Memory Movements* – nothing more, with no subtitle – is the title. How is it to be understood? “Memory” may refer to both a subjective ability and an objective result of – or an objective precondition for – that subjective ability: the computer I’m writing on right now works thanks to an internal memory; there are memorial monuments and commemorative celebrations that are there to manifest and work through past events, to make them present and shared. *Memory Movements* oscillates very consciously between the objective and the subjective, the manifest and the latent. It is subjective to the extent that it is rooted in the varied perspectives and predicaments of the different author names, but not in the sense that it explores the different authors’ own memories and experiences. We never get a close insight into any of the contributors; that’s not the goal here. On the contrary, the dissertation seems to be on the hunt for something inter-subjective or shared, something that links the present to a past, something that is quite simply objective in the sense that its existence is not exhausted by the subject. The subject is the means to get there.

I write “seems” because there is something extremely diffuse and unclear about the dissertation’s own movements. Thematically it covers a lot of ground: Dresden, Neues Museum in Berlin, Victor Klemperer, the legacy of Nazism, East German communism, the Elbe River, what it is to remember, the interview genre, the German language, the pitfalls of all retelling, etc., etc. The fact that a dissertation is characterised by searching is only natural, but in traditional research – humanistic as well as academic research in general – there is as a rule a question or a thesis that gives direction to the searching, and a topic or subject area that delimits it. A research undertaking is about answering the question, proving the thesis, and thereby contributing new knowledge about a topic, within a subject area. In *Memory Movements* there is no expressed question, no clear research question. (The closest thing to a research question is perhaps the rather vague formulation, given in the abstract for the study, about how the dissertation focuses on “a complex problem of narration, which remains, naturally, unsolved”.2) Nor is there a subject area defined in advance, nor any expressed purpose. So how then does it hold together? What does the whole look like? What is the purpose of each of the different parts? And how do they relate to one another?

One could answer those questions by turning to Theodor Adorno’s essayistic ideal and say that the method in Krook’s dissertation is the configuration rather than the definition.3 What the thesis has to say it says through the ingenious weaving together of a number of different operations rather than by nailing it down with a maxim, a concept, an argument, a conclusion. It is therefore inherent in its logic to not allow it to be confined to one area – the “area” and the “subject” are what the dissertation creates in its own experimental searching, through the configuration that emerges successively. Behind that viewpoint, in Adorno’s case, lies a critique of traditional research, which in actual fact, from his perspective, is not at all searching. Its underlying purpose is instead to confirm the prevailing dogma: what we already know, the existing positions. Real research presupposes the open experimentation of the essay.

This is an ideal that, staying with Adorno for the moment, is closer to art’s mode of operation. Given that this is a dissertation in literary composition, this is of course a reasonable approach. However, it is important, even if the results hold – in fact perhaps even more important then – that there is an internal logic or form in the work or the object produced, quite simply a necessity in the configurations that the work establishes. These results must tolerate criticism, just as all research must, but on their own conditions.

**The Parts**

The white slipcase holds six parts. Elise Adrian’s part is the shortest, with just 25 pages. It comprises 62 short, numbered paragraphs, entirely uncapitalised, all written in German. The content comes across in part as a kind of poetically treated example of a language exercise – taken from or inspired by, I would guess, books like Ernst Gerlach’s (ed.) *Sprechübungen für den Unterricht in der deutschen Sprache*, which is included in the concluding literature list.

Linda Beel’s part, the dissertation’s lengthiest, comprises two sections: “Erinnerungslandschaft” and “The Dresden Document: A Territory”. The former comprises a kind of journal entries or sketches written primarily in various places in Berlin. The narrative identity appears to be a Swedish cultural journalist interested in architecture, urban space, museums, Nazism, etc. The name Ilse plays an important role, though it’s not clear who she is. “The Dresden Document” includes a series of numbered “Experiments”, all abruptly discontinued, cryptic. They are dated 2012, in Dresden, Prague and Stockholm. The questions are many, the tone lofty.

Hilde Lindroth’s part is made up mostly of notes from her investigations of what happened with her grandfather’s sister Ilse (there’s that name Ilse again...). Because of her schizophrenia, this Ilse was admitted to a euthanasia clinic in Nazi Germany, where she died in 1941. Important in this context are the parents of Ilse and Hilde’s grandfather: Linda and Ernst Gerlach (it could be the same Gerlach who edited the dictionary Adrian uses). Some of the father and mother’s letters to the clinic where their daughter Ilse was confined are quoted. The wife’s letters always close with the words “With German regards”, the father’s with “Heil Hitler”.

Anja Nachaum’s part is made up entirely of poetry. It has four sections, the shortest only a few pages long. A collective motif is the River Elbe, which flows through Dresden and empties into the Baltic Sea. One part of the booklet is accompanied by an English text, apparently borrowed from UNESCO’s descriptions of various world heritage sites. A recurring theme in this part is the question of the form and mutability of a place as a form of existence.

Greta Wiedrow’s part is entitled “A Kind of Adrenaline Acuity” and comprises fragments of interviews with the retired nurse Martha Gerlach, who seems to be Wiedrow’s mother and the daughter of Ernst and Linda Gerlach, the couple who play central roles in Lindroth’s part. It is said that the interviews, which deal largely with Nazism, took place on eight occasions between 2000 and 2002. But upon closer examination, the text is made up almost entirely of Wiedrow’s reflections about the interview form rather than of the interviews themselves. Only smaller fragments of Gerlach’s answers are reproduced.

The whole that these five parts together constitute is disparate and fragmentary, but also well thought through and discretely coherent. In the course of my reading, there emerged a number of small but significant links (those mentioned above are just a few examples) among the dissertation’s different parts and perspectives. Bit by bit, it is as though the different parts communicate more with one another than with the reader. Even if it is still hard after completing a reading to answer the question of what the thesis wants to achieve, a broader picture gradually emerges – compound, fragmentary, but to some extent coherent – a little like putting together a large puzzle without knowing the picture. If there is a centre to the picture, it is Ilse’s fate and the family’s way of relating to it. (The dissertation deals with “the family as a place for historical writing”, according to the explanation given in the Summary (HK p. 83).) On a more comprehensive or indirect plane, one could therefore say that the dissertation deals with how one should relate to the Nazis’ crimes. How should they be retold, how should the memory of them be preserved, how can the suffering and the guilt be justified? In short, how should this history be told? Is it possible to represent it without simultaneously altering it?

But even if the different parts are disparate, they are perhaps not quite as disparate as Krook herself seems to believe. In the dissertation’s summary, it is asserted that the different authors speak with five different voices, but aren’t their voices, tone and temperament in actual fact closely related? Is there not a consistent style (lofty, fragmented, searching, cryptic) that unites all of these parts? Does this not indicate that there is after all a central position from which the whole thing is experienced, conceived, said, written? In other words: is there not, after all, a uniform author subject behind the disparate parts – just what the project appears to want to avoid?

**Order**

The simple answer is that this position is found in Helga Krook’s own part. I address this one on its own, not because it falls outside of the dissertation, but because it occupies a relatively clear meta-level in relation to the other parts. Krook appears here as a kind of editor who reflects on the project as a whole. Her part begins with a traditional academic abstract: it includes the dissertation’s title, keywords and abstract. However, it does not name the author. In the text itself, there are also traces of the ingredients I sought above: purpose, research question, even a methodology discussion, if only in the form of quotations from an application to the doctoral degree programme she once filled out. The part concludes with an English summary, which clarifies an unusual amount for a summary, along with a customary word of thanks. If it is made clear anywhere that this is a dissertation, this is the place. At the same time, it is as though the author identity is constantly trying to avoid such clarity, as though the text struggles against its own status as a dissertation, against its form. “This dissertation perhaps does not exist. More on that later” (HK p. 23).

In spite of this reluctance, the Krook part is described on one occasion as a “preface”, i.e. an introductory chapter that outlines, comments on and holds together the articles in a compilation dissertation. The odd thing is that the preface in this case lies in the middle of the thesis, just one part among the others, more of a central core than a preliminary view or surrounding frame. It is certainly true, as Krook emphasises, that there is no indication as to which order the different parts are meant to be read, but of course we must read in some order. And I suspect that some people will start with Krook’s own part, while others will do as I did, and read the parts in the alphabetical order in which they are arranged on the slipcase’s cover: Adrian, Beel, Krook, Lindroth, Nachaum, Wiedrow.

And of course Krook has thought about this, because the order is quite important. If we read her part first, there is a risk that the other parts are reduced to literary fiction illustrations of the meta-discussion that is found in her own part. The positive in that case is that when we encounter the other parts, we have a better understanding of the project as a whole, particularly through the explanations of the concluding summary, but a critical question also arises: what do the other parts really contribute? Can they avoid being no more than illustrations of the editor’s reflections? Why should one read them, when they so decidedly turn away? Or taking a broader perspective: what does the artistic dimension add to the academic research aims? A decorative “doubt”, a shaking up of the solid that nevertheless ultimately lies there as a frame, the A to Z of the dissertation.

Because the “preface” lies instead at the centre, the conditions are changed. To use a term that pops up in Krook’s part, it’s about “interpretive sovereignty”: read in this order, it is not the academic components (abstract, summary, the research question, the findings, etc.) that provide the framework for the literary; the relationship is in fact the opposite. And this sheds a different light on the game with fictive names, perspectives and formats, which is at times confusing and even irritating. By placing the academic questions in the middle, the matter is turned inside out: readers must search through the text to find the research questions through Adrian’s linguistic exercises and Beel’s notes, and then find their own way out again through Lindroth, Nachaum and Wiedrow’s diverse contributions. The disadvantage of this order is that it depends largely on the reader’s engagement to work – on their willingness to keep reading in spite of the lack of clarity. The advantage? A kind of openness to other opportunities, other modes, other directions. At least that is, I believe, the idea.

**Communication**

“Don’t we have to try to find other ways of telling stories that are perhaps not stories in a strict sense?” (GW p. 46). This question, formulated at the conclusion of Wiedrow’s part, is to some extent the question or thesis of the entire dissertation: don’t we need to find other ways?

It’s not a new question. If we have Ilse Gerlach’s above-described fate in mind, we can see it as a variation on Adorno’s famous maxim that Auschwitz made poetry impossible (and necessary): for both aesthetic and ethical reasons, we must find other ways of expressing what has happened. Fundamentally this is modernism’s eternal preoccupation, in fact the imperative of all of modern art: *make it new*. On the other hand, it is not the imperative of modern research. The research, the science par excellence, depends on the method. Rather than a search for “new” ways, it is characterised by the standardised approach. In that regard, Krook’s dissertation illustrates the undeniable difference between artistic and traditional academic research.

That does not mean there are no problems or difficulties in this need to “find other ways”, particularly because it can conflict with the need to make oneself understood. This is one of the central dilemmas that *Memory Movements* grapples with: on one hand it tries to find new forms of expression, new storytelling formats; on the other it must, like all literature, make itself comprehensible, legible. It is significant that it is possible to find a reflection on this in the book (“It is not possible to read this book”) (LV p. 120). The dissertation is aware of the problem.

Architecture is a dialogue, not a monologue, asserts the architect Daniel Liebeskind in a comment quoted by Beel. ”It’s more like a book. […] It has to be able to communicate” (LB p. 148; ellipsis by Beel). This is true, in fact, for any book, for literature, for artistic research: it must communicate. Isn’t this, in the end, literature’s primary obligation? It must make itself understood. The reader must be convinced to keep reading. A dissertation does not need to be as preoccupied with that requirement as a newspaper article, of course, or a lecture or a crime novel, but ultimately specialised research too must appeal to the reader, bring readers along in some way, and communicate. Otherwise, the reading will simply end, and the dissertation will remain unread.

*Memory Movements* is not some uncomfortable or awkward text (even if it requires the reader have mastery of German), but its lack of clarity (its unclear purpose, unclear direction, unclear topic), in combination with the lack of explanations (the different parts barrel straight into what they do without ramping up and without guardrails) undeniably requires a great deal of the reader. We are expected to read on without knowing what is at stake. Rather than the text wanting to convey some message to me, it is sometimes as though it intentionally hides something, as though it is striving for ambiguity.

One example: Greta Wiedrow’s part, as noted, is made up entirely of interviews with the mother, Martha Gerlach, but the whole thing is fragments. In the concluding list of references, we are given the laconic explanation that “the text itself fell apart”. I perceive the comment as part of the fiction that author Wiedrow is herself part of, and yet – or perhaps because of that – it provokes my sceptical objection: what happens when a text falls apart? If we are afflicted by some kind of improbable catastrophe (the computer’s hard drive crashes; the only record is a paper printout, and half of that blows away on a stormy day at the beach; the shuffled remains of a document in the attic...), wouldn’t we then patch together the pieces as best we can, if it’s a dissertation we’re talking about? And if portions of the printed material are lost, one could expect that it would be the first half, or the second half, or something like that – not every other section.

Okay, I’m making a consciously clumsy argument now, but I do so in order to demonstrate the lack of credibility in the explanation (“the text fell apart”) this dissertation expects me as a reader to believe. Or else it’s not so important: the reader is supposed to just accept that the text is fragmented. But why is it fragmented? The ambiguity on this matter, in my mind, has consequences for the status of the fragments. The absence of a good explanation means that I instead assume, think, realise that the “fragments” are actually the whole thing, and consequently not really fragments at all. Thus, even the fragmentary form is only a pretence ...?

Another example may be found in Linda Beel’s booklet under the journal entry heading “7 November” in “The Dresden Document: A Territory”: “If the word Dresden was every spoken at home in Vad, it was my father’s word. The word A was almost never spoken” (LB p. 139). Those are the first two sentences in a ten-line-long paragraph. My interpretation is that “Vad” is the name of a place where the author has lived. But what word “A” is an abbreviation for remains obscure. There are no clues in the surrounding text. The author seems to know, so why doesn’t she just write out the word? Because it’s a secret? Unethical (A for Aryans)? Irrelevant? None of these alternatives stands out as particularly good.

The consequence of the text in this way taking back the information it at first seems to offer the reader is a growing uncertainty: what does it mean that it was “my father’s word”? Shouldn’t it say “my father’s expression” or something like that? Because of course words don’t belong to one person, especially a word like “Dresden”, which is just the name of a place. Why are parts of the text written in cursive? And the “Ilse” about whom so much is said – who is she? Why does the dissertation choose to mumble to me rather than speaking as clearly as it can? Is it I who am sloppy in my reading, or is it the book that wants to hide something instead of conveying something? Shouldn’t it instead do everything it can to help me understand?

To mystify means to be deliberately obscure – in order to hide the fact that the situation is actually trivial, simple. The logic of mystification is to create the illusion that there is something behind the veil. I believe that Krook’s dissertation can to some extent be criticised for this.

**Truth**

But the fact that literature must communicate, in accordance with the Liebeskind quotation above, does not necessarily mean that it needs to communicate according to the conditions of the prevailing conventions. One could in fact assert that literature is all about establishing one’s own conditions for communicating. Or, as Krook writes, “A literary composition, if we’re talking about text, could be just about anything, but it has to be written from start to finish on its own terms” (HK p. 71). From this point of view, the boundary between clarity and obscurity is never determined in advance. The capacity to communicate is always being renegotiated – in fact, you could even claim that it is this renegotiation that is literature.

In Linda Beel’s part, there is a comment on the difficulty of telling a story that has never been told.

Is it so that the telling tends to get worse the closer it gets to what has never been told? That the telling itself easily collapses under the weight of the untold, under the necessity to tell, to show us: this is how it was! It is true! And quickly – as though everything might suddenly disappear again – one chops out the finished narrative’s clichés in order to convey *das noch nie Dagewesene* (the unprecedented). Maybe also to be able to present what is recognisable. As though doing so might make it more credible (LB p. 143).

I read the passage as, if not a defence of mystification, then at least a warning of the opposite pitfall: the clichés to which the telling deteriorates when forced to make itself understood – that is, recognisable – in hopes of showing something true.

To be specific, what is at stake here is not the ethical dilemma of witnessing an event of suffering and criminality (“Auschwitz”) that exceeds the human capacity for compassion and understanding, but rather the difficulty in telling the untold without transforming it into something recognisable, something that just confirms the status quo (our taste, our conventions, the excellence of our values, etc.). It could be formulated as the dilemma of novelty – topical today in both art and research – which in Krook’s case is specific to the problem of narration. Thus, the question Beel poses is whether the telling automatically becomes bad when it takes on the untold. Perhaps. In that case, all searching for new knowledge will of necessity lead to the obscure, the unknown. If we are on the hunt for something as yet unknown, it is not possible to define or describe our way to it – so other methods are required. From this perspective, therefore, it is not through any kind of snobbery or some desire to mystify that the text breaks off and becomes obscure, but rather as a consequence of a desire to avoid the clichés.

In this way, the “untold” may be said to have a weight that causes the telling to collapse – this is what Krook’s (or Beel’s) argument looks like. This collapse is a metaphor that recurs several times in the dissertation, as here in Krook’s part: “When artistic expression collapses under the weight of an excessively historical weight and reworked material. [...] When some matter needs to be demonstrated and art is the only medium that can do it, and it collapses” (HK p. 67). Here it is the material itself that has weight – it is not hard to understand – but the failure is the same. What becomes more clear here, although it was perhaps implicit in the preceding quotation as well, is that the collapse itself thereby comes across as inevitable. Something similar is expressed a couple of pages earlier: “The format developed for this project is going to create a history. Several of them. Therefore, the format must be open. It must be able to hold even what we don’t yet know. How can I invent a true – true? – format when the whole project is bound to fail?” (HK p. 64). Even if the project is bound to fail, it is also going to create a history. Thus, it is not possible to avoid the history, the story, the whole. But, on the other hand, one can create multiple histories by keeping the format open.

The possibility of writing the true is thus problematised both in the latter quotation and in the block quotation above. But if the former instance expresses scepticism about the possibility of representing the true, the latter instance seeks a format that is true. In this way we end up once again close to Adorno and his descriptions of art’s relationship to the true:

The true is open to discursive knowledge, but for precisely that reason it doesn’t possess it; the true has the knowledge that art is, but as something incommensurable with it.

(Unverhüllt ist das Wahre der diskursiven Erkenntnis, aber dafür hat sie es nicht; die Erkenntnis, welche Kunst ist, hat es, aber als ein ihr Inkommensurables.)4

The artworks have an extremely tension-filled relation to the amount of truth they contain. While this concept-less content only becomes apparent in the made, it simultaneously negates the made. Each work of art goes like a structure under its truth content [...].

(Zu ihrem Wahrheitsgehalt stehen die Kunstwerke in äusserster Spannung. Während er, begriffslos, nicht anders als im Gemachten erscheint, negiert er das Gemachte. Ein jedes Kunstwerk geht als Gebilde in seinem Wahrheitsgehalt unter.)5

In contrast to discursive knowledge, each work of art, from Adorno’s point of view, carries with it a truth; it’s just that the work itself stands in conflict with this truth. Thus, the truth of which Adorno speaks deals not with some form of representation of an exterior relationship (“the film gives a true picture of X”), but rather with the content of the work itself. Nor is it so simple that this content can be understood in terms of some inner harmony or reconciliation. The truth content is instead tied to the moment when the work as a creation (*Gebilde*) collapses. Thus, there is no simple reconciliation in this, either in Adorno or in Krook: the incommensurability, the failure, the collapse, is an aesthetic precondition.

Even Krook’s mystifying tendencies thereby take on a different light, at least in theory. Defending a work that tries to be obscure is hard; understanding a work’s struggle to create clarity, meaning, context and whole is something entirely different.

**Movement**

The dilemma, the question Krook’s dissertation treats, grows increasingly clear: both art and research are about telling the untold, about trying to get at something true. But anyone who has something to tell is consigned to the language that already exists – to the clichés, the recognisable, the usual narrative ploys. The alternative is to interrupt oneself and stay with the unexpressed – with the consequence that communication is abandoned. Understanding is rendered impossible. In this way, all literature is a Münchhausen trilemma. Each work must pull itself up by its bootstraps.

Krook’s answer to this dilemma is about mobility and lightness. The precisely articulated question is: how can we find a sustainable but sufficiently light form for a material as heavy as the memory of Nazism? Or, in Krook’s words, “In light of all the questions the material provoked, a single counter-question arose: How can I find a lightness, a space of my own in the work with materiality and the questions that in the end are the decisive ones? How can I find a freedom of movement? An opportunity to be surprised?” (HK p. 12). If the failure, that is the failing, is inevitable, then she is pointing here toward something more constructive: freedom of movement.

The great significance of movement for the project is apparent from word’s inclusion in the title of the dissertation, but the theme pops up here as well, two pages after the comment on the collapse. It’s about the fact that the desire for understanding risks leading to rigidity, which renders understanding impossible. The comment is short and cryptic, but it can be associated with the so-called “Holocaust industry” – how the desire to memorialise the Nazi Holocaust transforms it on the contrary into a fetish whose rigidity obscures the true. In the same way, a text that wants to both memorialise and be understood risks, in Krook’s words, “becoming rigid, drowning, being lost. Understanding is an impossibility, a downward spiral into a depth that seems without end.” That line is followed by a new paragraph, which introduces what is really a recipe, a solution: “To not lose the ability to move. Perhaps this is as far as these five authors can come in relation to this material” (HK p. 69). Mobility is what’s important – mobility in relation to the material. The old boundary between told and untold is exchanged for another: rigidity vs. movement. The advantage of this manoeuvre could be that mobility confers the ability to overstep the boundary between silence and communication, between the told and the untold.

It is tempting to agree with this, to agree with the dissertation. At the same time, we can ask ourselves whether all literature must necessarily become rigid. And is not this rigidity – in the form of a book, a printout, a sound recording – a precondition for the work’s status as literature? Is not the rigidity of the language – the grammar, the alphabet – a precondition for distinctive individualised characteristics, for linguistic nuances, for double meanings? Doesn’t mobility arise in the reading thanks to literature’s rigidity? And is there not a risk that a work that tries too hard to be mobile forces the reader to be rigid? Or the converse: is it actually the most rigid, the most ossified, genres – the myth, the folk tale, the pop lyrics – that generate the most movement in the form of inspiring poetry, fantasising, arousal, reinterpretation, misinterpretation...?

Thus, the question is whether movement is something the work must bring about in the way that Krook seems to want to do, or if it is always there and part of every act of reading. If the key is not to lose the ability to move, then the question follows as to where that ability lies – in the work or in the reader’s aesthetic experience?

The answer, of course, is both. You can’t have one without the other. The answer is also: in literature, when it succeeds in creating a space in which truths can be mobile rather than being nailed down, as formulated in one fragment from Adrian: “setze einen raum. setze ein – , wo wahrhei- ten sich bewegen können, dürfen, mögen, müssen” (EA p. 21).

I previously concluded that Krook demands a lot of her reader: a great deal of patience with the cryptic and with the ambiguity of the whole. At the same time, I wonder if, in another regard, she doesn't sometimes underestimate the reader’s ability to provoke movement. Isn’t it enough to, in Adrian’s words, create the space? The movement is up to the reader.

Perhaps this is an inevitable aspect of artistic research: it can expect nothing and must demand too much.6 It must be heavy and light at the same time.

**Artistic Research**

In the theoretical discussion of artistic research’s identity and potential, this research is recurrently assumed to relate to a number of different boundaries: the boundaries between the practice-based and the theoretical, the poetic and the critical, the artistic and the analytical, and so forth. The problem is that these distinctions can easily be transformed into premises that are allowed to define artistic research, regardless of whether it is assumed to overstep these boundaries or to stay on one side or the other.7

If we take up the matter from Adorno’s perspective, these divisions appear to be disturbingly rigid. From his point of view, art itself – which naturally is a form of practice, just as science is – already includes a reflective component, a rationality, a critical dimension. From this perspective, “artistic research” appears to be practically a tautology, though one that is anything but innocent. For does it not imply on one had a deeply romantic conception of Art as something creative and indecipherable (to which a dose of critical reflection must be introduced if there is to be any research from it), and on the other hand a super-positivistic image of Science as something thoroughly analytical, rational and theoretical?

If one wants to defend artistic research against this kind of Adorno-influenced casting of aspersions, one could claim that the purpose is not some kind of synthesis, but rather to make a home in the work itself for the tension between the creative and the critical (the mimetic and the conceptual, the material and the formal, the somatic and the rational, the social and the metaphysical, the practical and the theoretical...). The goal is not to heal the rift between the two, but to create a work that incorporates the dialectic in which one is constantly transitioning into the other.

Naturally there is nothing forcing us to take direction from Adorno in this way; the predicament of artistic research can of course be conceived from entirely different theoretical premises. The reason I spend so much time with his ideas is that Adorno actually makes Krook’s dissertation more comprehensible. I understand her ingenious, complex and challenging dissertation as an attempt to offer both aspects in Adorno’s dialectic – art and interpretation, “imitation” and “other reflection” – within one and the same work. The tactic of inventing five co-authors is a way of achieving a necessary distance to her own work – within the work itself.

Thus, there is an underlying thought and a logic in the different author names and the strategy of distinguishing one part of the thesis as a framing introduction. Even if there are of course weaknesses in the findings (just as there are in every dissertation ever written), as a strategy for an artistic research project, in my eyes it is nevertheless quite productive. It should be clear that this should not be construed as a “method” that henceforward could be imitated and applied by future doctoral students. Artistic research, like humanities research when it is at its best, should be about inventing without guarantees the “method” required for the specific situation, the specific materiality.8 Which is precisely what Krook does, or tries to do – in that sense her dissertation is exemplary.

1 “Ur ett pågående doktorandprojekt i litterär gestaltning”, *Ord & bild*, 5 (2012), p. 4.

2 Helga Krook, Memory Movements, Autor, 2015, p. 5. (Page references to *Memory Movements* with henceforth be given in the body of the text. The different contributors’ initial indicate which part is being referred to.)

3 Theodor W. Adorno, “Essän som form”, trans. Anders Johansson, *Glänta* 1 (2000), pp. 32–45: here pp. 38, 44.

4 Theodor W. Adorno, *Estetisk teori*, trans. Sven-Olov Wallenstein, Glänta produktion, 2019, p. 184. (Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, Gesammelte Schriften bd 7, ed. Rolf Tiedemann & Gretel Adorno, Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 191.)

5 Ibid, p. 191 f. (Ibid, p. 199).

6 As Jan Baetens puts it: “We have encountered a fundamental and recurring problem: one always explains either too much or not enough.” Jan Baetens, “Writing Cannot Tell Everything” in *Artistic Research and Literature*, (eds. Corina Caduff & Tan Wälchli), Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2019, pp. 13–22: here p. 19.

7 Cf. ibid, p. 15–16, 20; Vincent Broqua, “Practice-Based Literary Research as Activated Inquiry” in *Artistic Research and Literature*, a.a., pp. 113–24: here p. 113.

8 Or, David Matcham puts it, “Artistic research grounds itself in the abyss of its own groundless self-affirmation. If there can be said to be a grounding factor in artistic research then it is precisely in continued fidelity to the indefensible decision to begin the work that is itself grounded in the imaginative leap of faith into the unknown.” David Matcham, “Practices of Legitimacy and the Problem of Artistic Research” in *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*, vol. 13:3 (2014), pp. 276–81: here p. 281.

Lisa Tan’s *I Narrate Her Influence on Me1*

Petra Bauer

**A Point of Departure**

I began my doctoral studies in artistic processes at Konstfack, the University of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm, in 2010. Yes, this was how the project was framed – that I was a doctoral student in artistic processes. It was explicit, a given requirement, that in our doctoral education we were to reflect on our artistic processes and working methods, and that we should then share these with others. My understanding was that such reflection was considered more important than the theme or phenomenon we were exploring, more important than the actual work we developed and the knowledge produced through them. It was instead the illumination of our methods that constituted the core of artistic research. Of course this influenced me and my colleagues who perceived it in the same way in how we organised our dissertation projects within the framework of the doctoral programme. When it comes to actual artistic work, I continued as I always had to make films in close collaboration with individuals and groups, but the text I had written within the framework for the dissertation was dispatched by a clearly individual, singular subject. Through this text, I reflected over the films we created and the methodology we had developed. In my case, thus, the difference was obvious between the collective “we” around which the films were built and the singular “I” examined in the text, and in part explained the methodologies for the collective we that I thought made up the film.

Of course, there are other ways of approaching artistic research than the one described above. One research group that has demonstrated this is Forensic Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London. Forensic Architecture comprises a group of researchers from various disciplines, including journalists, filmmakers, lawyers, artists and programmers who employ artistic methods to study abuses committed by states and large corporations against both people and the natural environment. They take on cases on behalf of human rights organisations, lawyers, activists and non-profit organisations in the local communities impacted by the abuses, and they present their results in courts, tribunals and the media as well as cultural institutions that are also involved in funding them.2 In Sweden, however, until now the dominant stance has been that artistic research is about reflecting on the artist’s processes and methods. In recent years, new approaches have certainly been developed and adopted in Sweden’s art schools as well.

The same year that I was admitted to the doctoral degree programme, Lisa Tan began her own doctoral work at the Valand Academy in Gothenburg. We met within the framework for the national school of artistic research3, and together with other doctoral students we formed a group in which we discussed issues related to artistic research generally and to our doctoral programmes in particular. We shared our knowledge and experiences, but also our frustration over the absence of certain structures and issues in the programmes. What courses were we actually supposed to take? What was expected of us as doctoral students in art? Could we make art without needing to write a thesis? That is, was it enough to let our work to document our process, or did we also need to put the method we had chosen into words? All of us struggled with these questions, including Tan.

This background information might seem overly general and trivial, bordering on anecdotal, but I insist that it gives a picture of the context in which our dissertations emerged, and that it is specifically important for understanding the politics that is embedded in the methodology Tan made use of in her dissertation project and what it in turn has the ability to do. I will return to this later.

I have been asked, as an artist and artistic researcher, to describe and reflect on how Tan’s dissertation encompasses and formulates the topic, problem and discipline that constitute her study. Thus, I am to reflect on a reflection of a reflection of a topic that has been part of Tan’s intellectual and emotional life for several years. What I must ask myself, then, is what can I contribute that has not already been done and expressed? What can I add to what’s already in the films and texts that accompany her dissertation? To what has already been said and discussed by reviewers and critics? In order to answer my own questions, I have chosen to focus primarily on the particular methodology that Tan has developed within the framework of her dissertation.

In this essay, I will first address what I call the topography of the thesis – that is, its structure and elements – before presenting how it treats its research questions. In the third and final part, I will discuss one of the methodologies Tan makes use of that I consider to be a central element in her study and also an important contribution to artistic research.

**The Topography of the Thesis**

Lisa Tan’s dissertation comprises three elements: the films *Sunsets* (2012), *Notes From Underground* (2013) and *Waves* (2014–15); a publication with still images from the films and essays written by authors and artists invited by Tan to contribute – Mara Lee, a poet, author and researcher in literary composition and now a professor of art theory at Konstfack in Stockholm; Lauren O’Neill-Butler, a writer and editor based in New York; Natascha Sadr Haghighian, an artist with a research-based practice that encompasses many different forms of expression, including video, performance, installation, writing and sound. Sadr Haghighian also served as Tan’s co-advisor during her work on the dissertation project. And finally, Joshua Shaddock, an artist and graphic designer who was invited to design the publication. These people are all close colleagues and friends to Tan, and they have followed one another’s work for a long time. Shaddock writes in the preface to the publication:

This book was made with friends. Each of its contributors holds Lisa as a dear companion – old or new, far or near – and has been part of the development of these videos. […] The impulse is to characterize their texts as subjective, but more fitting would be to say they’re involved.4

Here I want to underscore how unusual it is for a thesis in the field of art to be made up primarily of contributions from people other than the author herself. In Tan’s case, however, this is not just an unconventional gesture; it is a central aspect of the method Tan has used, and it is perfectly in keeping with the internal logic of the research project.

Along with the films and the book comes a reflective essay written by Tan herself on the background to her dissertation project, methods and approach. This essay is not included in the above-mentioned publication, but rather printed in a simpler and more modest booklet. I see this booklet as a materialised footnote to both the films and the more ambitious publication.

There is also a potential fourth component in the exhibitions in which the films were included, and particularly the one that took place at Galleri Riis in Stockholm, about which Tan writes in her essay.5 The spatial installation is always a central aspect of Tan’s art and studies, and an important part of the films’ materiality and content.

**Questions**

How can experience of the liminal exist as an artwork?

How to evoke liminality as an aesthetic encounter?6

The dissertation is rooted in these two questions. They lead Lisa Tan in her search for answers, expressions, materiality and experiences. She is accompanied on this exploratory journey by, and engages in dialogue with, several people and works. The most important and most central of these are the authors Clarice Lispector, Susan Sontag and Virginia Woolf. They make recurring appearances in various forms throughout the three films. Tan has also borrowed from Lispector in the title of her dissertation, *For Every Word Has Its Own Shadow*, which Tan says refers to Lispector’s idea that the meaning of an articulation can be read not only in the words on the paper but must also be derived from the gap that exists between the words and the page on which they rest. Inspired by this, Tan says that her dissertation occupies the liminal space between language and its absence.

These three above-named authors have passed on – that is, they no longer have earthly human forms. Perhaps this is important, since it makes possible a more free and boundless approach to them as people, to their writing, and to their world of ideas. Tan glides through this liminal space in her references and reflections. She makes reference to certain biographical facts and thinks through their words, their use of the language and their view of writing. The big difference between Tan and these three female authors in terms of their view of articulation is that for Tan the combination of language and motion picture is central. Like Virginia Woolf, Tan wants to move beyond the words and into something else.7 It is not clear what this something else is. But it is as if the words were not enough to convey the experience of being in a liminal space, in a neither/nor place. Tan makes use of motion pictures to try to avoid what Susan Sontag refers to as the blind spots in the language. (As if motion pictures could have blind spots? But perhaps they appear in other ways?) Tan says that when image and word are combined, they have the potential to open up places that make possible other kinds of explorations than when they are separated. The place between the motion picture and the text is a liminal space in itself. When they are combined, it is not possible to lock in meanings. Articulations move and are open to a wide variety of interpretations.

I have probably never treated Tan’s films as films, but rather as texts in the form of words, images and sounds. Tan avoids using the term essay to describe her own films. But I would nevertheless like to describe them as attempts to communicate a personal journey to an imaginary or temporary place where boundaries cease to exist – boundaries that separate day from night, above from below, water from land, and language from imagery. In her reflective essay, it becomes clear that this searching is based on both personal experiences and intellectual exercises. Tan does not want the works to merely talk about the liminal space; she wants them to also give rise to experiences in their own right.

Tan tries to achieve this boundless state through language, through distance, through movement and through time. In her own essay on the works, she returns several times to the desire to write, like Virginia Woolf, to a rhythm rather than a plot. She wants the study to give rise to questions, but not let the questions rule the study. That is, Tan has indicated a starting point, and then she tries to be responsive to what happens in the study that takes place in theory, in the materiality of the images, in dialogue with thinkers and colleagues, and in her own thinking. In other words, Tan has adopted a research method that does not try to provide answers to hypotheses, but as in the essay to allow the initial question to lead the researcher and the reader astray in the most constructive way – down thought paths that were previously unfamiliar and unanticipated – and to demonstrate the connection between the most unthinkable elements and phenomena. The questions indicate a direction, but do not limit out thinking.

The works are ambitious and honest artistic attempts to find forms for communicating an experience of the liminal space that exists in language and corporeal experience. In that regard, these are documents of a process and a method of searching. In some scenes in *Waves*, the composition of the film also gives rise to its own experience – that is, it is not merely a document about a search; they act in relation to me. A concrete example: Tan describes how she searches for pictures of a painting by Gustave Courbet called *The Waves* that hangs in the Städel Museum in Germany. But instead of going there, she visits the painting virtually. At the same time she does so, she realises how much actual physical force and energy this virtual visit requires. The longer she looks, the warmer it becomes – quite literally. Energy flows through wires under the sea, which cools them off. The sea and the waves become physically tangible. In order for us to see a picture of the see, the sea must do some work. The same physicality documented here also takes place when I look at Tan’s films online. My observation thus takes place with the rhythm of the sea. In this exact moment, the boundary ceases to exist between our bodies, my human body, the body of the picture, the body of the story, the body of the wires and the body of the sea. We become part of a rhythm and a flow that is shifted forward by the events that are portrayed in the film. But just as I begin to reflect on this, the rhythm comes to a stop and I am back again in the film as a document that is based on Tan’s own experience of the unbounded.

Tan says that her contribution to artistic research is twofold: first, she contributes a critical discussion about the liminal. Second, she says that as a visual artist, in dialogue with moving pictures, she takes on and further develops some of literature’s philosophical issues as expressed by Lispector, Sontag and Woolf. However, I would like to assert that there is yet another aspect of Tan’s dissertation that is important to artistic research as a whole: how she uses dialogue as a method. Allow me to develop this thought.

**The Radical Dialogue**

In her dissertation, Lisa Tan maintains a close dialogue with the authors Lispector, Sontag and Woolf. Their world of ideas is retold, expanded and developed in Tan’s films and in her own essay. She thinks with and in parallel to them and their work. Using water as a metaphor, Tan allows herself to be borne along by the stream and the waves that arise in the search for how experiences of a unbounded condition can be recounted and articulated. At the same time, she does not hesitate to hop ashore and wander away in directions other than those staked out by these three authors. In Tan’s own words about Woolf’s significance for the film *Waves*, “I narrate her influence on me, as I find my own way of depicting consciousness in relation to society and its technologies.”8

However, she has brought along with her on this journey not only Lispector, Sontag and Woolf, but also some close colleagues and friends who think with her, alongside her, and through her work. For example: In preparation for her work on *Sunsets*, Tan asks her friend Rita Sobral Campos if she can translate the interview with Lispector in close dialogue with Tan. This informal translation and relationship came to be a central feature of *Sunsets*. And in the film *Notes from Underground*, Tan’s life partner is fully present. However, it is important to underscore that it is not about these people or their personal experiences; instead, it is the conversation among them that generates thoughts, reflections, questions and assertions, which in turn become the film’s material and point of departure.

As I named previously, Tan has also invited in several members of her personal intellectual network to contribute to the publication that is included in the dissertation project (Mara Lee, Lauren O’Neill-Butler, Natascha Sadr Haghighian and Joshua Shaddock). The films were made in close dialogue with these people, and their essays make up a large portion of Tan’s dissertation project. The essays are based on Tan’s thoughts about the liminal as expressed in the films, and they answer with their own experiences and reflections. The form of the book too is a response to Tan’s study. The form and content of the publication may be seen as one component in Tan’s desire become a part of something existing instead of being its point of departure – to be part of a large wave in motion. And, sure enough, it is impossible to delimit the thoughts and reflections expressed in the essays and films. Just as Lispector’s writing is rooted in experiences of non-hierarchical encounters with people, things and events in the world, Tan’s dissertation is rooted in non-hierarchical encounters and conversations with living, dead and virtual people, things and phenomena. It becomes a study of how things are impacted by other things, such as events, phenomena etc. – such as how Sontag’s ideas and the geological era can be experienced in a drip of water in a cave.9

The dissertation thus sheds light not only on influences – that would have been far too easy – but also on how knowledge is produced with, through and in parallel to one another to the degree that the boundary between the individual and shared subjects ceases to exist. The dialogue and the thinking wave’s motion becomes a method that puts its stamp on the entire dissertation. It influences what is done, how it is done and why it is done. It is one of the dissertation’s central methods.

When I ask Tan why she chose as part of the dissertation project to produce a publication together with invited writers, she gave two different answers. One is pragmatic and more practical in nature. Tan says that at the time of her dissertation, there was no substantial publication about her work. Within the framework for the dissertation project, she saw the opportunity to create just such a publication that could be distributed in various contexts and have a long lifespan. Though there is a tradition in the art world of inviting in writers to write about artists’ work, it is highly unusual to do so within the framework of a dissertation project. However, Tan was well aware that from one perspective she was making use of a well-proven method, and, at the same time, from another perspective she was challenging and expanding what may be thought of as customary and accepted.10

The other answer is more conceptual in nature. Tan says that the work with her dissertation project was extremely social. Even if Tan’s work is always based on or even rooted in an individual subjectivity, she says that at the same time it would be meaningless without the dynamic and thinking found in her intellectual circle of friends. Furthermore, she says that all of the invited contributors were (and still are) active conversation partners throughout her work on the dissertation project. Tan goes so far as to call them “actants”, with the purpose of creating a non-hierarchical relationship between the human conversation partners and the things and phenomena she works with, such as the sunset or the drip of water in a cave. This is particularly important to Tan.11

It is interesting that the artworks and essays in the dissertation project cease to have individual authors. They form a collective attempt to understand the logic of the liminal. But the shared subject ceases to exist as soon as the films enter into the space of art, and once again the individual artist stands in the space and speaks of authorship, originality and will. But in the dissertation as it is presented in the space of academic artistic research, Tan makes visible the impossibility of producing knowledge as a singular subject. In philosophical thinking and visual expression alike, we are part of a wave of knowledge that moves in different directions at different speeds with different strength. Perhaps there is a boundless state here that I perceive as a reader, artist, writer and partner in dialogue. “The key thing is how to get taken up in the motion of a big wave, a column of rising air, to ‘get’ into something instead of being the origin of an effort.”12

For me this is a radical action that doesn’t just speak of the shared, but acts it out. Here the space of art has something to learn from the kind of action that is possible in the space of research, but not necessarily in the space of art. Thus, the point of departure for research is that knowledge is produced through and with already existing knowledge, while the point of departure for art, on the other hand, is that works arise from autonomous and original thoughts. Artistic research questions this modernist idea of art, which continues to dominate in spite of countless attempts to deconstruct it. I have therefore long been positive toward artistic research for precisely this reason – because in its form and institution it questions knowledge as an individual effort. However, there are not many who are able to express it so clearly. If I take myself as an example, within the framework for my dissertation, a number of different films were produced collectively, but the thesis still had a single individual author. Nevertheless, I tried to assert that it was the result of shared knowledge. Which it is, though not convincingly so in its materiality. Lisa Tan, however, does succeed with this both in form and content. Everything she does happens literally in dialogue with other people and works. As an artistic researcher I am inspired by that, and grateful for what is a valuable contribution.

1 I have borrowed the title of this essay from a sentence found in Lisa Tan’s dissertation. For me it demonstrates the significance of others in one’s own thinking and research and for an artistic practice. Tan, Lisa. *For Every Word Has Its Own Shadow*. (ArtMonitor: Gothenburg, 2015), p. 21.

2 https://forensic-architecture.org/about/agency, accessed 31 March 2020.

3 https://konst.gu.se/utbildning/Utbildning+på+forskarnivå/forskarskola/Antagning/Nationell\_forskarskola, accessed 31 March 2020.

4 Tan, Lisa (ed.). *Sunsets, Notes From Underground, Waves*. (Archive Books: Berlin, 2015), p. 5.

5 Tan (2015), *For Every Word Has Its Own Shadow*, p. 32.

6 I have translated the original “liminal” with the Swedish *gränsland*, or borderland. However, there are some nuance differences between the Swedish and English terms. I ask the reader therefore to keep the idea of “borderland” in mind. Ibid, p.10.

7 This is expressed clearly and directly in Lisa Tan’s film *Waves* from 2014–15.

8 Tan (2015), *Sunsets, Notes from Underground, Waves*, p. 42.

9 In my work on this essay, I contacted Lisa Tan by email and posed a number of questions related to her dissertation project for which I wanted further clarification or more developed answers. The exchange took place on 13 January 2020.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Tan (2015), *Sunsets, Notes from Underground, Waves*, p. 46.

Johan Petri’s *Rythm and Immanence*

Rasmus Ölme

I spent the latter half of 2019 physically, digitally and mentally in the company of Johan Petri’s dissertation, *The Rhythm of Thinking – Immanence and Ethics in Theatre Performance*.1 The essay that follows captures the thoughts that emerged from this encounter. In writing it I have tried to present my criticism without taking a position for or against the assertions and discoveries Petri presents, instead focusing on how the dissertation makes the research process accessible to me as a reader. One of the challenges of artistic research is about exploring various presentation formats, and I want to describe how I perceive that this project succeeds in the chosen form of communication. In one short passage, Petri himself describes how academic writing finds itself “on a collision course with the inherent oppositional mode of an artistic undertaking”, and my essay may be understood as a reflection on how I perceive the way he has dealt with that collision (p. 55).

First, I summarise the thesis, its research questions and topic. Then I continue by reflecting on how I believe that the apparatus which is constituted by the dissertation together with a digital multimedia platform conveys the process and results of the research.

**The Dissertation: Questions and Material**

Petri’s study is rooted in several different topics that he sees as interwoven to form a net within which his research is conducted. The most central term in the research is “immanence”, and the project examines its role in the collective process that is Petri’s working method for the works that together constitute the basis for his practical research. The collective aspect is determinative and is brought to the fore when Petri calls for *co-composition* – a working method that Petri believes impacts his status as a director and therefore creates a relationship between ethics and aesthetics. This relationship is examined by Petri within the theatre’s specific structure of meaning creation and affect. The apparatus that this author screws together comprises many moving parts, and I see it as an example in itself of the import of the concept of immanence in the project. Petri creates a more or less controlled chaos as a playing field on which immanence can emerge. An important source to which Petri often returns is the work of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the concept of the plane of immanence (*plan d’immanence*), which he developed together with Felix Guattari. Alongside the concept of immanence, which of course is indicated even in the title of the thesis, I want to comment on the term “plane”. We are not dealing here with a single point, or a fountain-like source that spits out events. Instead, it is a surface that can be compared to a field or a piece of land. Rather horizontal than vertical, this plane is located within an epistemological tradition that Deleuze and Guattari describe well through the metaphor of the difference between the tree (the vertical) and the rhizome (the horizontal).1 A similar figure of thought to which Petri often returns is the net:

My aim is to present a net of questions, observations, and thoughts ranging from the experiences of collective creative processes and collaborative work with the performers, to academic criticism on discourses related to the fields of performance studies, philosophy and performance philosophy, perception theory, and musicology (p. 17).

The metaphor is also used when the author compares his research with the unfurling of this net (p. 17). So what is this net made up of? It is no small matter to summarise. In the introductory section of the dissertation, “It Is All in the Passing”, another metaphor similar to that of the net is used: “fields of tension that emerge between things”2 (p. 29). Before Petri has time to name these things, he deconstructs them by explaining that they are not to be seen as things in and of themselves. They should be seen not as entities, but instead as “compounds of energies: of diverse intentions and desires” (p. 30). Petri thereby creates a fractal metaphor in which the only thing we find when we zoom in to one of the knots in the net is yet another net. The things that make up the fields of tension are themselves fields of tension. Petri lists the agglomerations: 1. The theatre artists; 2. The material (which he describes as hardware, or structure); 3. The conception of an event; 4. Petri himself; 5. The critical discourse in which he has chosen to locate the work (p. 30).

Petri is aware both of how comprehensive the span he is trying to embrace is and how unstable the ground is on which he is building: “In this complexity, can anything be considered stable?” he asks himself (p. 31). He answers his own question by saying that “[…] the only thing that can be stable is an ethics” (ibid). But just as he deconstructed things into agglomerations of energy, he goes on to explain that even ethics is processual, i.e. continuously moving forward, it carries the modality of conviction, experimentally searching for what life can be […].

I think this passage clearly shows how Petri consciously works with very vague categories that also clearly refer to his inspiration from John Cage. The three works that constitute the practical research are all “built around material that in one way or another originated from the American composer and artist John Cage” (p. 18). Cage’s strong influence is well described in the dissertation, and Petri devotes the lengthiest chapter in the book to Cage: “Cage Interpreted and Performed” (pp. 67–159). The chapter describes one of Petri’s works, *John and the Mushrooms*, and offers a long digression on Cage’s life and work. The chapter is both exhaustive and well-written. Although I was already relatively familiar with Cage’s work, I found the chapter very enlightening and almost like a book within the book, and I can imagine that it is an outstanding contribution even for the most learned Cage experts. On the whole, I think that Petri’s unaffected admiration for Cage is moving and inspiring. There are many examples of artists who have endeavoured more to describe their work’s originality than its origins. In academic artistic research, the contextual aspect is more important and, in my opinion, insufficient in a disturbingly large number of cases. That is not at all true in this case. Alongside the ethical transparency, Cage’s influence reveals a unique attribute of Petri’s profile as an artist: he works as a director and as a composer, but also works with non-narrative conceptions within the theatre. Of the three works on which the dissertation is built, in only one of them (*John and the Mushrooms*) do actors contribute. In the others it’s musicians and dancers. I am not knowledgeable enough to evaluate Petri’s contribution to the field of music, but in theatre and dance I judge his work to be most innovative in the former. In the Swedish arts scenes, similar experimental and non-narrative conceptions are unusual, as shown by quotations from the contributing actors.3

**The Dissertation: Composition**

Petri unfolds his net in three different textual forms: A – descriptions, B – essays and C – interviews. The descriptions of the works that make up Petri’s practical research contain both documentation and reflection from the author as well as his co-contributors. The descriptions also strive to create a bridge to the theoretical framework posed by the research questions. It should be said (and the author does say) that the descriptions sometimes flow out and abandon their descriptive form. Along with bridging to the theoretical framework, these sidetracks are able to erase the boundaries between the descriptions and the essays that aim to anchor the practical work in the philosophical discourse adjacent to the research. The six interviews, the text form just mentioned, are wedged between the other two formats (descriptions and essays) in such a way that the other two only follow one another once. I mention this because I think I detect in this work the hand of Petri the composer. The composition of the three formats is thus as follows: X-C-A-C-A-C-A - B-C-B-C-B-C.4

The dissertation is also available as a multimedia digital platform. Personally, I began with the physical book and watched the video documentation. When I then came in contact with the digital platform (after a minor technical snag), I found the proximity between text and other documentation was interwoven better there and that the form made the project better. On the other hand, carrying the relatively heavy book around with me on trips and writing notes in the margins created, for better or worse, a different relationship than the digital interface can provide. Finally, I also had a PDF version of the dissertation. Without knowing exactly how, I am convinced that I would have processed the material differently if I had begun with the digital side instead. The three different formats also create in turn a kind of apparatus or assemblage that further expands the potential to disseminate Petri’s research. Yet again I can discern the composer within the author and see this as an example in itself of the kind of rhythmic thinking proposed in the title of the thesis.

**My Reflections**

The theories Petri uses are highly relevant to his explorations and to artistic research in general. Names like Rosi Braidotti, Brian Massumi and Gilles Deleuze are frequent references in the discourse surrounding artistic research, particularly in the theatre. Petri demonstrates a deep and complex understanding of the theories he relies on in his research. The practice and theory coexist harmoniously in his work, and I see the same elegant interweaving of his work as an artist with his research. In that sense, the project is an exemplary model of artistic research in which a well-established artist with an open and experimental practice critically delves deeper into their chosen area of knowledge and does so by continuing to make art. The dissertation demonstrates some inherent complexities in the relationship between theory and practice and between the making of art and research.

**Critical Review**

As I mentioned in my introduction, my critique is not of Petri’s work as an artist, nor of his research in terms of its relevance to the theme, the research question, the theoretical apparatus or the methodology. Instead, I have chosen to focus on the difficulties I occasionally experienced with the accessibility of his reasoning, and therefore with my ability to follow along with him.

Trying to draw objective conclusions from artistic processes is a fruitless endeavour, and I would definitely not advise students of artistic research to formulate their projects around an expectation of eventually arriving at such conclusions. It is essential for academic research but can be ruinous for artistic research. Nevertheless, it is bloody well extremely important for artistic research to find a way to submit to critical review. There were moments in my reading when it seemed that the only source I had was the author’s statement, and that I therefore had no chance of engaging critically with what is presented. Here follows an example in which the author gives an interpretation of a specific incidence from one of the works:

It is relevant to assume that the expression and form of the music by Cage that Anna and Kristine are playing has an impact on how Jessica and Mauritz’s expressive trajectories are shaped. This is underscored by the fact that Staffan’s activity so clearly is not affected. The music’s impact on Jessica and Mauritz can be described as working on a level of atmosphere (mode) as well as on a rhythmical and situational/relational level (narrative). Jessica has maybe not decided to recite her text when the music starts. She passes the musicians and when doing this she picks up a tone and sings very softly and briefly. From that point on it is clear that she is allowing the music to have a strong influence on the performative quality of her actions, if not exactly which specific text to recite, at least how it is shaped. The fact that she extends the music after it has stopped by using her voice underscores her attentive listening: her vocal expression grows and “continues” the instrumental music. (pp. 268–69)

Without a specific reference to the source material, I am left with no opportunity to form my own opinion about whether I think the author’s interpretation as in agreement with my own. On the digital platform, the distance between text and other documentation is much smaller, and I believe that such proximity could have been created between the physical book and the filmed material. Alongside the ability to form an opinion of one’s own, this could invite the reader to enter into the text, more like a kind of collaborator than just a recipient. Judging by how Petri speaks of his relationship with his collaborators, and even with the observers of his works, he seems to strive for that kind of generative dialogue, but it is my opinion that he does not really succeed in creating one in the text. Assuredly, a dissertation project concludes with a defence, and finding the balance between presenting a convincing argument and at the same time submitting to critical review is not simple.

Another example of a certain lack of references in the text: “As we shall see, the meaning and essence of ‘the methodology of the project’ expanded far beyond the performative situation into an understanding of the intent and affect of the expression” (p. 75). It’s not that I disagree with the author’s assertion, but when he writes “as we shall see” without more precisely describing where in the text this will happen and how it will become clear, it creates a distance between me and the text and keeps me from getting more engaged in it. A similar, more structural example of the same problem is the arrangement and division of chapters. Most of the chapters have no clear introduction or summary, and most of the headings for chapters, sections and paragraphs are more poetic than representative, such as “To Move Along” (pp. 218–20) or “It Comes and Goes” (pp. 383–87). When I have finished reading the passage, the rubric might be comprehensible to me, but if I skim the text I have a hard time orientating myself and following the reasoning. Important assertions, decisive insights and critical positions pop up in the midst of a more process-focused reflection. I don’t doubt the author’s clarity and don’t mean to imply that the reasoning is not in itself cohesive, but that the presentation of it is ambiguous.

On the whole, this gave me a feeling at times something like cooking in someone else’s kitchen. All of the utensils and ingredients are in their places, and for the cook of the kitchen it all makes perfect sense, but the visiting chef is going to waste a lot of time trying to figure out where everything is. A text of this size (about 450 pages) and such complex content can easily be overwhelming, and a more rigorous and comprehensive organising principle would help me as a reader to orientate myself. An example might be having regular headings such as “Introduction”, “Conclusions”, and “Relation to the Research Question”.

**Meta-reflection**

One thing I found missing in the text was a more concise reflection from the artist about how his artistic practice has been influenced by the research context. The works themselves are well described and documented, but the author offers no thorough reflection about how the research has developed his thinking about the questions addressed in the research – immanence, rhythmic thinking and ethics – and how it in turn has influenced his artistic practice. For example: what became immanent in the research? What kind of rhythmic thinking and what ethics has the research generated? The lack of this kind of reflection led me to look more carefully at the chronology of the project. As far as I could see, the works were made in the period 2009–12, and the dissertation was not published until four years later, in 2016, which led me to wonder about what role the practical work played in the research. Petri has obviously based his research on the practical artistic work, but I wonder if the kind of meta-reflection I’m looking for would have emerged if the practical work had continued on throughout the research period. This in turn provokes questions about the relationship between artistic research and the making of art within a research project. Producing works of the size he has done – which is in keeping with his role as a director and composer – demands a great deal of time and resources. In his case, practice is production, which makes it understandable if he has not been able to produce in parallel with his writing. At the same time, I imagine that several smaller-format experiments would have been possible, so that even the more intense writing period could have involved some practical work.

**Low High Resolution**

In the course of my reading, one question popped up that has stayed with me, in a less clearly articulated version, since my own doctoral work. In my effort to be a good researcher, I wanted to be as transparent as possible. All my work was to be shown. No stone would be left unturned, which meant an extensive quantity of text of questionable relevance. By choosing to include everything, the material buried itself, and, quite contrary to my intentions, the picture I wanted to paint became only blurrier for all its intricate detailing. That made me think about what happens when you change the lens on a microscope. A particular magnification gives the observer both insight and overview, but if you zoom in one more step to see even better, suddenly you lose track of what you’re looking at. You can’t see the forest for the trees, as they say. How should I, as an omniscient author, find the right magnification? When does the amount of information become counter-productive? It is in no way a simple question, and it reveals the necessity of getting help from colleagues and advisers in the work of editing.

Another thing that came up during my reading was a hunch. The interviews in the dissertation are said to be conducted by the Institute for Unpredictable Processes (IUP), founded in 2013 in San Francisco. The dissertation’s ostensibly random numbering (20, 7, 5, 14 and 19) gave the impression that an impressive number of interviews had been conducted, and perhaps even more impressive was how familiar the interviewer was with Petri’s work. It struck me as incredibly enviable to have an on-going dialogue with someone with such extensive knowledge of the area and of one’s own research and work as an artist – and on at least twenty occasions, no less! At the same time, it provoked a certain suspicion, and a quick Googling of IUP returned only two results: one from Petri’s own website and the other from the University of Gothenburg’s site, both references to the dissertation. The hunch I have is that these were self-interviews, which if nothing else would explain how familiar the interviewer was with the subject’s work. To stand up one’s own institute seems to me to be a brilliant performative action, and self-interviews are a helpful tool in both artistic practice and research. At the same time – at least if my hunch is right – this can create a kind of echo chamber, which could explain the feeling of standing outside that I often experienced while reading.

1 Petri refers to this on p. 36 in the dissertation with the following footnote: Deleuze, Guattari 1994, p. 41.

2

3 Cf. the quotation of Elvingsson on p. 137 in which she describes her experience of the difference between working with random choices and a conventional play.

4 X here is the introduction to the dissertation and may be seen as a prologue that does not fall under any of the three textual formats presented by the author.

Cecilia Grönberg’s *Event Horizon*

Johan Rhedin

A researcher who is quite comparable to Cecilia Grönberg is the German seventeenth-century Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher. This is particularly clear in his monumental contributions. Holding the almost three-kilo volume *Event Horizon* (2016) in your hands awakens a strange blend of awe and admiration – probably a similar feeling to what Kircher’s readers felt holding his enormous *Mundus Subterraneus* when it was published in 1665. These two books are largely dissimilar in terms of subject matter, but they are united to some extent by their approach to earth and nature as the medium, their innovative copying potential and virtual effects, natural history phenomena in the form of cultural historical distribution, geophotographic fossils, iconography, celestography, camouflage, uprooted trees, silver mines, informational meteorology, the Vegetable Lamb of Tartary, Kopimism, CAT scan technology, screen skins, biological software and speculative ecologies. In addition, both works are radical experiments in publicism, a kind of machines or aggregates rather than linear productions: *Mundus Subterraneus* includes twenty-some fold-out plates and maps (which can be folded both up, down, and out from the block of text) and some one hundred interspersed engravings and woodblock prints.1 *Event Horizon* is organised like the body of an octopus, with eight tentacle-like tracks that spread out streams of images flowing from the deep sea to distant galaxies. The book is undoubtedly a work of art in itself, its cover showing a whale skin that has been scarred in a struggle with the suction cups of an octopus. Just two months after its publication, the book appeared in *Dagens Nyheter’s* list of Christmas present recommendations for the “hard to shop for” (7 Dec 2016), and several months later it was awarded an honorary prize in conjunction with the announcement of the 2017 Photography Book Prize.

Merely stating that *Event Horizon* is a work of art or a beautiful book is just making it easy on yourself, of course. It should really be read. The problem is just that it’s constantly tempting you to hop from one part to another. You try to stay put, to concentrate, but soon you discover you’ve moved on to a completely different part of the book. Perhaps you’re reading the fascinating story of the Vegetable Lamb of Tartary, a kind of Central Asian fern that was believed to produce lambs as its fruit (presented here as a plant-animal collage form, but it can nevertheless be compared to an atavistic 3D printer), when suddenly you discover that instead you’re looking at photographs of ice skaters, remains of garlands, information boards in the subway or long suites of more or less bankruptcy-threatened photocopying businesses around the world. The reader’s attention and the book’s broadcasting ability make it obvious that what plays out actually does seem like a fight with an octopus. This book really has eight arms.

**Mundus Digitalis**

If Kircher’s field was still terra incognita in the seventeenth century, Grönberg’s twenty-first century is a terra iconocognita. We talk about a “world of images” with the media that surround us, or a “world view” that in various ways is made up of ideological projections of stereotypes or visions, but there are also literally worlds of views and views of worlds. An original research question for Grönberg is about what happens when the production conditions change from optical-chemical to optical-electrical technology, thus changing also the consequences of the fact that the photographic negative is no longer a picture formed by discrete points, but rather a code that must be read algorithmically to take on the appearance of a picture. It is about seeing “a photographic life world” in a broader sense than photography’s more or less institutionalised practices and thereby forming a “montage practice between image categories and projection slides”.2 It is a relatively new world, and yet old enough now, or rather ingrained enough, that today it passes for everyday work in front of the computer or smartphone screen. I have only physically looked at Kircher’s *Mundus Subterraneus* in a display case on a single occasion, never held it in my hands. There was once a time, in fact a very long time, when the only way to get at the book was to take out a bank loan and fight for it at exclusive book auctions, or else to acquire a researcher license and borrow it under grouchy, suspicious stares in one of the restricted reading rooms of a university library. Today I can leaf back and forth through a convenient digitised version of it in places such as the Internet Archive, a non-profit organisation that has archived almost half a billion websites and more than thirty million books, sound recordings, films, TV series and images.

This whole phenomenon, which is often summed up with the word *accessibility*, forms a fundamental resonance in *Event Horizon*, a publication that is in itself a “photographed book”, but in many places also a fascinating reclaiming of the digitised to become material or analogue. It’s not just about screenshots of various toolbars for software that are only rarely available in print, and then in older forms of printed manuals, or the dialogue boxes on websites, equally obligatory and irritating (as well as humorous), that must be filled in before moving on, or else avoid clicking on or accepting if you don’t want your computer invaded by a virus. The kind of thing that is familiar to any web-surfer or computer user. But here it comes back in printed form, like a kind of solid mass. It has to do less with the iconographic and more with the problematisation of the clinical. This is particularly visible in the attention Grönberg gives to the aesthetic consequences of involving the senses in digital information manipulation. One example is the work with the collection from Sala silver mine, where, in dialogue with photography theorist Geoffrey Batchen, she brings up the relationship of the Daguerreotype with the eye and the hand – the way the object must be dealt with tactilely, held in the hands and tilted to the light if it is to be visible at all (p. 188). Naturally, all this gets lost in a modern documentation of the documentation. A more concrete form is the analogue photograph’s messy work in the darkroom, where no one could develop or copy a picture without the use of their hands. It comes across therefore as ironic that a literal return of photography’s indexicality even in the digital world emerges through human traces in the form of hands, fingers and shadows in conjunction with the scanning of the book, for example.3 The dissertation has a plethora of examples of the interplay between material and immaterial overlays (documents and life forms, respectively) of information redundancy, where the scanning work moves with certain of the object’s non-informative attributes: binder paper, cloth spines, bindings and dentelles, house pseudoscorpions, dirt, stains – the “noise” of the bound contents.

One of the most interesting tentacles in *Event Horizon* is the one that reaches out to touchy on questions of distribution and archiving, the fluid and the material. The dissertation shows that there is a lot going on in the shadows of the code word *accessibility*. It’s not just about the system of semi-criminal text plundering that Google Books, Jstor and other companies established to create their astronomical appropriations of publications and document collections, where it’s possible to contrast appropriation (capturing, scanning) with dispersion (downloading, PDF-making). By extension, it’s also about a completely new type of unbound imperialist conservation technology and new opportunities of collecting that allow the verb “democratising” to grow together with the phenomena of transnational corporate conglomerates and server complexes.

There is a clear paradox in the capturing of books, images and historical objects in the field of culture, where the purpose is to increase accessibility and “usage”, since access to the depths of history in today’s case seems to produce its superficiality. Access, and particularly when it comes to our catalogued cultural heritage, is almost aggressive in its compulsive publication. Everything must come out. It has also led to debates about the naivete of public institutions toward the digital existence of their precious physical objects. For example, both Nationalmuseum and the Royal Library dumped enormous quantities of material onto Yahoo’s servers in the belief that it would simply rattle around in space for all eternity. Rolf Källman, then Chief Information Officer at the Swedish National Heritage Board, referred to the museums’ cultural heritage as future “digital crude oil for new products and services”4. Captured in a kind of epic painting, it might be represented by a dragon trying to conquer another dragon, both of them unaware that they are one and the same. Since before recorded history, the power of the archive has been that of a fundamentally unofficial action at a distance. The open digital archive is a typical Western phantom model, a public stand-in for the actual archive, which since Mesopotamia and the emergence of high culture has always been a hermetically sealed public amenity whose power lies in its degree of inaccessibility rather than its accessibility. With today’s material development, cultural historical digital exhibitionism, in expanding accessibility, thereby empties the traditional hermeticism by encrypting its amenity. This is one of the book’s most important political points: that accessibility is not the same as access. The, as it were, “fluid” handling of images and texts gives an illusion of a kind of physical consistency. But the masses are not always a solid mass.

**Scanned in Obscurity**

The digital world of images is possibly the largest monument ever created by man – a monument that essentially has zero mass. What is needed foremost is hard drive space, and secondarily server warehouses. These server complexes are growing. Like the great classical buildings of years past, like the British Museum or the Louvre, which house gigantic physical collections of writings, pictures, sculptures and archaeological finds, warehouse-like hanger buildings are being constructed today, made up entirely of shelving systems for processors, essentially housing bytes – that is, the binary building blocks for unimaginable numbers of combinations. Taken together, the collections of the British Museum and the Louvre look like modest hobby collections compared to these monsters of information. These server rooms are often constructed in former industrial or military facilities, like Google’s takeover of the disused Stora Enso paper mill in Fredrikshamn, Finland, Facebook’s use of the mining district in Luleå, or Bahnhof's occupation of Pionen, the monumental bomb shelter inside Vita Bergen in Stockholm. It is still an industrial activity, though now with relatively few emploThe workers are themselves users – they are those who search and find as well as those who upload, store and pass on the images, words and sounds. Grönberg examines the effects of always having a tool available in your pocket that in a single apparatus can photograph, store, find and disseminate. It leads to an important part of the book about Vilém Flusser’s thoughts on the technological image and “the end of history”, about the technical pictures that have been programmed for an eternal recurrence of that end. However, it’s not about the recurrence of the identical, but rather the circulation of images that bring the linear to a stop and thus about “a memory that is always spinning around and that relocates everything to the present” (p. 438). Flusser developed his post-historical thinking in the middle of the 1980s and also perhaps with a period postmodernist prophecy: “Our current interaction between pictures and people is going to lead to a loss of historical awareness among those who take in those pictures, and thereby also to a loss of every historical action that could result from taking in those pictures” (p. 438). But today it is easy to see which direction that idea leads, and not just in terms of the digitalisation of historical materials and continual permutations in decontextualised settings. It is particularly true of the power of social media over the various divisibility principles that both inhibit and distribute, like the different water chambers in a system of locks.

The state of images in a world of Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest and Facebook is already beyond what Flusser imagined. This is not a “pictorial revue”. Like the spores of an organism, they behave according to a dispersion system (in this case a reaction system), a cycle that also constitutes its supply of nutrients in a digital habitat. “The pictures,” Grönberg writes, “are part of a system for social interaction made up of participating, following and confirming. Their primary function is not to relate to traditional photographic questions; they are produced to be circulated and shared, and they serve as both material and oil, lubricant and energy, at the same time in a digital economy” (p. 55). It is a kind of nourishment without metabolism, a form of cultural enzyme that catalyses what Hillel Schwartz would call the culture of the copy’s fattening principle.5 The production of the picture based on its circulation logic turns the traditional questions about photography upside down, and, conveniently enough, it happens (once again) in a highly ironic recurrence of the concept of index, this time in the indexing used in search engine algorithms. What was once singular – the capturing of a moment, the uniqueness of the glass or metal plate – becomes multiple in the digital, which is no longer a matter of mass-copying or mass-production. In the multiple, the picture (or the sign) does not get worn out; instead, it propagates itself combinatorially through pattern recognition, image and words in a system that sometimes looks like random jumbles but is actually indexed and promoted through the logarithm. The boundary for the diversity of the putatively singular is thus not an unlimited number of copies (factory-installed filters and animation effects), but rather the combination’s critical limit, the instinct toward a kind of optical exhaustion syndrome or, as Grönberg puts it in one place, “a swell for semioticians” (p. 84). Nowhere is this more clear than in the social media terms used to describe account-holders’ “feeds”, whose vertical implacability forms a heraclitic stream in which the user sees the same thing over and over again without ever having to pause twice at the same image.

The optical-chemical era’s analogue processes for developing and copying are obviously entirely obsolete now, but that does not mean the images of the digital era are fully immaterial. Actually, they have shifted to other materialities. Strangely enough, it is not so easy to contrast the chemical baths and clothes pins of the analogue era with the elegant interface of the digital era. Not if, like Grönberg , we turn to what the Canadian photographic artist Jeff Wall views as a “fluid intelligence”, in contrast to photography’s always more recognised “dry” character (the sophisticated mechanisms, the lenses, the framed picture in a room, etc.). Wall sees the water as a constantly present echo of the photograph’s pre-history, a “memory trace from an ancient production process” whose “archaic character, of chemicals in fluid form, links the photograph decisively with the past, with time”.6 Wall wrote his essay in 1989, but he already had a clear understanding at that time of the future of digital production. But even in a time beyond humid darkrooms, developing and copying baths, the result is really just “a new shifting of water within photography [...] to a more remote horizon that drives the production with electricity”. Through this materialistic reading, Wall offers a concise ontological picture of the photographic image: “I believe that this ‘prehistoric’ image of photography – a speculative image within which the mechanism itself can be imagined as though it had not yet emerged from the world of minerals and plants – can help us understand the ‘dry’ aspect of photography in a different way.”7 In the case of Facebook’s server rooms in Luleå, it is undoubtedly so that the electronic image is generated with the aid of the Swedish government’s heavily subsidised electricity, which is produced by hydroelectric plants – in other words, through the exploitation of rivers, thereby linking the history of photography with new infrastructure.

**In Deep Water**

Does this fluid intelligence mean that the image is a process without end? A process whose beginning is also obscure? Here the water once again takes on a prominent importance. Jeff Wall’s perspective is developed with Flusser’s help into a less mineralogical and more biological force: the octopus. One of Flusser’s strangest books, a study of the vampire squid published in collaboration with zoologist Louis Bec’s work with pictures, constitutes a primary source of inspiration, but Cecilia Grönberg, together with like-minded researchers such as N. Katherine Hayles, Angie Kiefer and Melody Jue, takes it much further.8 The use of the deep sea as a model for our oceanic image culture has deeper and broader implications than just the metaphor of boundlessness. The technology compels us to go with the flow. Merely the daily adventure of the Google image search transforms us into undersea workers, surfing through slides, where the art of navigation is immaterial and the sextant has been replaced by a blind interface. The metaphysical thought of origins becomes instead a question of the original image size or versions without a digital watermark, the either visible or embedded stamp that links the image to a legal mechanism with watered-down threats of consequences for copyright infringement.

The section about the octopus’s different media systems constitutes the central portion of the dissertation, its middle and its body, as well as its other parts, since it is in turn divided into eight services (or arms). It is a thoroughly executed, speculative aesthetic study of this deep-sea creature that shares many quite fascinating abilities with successful human technologies – compare, for example, the cephalopod and the iPod, the ink jet printer and the octopus’s ink defence, camouflage, etc. Flusser’s book is a study of the cephalopod’s habitat and digestive system, reading into it what human culture would be like for the vampire squid. Flusser writes that the octopus’s world

is not felt with hands but rather with tentacles. It is not itself visible (noticeable), but the vampire squid makes itself visible by generating its own light. [...] The world that is occupied by the vampire squid is a fluid, centripetal vortex. It takes hold of it in order to distinguish its fluid attributes. Its tentacles, which correspond to our hands, are digestive organs. While our method of understanding is active – we inspect a static and established world – their method is passive and impassioned: they take in a world that is rushing past them. We understand what we come across, and they understand what comes across them. While we have “problems”, things that get in our way, they have “impressions”. This method of understanding is impressionistic (p. 443).

What is striking is that the vampire squid stores these impressions, collects information and sends it out, a kind of “software modification” not unlike the world we live in, where we interact physically with our surroundings less and less. But this soft, strange form of fluid intelligence turns out to also have photographic attributes – light-reflecting skin cells that allow it to quickly change colour and form and, like a photograph, to look exactly like the environment in which it is hiding. There is the species found outside of Indonesia known as the wunderpus octopus, for example, which doesn’t just project an image of its surroundings over its skin, but even has a large repertoire of appearances and patterns of movement from other animals in its habitat stored in a memory system. This has long been a mystery to research, but through the emergence of digital image-making we have come to the conclusion that here too it is about “morphs’ – that is, biological resources for hybrid images. Grönberg writes:

In cephalopods, morphing fills the same kind of function as it does in computer graphics. Two components are involved: a transformation of the image or texture that are visible on the surface of a form and a transformation of the underlying form itself. The “pixels” in the cephalopod’s skin are called chromatophores. These can expand and contract quickly, and each one is filled with pigment of a certain colour. When a nerve signal tells a red chromatophore to expand, the “pixel” turns red. A pattern of firing nerves generates a shifting image – an animation – on the cephalopod’s skin. An octopus can quickly position its arms to generate a plethora of different forms, such as a fish or a piece of coral, and it can even create textures by wrinkling its skin (p. 453).

I need hardly clarify that it is very difficult to study or photograph these cephalopod artists, not just because they live at a depth where we can barely go, but because of the dense darkness there, setting up a kind of paradox. It is a documenting animal that cannot be documented, what’s more an animal that dialectically turns out to use technologies that are similar to those that human beings invented only very recently for use on land. The prevailing situation turns out to be short on purely documentary material, though there is no shortage at all of the “fantastic picture” of the octopus – that is, our fantasies about this foreign intelligence, which has been said to be able to swallow entire ships and is every sailor’s worst nightmare. Grönberg offers an abundance of examples from this popular cultural imagination about octopuses, from the Kraken and the Nautilus to political propaganda of all sorts, where tentacles are equated with “suspicious entanglements” and potential disaster. Here she makes an observation that in its full breadth is surreal and yet completely obvious. Thus, somehow this molluscular software product, which establishes itself in its surroundings by morphing, also implants itself in us people, and we in turn project our fears upon it.

And here, finally, there is an impressive twist in which our cephalopod is given an antipod. We must not forget that *Event Horizon* is constantly striving for the technical image’s conceptual horizons and brings photography back, through developing baths, to the world’s oceans, to the spaces that are often called nature. Now we are transported to the other “seas” – to outer space. The link between the farthest reaches of the universe and the darkest depths of the earth is presented even in the physical form of the dissertation: the cover, as I’ve mentioned, is made from the skin of a sperm whale scarred by an octopus, but the title points clearly to the outermost regions of space. The term *event horizon* here serves as “a name for the border in space-time beyond which no events, and no light, can reach an external observer” (p. 40). This border lies not just beyond our thinking, but beyond the idea of space-time in general. While Flusser writes that the vampire squid is “a ‘negative model’ in relation to us – a fluid, amorphous life form that lives under very great pressure in darkness in an almost oxygen-free zone” (p. 442) – Grönberg brings us even further to the most negative of models known to man: “the black hole” and its extreme gravitational pull that swallows everything, including all opportunities for representation. It becomes neither science fiction nor, as in the world of Hollywood, spectacular philosophical somersaults. Grönberg makes use of the “event horizon as an image, a concept, a projection surface and an interface for reflection about a number of forms and phenomena that have shaped the ways we encounter and associate with photographic images in an era of digital production, publication and circulation [...] how they live on like unblessed spirits, in an undead existence, vaguely discernible on the event horizon” (pp. 39–41). Like the difficulty of documenting species such as the wunderpus octopus, it is a challenge, to say the least, to photograph what is the negation of everything we understand about photography. But the black hole, as she explains, is also only conceivably unphotographable (p. 40). In April of 2019, barely three years after the dissertation was published, the first photograph of a black hole was made public. In this case, the hole is at the centre of the galaxy M87 and comes to us through a series of images made by a whole cluster of telescopes using so-called “very-long-baseline interferometry”, their aggregate capacity together forming the Event Horizon Telescope. This photography of the unphotographable nevertheless makes it obvious that this study of the technical image’s production potential is not interested in the desire to bring an astronomical vampire out into the daylight just for the challenge of it. On the contrary, this ties a bow around the history of photography – a history that has always had a parallel history in which witness, sensation and permanence are reconciled with various materials and translations. Here I see the book’s philosophical foundational question, that it is ultimately uncertain whether it is man that has discovered photography technique or if perhaps we ourselves are still part of a photographing creation.

**The Research Vessel**

The deep sea and faraway galaxies: the astronaut, the argonaut.

There is no doubt that this is a singular book, or that it is hard to locate within the on-going discussion of photography and humanity’s increasingly broad involvement in an image-manipulating public. It differs from the classical references, differs from the classical questions. Nor is there a hint of polemic or theoretical mobilising against an imagined barricade of both context-based and more or less sociological studies of photography’s role in the social interface between desire and reality. This book is considerably more practically invested than the theories it holds, an effort of more than ten years that involves patterns of movement that are surely tangential to the dissertation’s original questions, but which have obviously taken a researcher from a rather safe sphere to observations that would otherwise come across as more metaphorical than the concrete information presented here.

*OEI* is a structure that is conceptualised as a research vessel, an experimental structure in which the question of alternatives (visual, literary, document-based and editing-based) knowledge production takes centre stage. It is a place for open, heuristic and interest-driven studies whose findings are assumed in advanced. Something therefore also establishes potential links to the field that is known today as artistic research (p. 72).

I view the expression “research vessel” here as a keyword. Of course, one can wonder what kind of research is involved here. My reading of this comprehensive book is necessarily selective and at times strained. Discursively, I have only tied together a fraction of the larger conceptual context and presented a few of the questions. In this I have perhaps sold the book short, trying to capture the octopus and serve calamari. But here we are sailing in uncharted waters beyond the ordinary cultural critical discussion of image media. The aesthetic conversation about photography, at least in academic circles, has often been too preoccupied by both a subjective and subjectival relationship to photography, which has led not infrequently to a kind of sentimentality under the almost entirely unchallenged canonisation of Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes’s essays on photography.9 Each of these different books about the “nature” of photography or “writing with light” quickly formed a homogeneous discourse around signs, representation, rhetoric, timeliness, existence, authenticity, transcendentality, reproducibility, etc. Naturally it depends on what one intends to do with photography, but it has been (and is) useful, after all, in fields such as aesthetics, philosophy and art history generally to speak of the photographic image based on already established theoretical contexts. The question of photography’s ontology therefore lands more easily in the field of legibility, where it grows together almost undetectably with a prescribed writing of art history, or where it becomes an object that careens freely from one humanistic discipline to another.10 Today it has become topical, primarily through the turn toward neo-materialism and media-archaeology during the twenty-first century, to reorientate several of the main issues toward a more unwritten materialistic field.

Research is conducted in so many different ways, perhaps as many as there are subjects to study. Each individual research process that leads to a dissertation is the product of a unique course of development, amalgamated from so many parameters and events and impressions that it is a lie to claim to be able to describe it. Science has developed a somewhat reactionary zero tolerance for associations (and in some cases its sibling, analogy) and things that are or appear to be random, unless it’s about Alexander Fleming’s left-behind soup bowls or various Newton apples that have struck people on the head during the course of history. Instead, it embraces formalised and systematised frameworks with which researchers must negotiate over time. Initially they are afforded great leeway, but it is a space that gradually grows smaller, since the results must also be informed by the academic community, a faculty that prizes originality but as a rule disdains non-conformity. Then there’s the old squabble over “the two cultures” – the hard sciences that generate empirically proven facts and the intellectuals who would rather interpret than explain. The debate over the gap, or in fact the chasm, between these two cultures stands out today as antiquated, but not because there has been any recalibration of the ranking of the two areas. Rather, they have in time learned to live on either side of a global pool of research funding, one side of which is more prosperous than the other. But although we are currently living in a time of peace, the humanities are still anxious about being unscientific and determined to institutionalise their claims in the form of the scientific method. A favourable interpretation of this phenomenon is that it is of course helpful to the reader for researchers to reveal how they have conducted their work, why this type of reading is better than others, and possibly why it sheds new light on already over-illuminated areas. A less generous view calls to mind, at least for me, after years of guidance and enduring compulsory educational requirements in scientific theory, is that “the question of method” as a rule arises ad hoc, as a final hesitant phase in which the student or researcher gathers together an arsenal of theory that is initially overemphasised and thereby risks giving away both discoveries and aspects to celebrities.

This does not mean that anyone is free of other influences or that one must out of principle try out the most unconventional interpretations or presentation formats. Personally, I am seldom as satisfied as when I find a bone-dry German monograph in which it is disappointing to come across an adjective. Research must simply take different forms and be produced through different practices and strategies. *Event Horizon* is one of them. “It’s not about the book, the text, image arguments as the conveyance of messages. Instead, it’s about the book as a material aggregation of words, images and documents constructed to be able to generate different readings” (p. 54). Grönberg strives for “a work with forms and practices that can serve as ‘adapters’ by leading from one place to another, connecting together two systems” or even “serve as context switches in an attempt to keep different types of reading operative simultaneously” (p. 64). The book’s entire approach is a visual and text-based montage that may be confusing for many at first glance, but in time becomes an impressive composition of image streams and text stations. It is the result of not a single method but rather a series of “disposable methods” developed in relation to specific archival materials, thus creating the opportunity for visual historical descriptions (p. 44). Grönberg has worked this out over a long time together with Jonas (J) Magnusson, particularly in the monographs *Omkopplingar* (2006) about LM Ericsson and *Witz-bomber och fotosken* (2009), and now their disposable methods form their own tentacular nervous systems, each with its own agency, like the octopus’s “independently thinking arms” (p. 51). The result is, quite rightly, a visual and text-based montage that often “shows instead of telling” (p. 53). In its composition it must ultimately be regarded as a critical practice, a motorial contribution to which one cannot remain neutral.

1 Kircher is, not surprisingly, a key figure in Siegfried Zielinski’s now-classic *Archäologie der Medien*. *Zur Tiefenzeit der technischen Hörens und Sehens*, Rowohlt, Hamburg, 2002.

2 Cecilia Grönberg, *Event Horizon: Distributed Photography*, OEI Editör 2016, pp. 40–41. Henceforward, page references to the book will be given in the body of the text.

3 Without intending to speak for anyone, I can explain that “index” is Latin for the pointer finger, and is also a classic semiotic term used by Charles Sanders Pierce as the sign of the physical relationship between the object being photographed and the picture of it.

4 Håkan Lindgren, “Kulturarv – så länge Yahoo vill?”, *Göteborgsposten*, 11 August 2011.

5 Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles*, New York, Zone Books, 1966.

6 Ibid., p. 45. Cf. Jeff Wall, “Photography and Liquid Intelligence”, in *Jeff Wall*, Thierry de Duve, Arielle Plenc and Boris Groys (eds.). London, Phaidon, 1996, p. 90.

7 Ibid.

8 Vilém Flusser, *Vampyroteuthis infernalis. Eine Abhandlung samt Befund des Institut Scientifique de Recherche Paranaturaliste*, Göttingen, Immatrix, 1987.

9 Cf. Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977 and Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections of Photography*, Hill & Wang 1980.

10 Here I am generalising, of course, but consider, for example, the development of cultural studies in the 1990s in the struggle to establish what ultimately came to be known as Media and Communications Studies. Interesting in this context is the contradictory fact that Sweden was one of the first countries to translate Flusser’s study of photography, just five years after the original German edition was published in 1983. See Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy for Photography*, trans. Anthony Mathews, London, Reaktion Books, 2000.

Mårten Medbo’s *Clay-Based Experience and Language*

Niclas Östlind

Helena Kraff's *On Pitfalls in Participatory Design   
and the Question of Expression*

Katja Pettersson

In her dissertation, *On Pitfalls in Participatory Design and the Question of Expression* (2018), Helena Kraff conducts and analyses work with a project on ecotourism in Kisumu, Kenya with participatory design as a method.

I myself, Katja Pettersson, work as a designer with objects, studies, teaching and installations, and I believe that I have been asked to read and discuss Kraff’s dissertation because my work is often rooted in practice-based studies. In most of my studies, the results are physical objects that are consequences of or summaries of a kind of participatory process. My methods often include conversations with experts and researchers, workshops with various people, or collaborations with animals and plants. In working with reading Kraff’s dissertation, my essay has emerged in collaboration with Katarina Sjögren, a curator and gallerist, former head of the Department of Crafts at Konstfack, the University of Arts, Crafts and Design, and lecturer in history, theory and context at Beckmans College of Design.

Helena Kraff’s dissertation project is a further development of similar participatory projects previously undertaken in Sweden together with her working partner Eva Maria Jernstrand. Through these projects, she has gained experience with the way of working and been able to develop methods and approaches within the field of participatory design. Jernstrand and Kraff’s earlier work was in the private sector, and one of the reasons that Kraff sought out artistic research as a framework for her project was the opportunity to secure time and funding for more in-depth work than she thought she would be able to do in her own company. In the projects that form the basis for her thesis, Kraff again works with Jernstrand, though they have written separate dissertations. Jernstrand’s dissertation and its organisation are not discussed in detail in Kraff's thesis; instead, Kraff chooses to focus primarily on the risks, which she calls pitfalls, of working with participatory design. The work with tourism projects in Kisumu instead provides a backdrop for reflection and thoughts about working with participatory design in a context in which the conditions for participating vary, and with ideas about how all participatory design perhaps occurs on a variety of bases and with varied individual conditions.

Kraff’s initial intention was to undertake a project in the fishing village of Dunga, Kenya together with Jernstrand, and within the framework and funding for Mistra Urban Futures, an international research and knowledge centre for sustainable urban development.1 Mistra Urban Futures funds Kraff and Jernstrand’s research project. One of Mistra Urban Futures’ areas of focus and places of work is Kisumu, Kenya, where they engage with interdisciplinary researchers. In Kisumu they work specifically with the thematic areas of Marketplace and Ecotourism. In consultation with Mistra Urban Futures, Kraff and Jernstrand chose to work with research projects that focus on the execution of participatory design projects in ecotourism, and with particular emphasis on local guides in Dunga, on the banks of Lake Victoria. After having begun by questioning its methods, during the course of the project, Kraff’s work has come to focus on illuminating and examining the pitfalls that may arise from the use of participatory design as a process and method, and how participatory design may or may not be used to create the conditions and processes for just and equitable participation and what equitable participation can be.

Kraft emphasises that she had believed in the potential of participatory design early in the process and in previous projects, and her continued work is characterised by a belief in creating design processes that lead to a better and more equitable world, at the same time she, with a critical view, illuminates the complexity and vulnerability of processes built on participation from often asymmetrical positions of power. Kraff describes how, in the midst of her work on the dissertation, she came to doubt her own work and doubt the potential of participatory design after a lecture by the design researcher Otto von Busch.2 Von Busch’s lecture, “The Purgatory of Social Design”, takes up questions like who is served by participatory design, whether everyone actually wants to participate in design processes and if designers manipulate the systems by running their own social design processes.3

After having re-evaluated the fundamental choices of her own work, Kraff chose to focus her dissertation on the meta-discussion about the difficulties and challenges of participatory design projects, and she chose to use her and Jernstrand’s on-going project as a case study in participatory design. By starting to listen more to other researchers and project participants’ criticisms, she came to re-evaluate and change her own working methods, for example by focusing more on getting women guides to participate in the local project, something that she had not chosen to do previously, possibly in order to avoid friction with the local community. Her own term for the challenges that can arise in the work is *pitfalls*, a word that leads to thoughts of physical roadblocks in an otherwise traversable road. Pitfalls also indicates a hole from which one can climb out and continue along that same road, perhaps as in this case together with others whose reflections and input can lift one up out of the metaphorical pitfall so the project can move forward toward the intended goal.

Kraff’s dissertation poses and addresses the following questions:

1. What are the pitfalls of participation, and how do they hinder equitable participation?

2. What characterises equitable participation and how can designers and design researchers work to achieve it?

The dissertation’s primary audience is design practitioners, researchers, teachers and students who are interested in participatory research methodology and/or in exploring the challenges of participation, particularly the challenges that can arise in projects that are established as collaborations between continents and countries with divergent conditions. Kraff describes how her own conditions, and Jernstrand’s, as participatory researchers from Sweden differ markedly from those of the two participating African researchers, who follow a completely different curriculum with lots of teaching and little study time. Their African colleagues have less access to libraries, and they have a hard time securing funding to participate in conferences even when they have been invited to give papers, which makes it more difficult to publish and to network. Thus, even these researchers, who might seem on the surface to be participating on the same conditions, in practice start from fundamentally different places. How great, then, are the differences between them and the guides and local inhabitants who participate in the project. They come from a completely different socio-economic background, one that serves here as a kind of research case study, even if participatory design aims to give everyone the status of thinking and formulating subject.

My own way of conducting design processes differs from traditional participatory design, since as a designer I am and have been the decider in the designing part of the work, and where the participants in the study can be said to have contributed to an intellectual or aesthetic material, their work leads to an object or an installation that I designed myself or with the help of other craft artisans or technical professionals.

Also, the participants in my projects have often been part of a clear and explicit hierarchical strategy, either because they were animals or plants and therefore constitutionally incapable of taking on the role of educated, human designer, or because of their age, when I was collaborating with children, or because they were students who were subordinates with a clearly asymmetrical power relationship to their teachers in an academic setting. In projects when I choose to interview private people in their homes, a different balance is established, since they are at home but at the same time do not have the function of designers. Instead, the subject of an interview for my research forms the basis for a project designed by me, the designer. In collaboration with other professionals in the field of art, I as the designer am the client, and even if a professional exchange and co-creation emerges, it is not fully within the framework of what can be considered participatory design.

Despite the differences in our methodologies, with Kraff working to create processes rather than objects, I share her vision of using design and the design process to contribute to the creation of a more just and sustainable society. One project that lies between our two methods is Editions in Craft, a project initiated by Renée Padt and Ikko Yokoyama in 2008.4 Their project invited Western designers to collaborate with artisans and craft techniques from around the world, focusing on women, and with artisans in Sweden who work with techniques that are dying out. These collaborations led to the creation of some exclusive design objects for sale. I took part in a workshop in which we worked with thatch as a material for creating works. Kraff works with participatory design without having a defined objective; instead, she works to create processes to, in this case, bolster tourism in a particular area. The design object is the process, and the participants guide and define the destination. Of course, there is an inherent imbalance here, as the designers come from outside and launch a process whose point of departure is defined by the designer and to which the participants “are exposed”, but the participants can choose to leave the project and are those who actually execute and manage the project. The composition of the group and the dynamic is an interesting and complicated aspect that Kraff addresses: who is in each group, how many people, and who controls the composition of the groups? In the project in Dunga, the groups have evolved over time – depending on who was able and willing to take part, but also because she started actively inviting in women after initially being reluctant to do so. Requests also emerged from the participants to form larger groups, which they thought would better reflect the community, while Kraff felt that smaller groups were preferable. However, the groups ended up becoming bigger after Kraff and Jernestrand listened to the participants. This reflects how complicated the process is when the designer/process leader can be assumed to have more knowledge about group processes, at the same time that it is important to listen humbly in order to achieve an effective participatory process.

Participatory design is a collective term for a method in which one actively involves stakeholders in the design process to ensure that the outcomes meet the intended users’ or other stakeholders’ needs and demands. By using participatory design as a method, the users are seen not just as consumers or customers, but instead as experts in understanding their own way of living and working. They are seen as partners in the design and development process.5

Participatory design was developed in the 1950s and 60s as a method for creating a feeling of ownership among others besides the clients and designers, and to foster active engagement in the process that then continues on during the use.

Participatory design is an approach that needs a process leader with a strong ability to facilitate the process so that all participants can feel that they can make their voices heard and to avoid power struggles among participants or between participants and the project’s initiator or owner. To effectively lead inclusive processes, the designer or researcher must have psychological finesse and group dynamics skills. If the participants are not allowed to be truly involved and thus influence the results, there is a risk that the design process transforms the participants into actors in a “feigned democratic” process that thus undermines trust in both the democratic work and the design process itself. It is therefore key for the designer, who is often both a catalyst and an actor, to critically analyse their role and the project’s potential and pitfalls before, during and after the project.

Participatory design (originally called cooperative design and now often known as co-design) is a design strategy that strives to actively and democratically involve all stakeholders (e.g. employees, partners, customers, citizens, end users) in the design process in order to ensure that the result fulfils their needs and is useful. Participatory design is a strategy that focuses primarily on processes for design and is a way of creating environments that are more responsive and suited to the inhabitants and users’ cultural, emotional, spiritual and practical needs. Methods and strategies were adopted, like “placemaking”, a term coined in the 1960s by William Whyte for studies and issues of the social life of small urban spaces, and “advocacy planning”, which was introduced by Paul Davidoff and Linda Stone6 for addressing the problem that it is not enough to merely provide a platform for expression, since active participation and democratic planning demand a certain degree of critical awareness from the people participating in them.

In several Scandinavian countries during the 1960s and 70s, participatory design was embedded in work with unions. Participatory processes have their roots in methods like “action research”, a term coined by Kurt Lewis for a method that is closely related to the participatory design process.7

Before embarking on her doctoral studies, Helena Kraff earned a master’s degree in business and design at HDK, during which time she did a project together with Eva Maria Jernstrand in Bollebygd, where they worked with participatory design. The goal for the Bollebygd project was to work with democratic methods. This led them to work with participatory design for a year, testing various methods and tools in the field to more closely collaborate with the inhabitants of Bollebygd. Kraff and Jernstrand have also written several articles about participatory design in various projects.

When Kraff chooses to focus on exploring the pitfalls in participatory design, she turns her practical project with Jernstrand into a case study in order to generate and acquire more knowledge about participatory design as a method. She takes into account a plethora of different parameters – economics, socioeconomics, gender, group dynamics – and both sees and criticises her on-going project, trying to correct for these factors in real time, in the course of the on-going project, at the same time that she uses writing as a method and means of expression. Therefore, the project is not described in as much detail as the reader might wish if it were to provoke reflection and be useful as practical knowledge. Instead, the knowledge generated is primarily academic: writing is given priority over the lived experiences of both researchers and participants. I would have like to have found a discussion of the local project in Kisumu in the text, where it is given low priority and not described in such a way that would allow the reader to get to know either the project or the participants. This may be because it is difficult to complete a project after one has begun to be critical of it. The criticism of one’s own work creates, for better or worse, a distance that makes it difficult to commit oneself to the project and give it the space it needs if it is to be evaluated. This is perhaps an inevitable effect of being the initiator and at the same time criticising one’s own power position in the project. The sensitivity that makes participatory design important can also be a pitfall that makes it hard to conduct the project all the way to its intended destination.

Otto von Busch and Karl Palmås formulate a list of questions that may be used to study a social project in order to reveal and analyse power positions. This list can be summarised as follows:

– Who is the user or the stakeholder? What is their interest in the project?

– Who is the client? What is their interest in the project?

– Who do you report to? What is their interest in the project?

– Who is invited/included and who is excluded?

– What is the structural and institutional framework for the action?

– How is power redistributed, who gains power and from whom is it taken?

– How is the social aspect (relationships based on loyalty and engagement) redistributed or reformed?

– Who gains what in the end?

– How can compensation for the poorest be guaranteed?8

A review of the project following the list above would have been helpful as a way to analyse potential pitfalls. Kraff has touched on many of these questions, but an analysis of the client, Mistra Urban Futures, would have been interesting. What is their objective, under what conditions do they act, and are they active in the local area? How do their responsibilities and compensation levels differ from those of the participants? The question of power is also interesting in the project. Is there a real redistribution of power and equitable participation, and is this a stated objective of the project? And is there an on-going discussion with the local community in Dunga about whether they want to have the project there?

Another reflection is that Kraff has made it hard for herself to study equitable participation in particular by staging and studying a project that takes place in a context that is so divergent from the one in which she herself lives and works. Conducting a project in another part of the world, where you don’t speak the language and lack the requisite cultural sensitivity, creates barriers – for example, in that you need to use interpreters or ask everyone else to speak a language other than their own (usually English), which often limits the vocabulary being used and makes many people uncomfortable. What’s more, locating the project in an environment in which the participants have completely different economic conditions creates yet another difficulty for fostering close contacts. For the project with guides in Kisumu, the framework was established by the organisation that funds the researcher’s work, and it was not possible for Kraff to spend the entire research period on site in Kisumu. For long periods she was in Sweden, and the communication was complicated further by inequitable access to the internet. Kraff describes how Skype meetings could be delayed or cancelled when the guides in Kisumu were unable to find a functional internet connection anywhere. The female guides had even less internet access and often worked all day selling fish, so the male guides offered to serve as intermediaries in the communication. All of these exacerbating conditions created so many hurdles or pitfalls for the project that I wonder if it wouldn’t have been helpful for Kraff’s research questions to be studied in a project in a different environment – one without so many complicating parameters – in order to thereby enhance the ability to answer the research questions.

The fact that Kraff and Jernstrand themselves, like their African research colleagues, participated in the project itself created certain hurdles. Kraff describes how some in the “community” (a term that is discussed and criticised in the dissertation) were reluctant to express their criticism of the researchers’ presence, and even silenced those who wanted to offer critique, probably out of politeness. There is an interesting idea about hospitality in similar projects. The researchers and initiators are simultaneously both guests and hosts in the project with the guides in Dunga, Kisumu.

In summary, Kraff has written a dissertation that speaks meritoriously of the difficulties of working with just and equitable participation in a design research project in Kisumu, Kenya. After attending a lecture by Otto von Busch, her focus shifted from conducting the project to studying the pitfalls in equitable and just participatory design. The lecture inspired Kraff to question what she was working with and choose to formulate the dissertation as a discussion of participatory design. The meta-discussion is both the strength and the weakness of the dissertation. I would like to have seen a deeper explication of the project on site in Kisumu, at the same time that the discussions surrounding various design methods are important to the field.

In the general curriculum for the doctoral programme in design at the University of Gothenburg, it says that in “the concentration leading to a PhD in design, great emphasis is given to the students’ ability to anchor their design work in art-based practice, theory and method”.9 In Kraff’s thesis, there is not discussion or analysis of what constitutes the design work in her research project. Is it the process that is the design in the work? Or should the work be seen as a non-artistic research project, and, if so, has it been undertaken in the right department, given that the requirement of artistic research is part and parcel of this doctoral programme’s purpose? Artistic research in design runs the risk of losing the discussion about research in the design itself in favour of textual analysis and the written component. Kraff has done practical work on site in Kisumu, Kenya, but because that work is not described in detail, it is difficult to evaluate the artistic and design aspects of that work. Discussing the compositional aspects of a design project poses difficult question for us about quality, the implications of the research in the physical making, and in what language this can be discussed and summarised. And it must be presented in the form of a text. Andreas Nobel’s dissertation, *A Dimmer Switch on the Enlightenment*, critically analyses the relationship between the written word and design with artistic research.10 The written word and analysis of textual sources occupies much of Kraff’s dissertation, while the discussion of what design work is and how it has developed during the course of the research project is only a very small part. If the participatory project is to be regarded as designing, then it would be well served by being analysed as such rather than as an almost sociological field study, and it should also be anchored as a design among other design projects in the same field.

1 [https://www](http://www.mistraurbanfutures.org/sv).mistraurbanfutures.org/sv (accessed 14 Oct 2019).

2 Kraff, Helena. 2018 *Exploring Pitfalls of Participation and Ways Towards Just Practices Through a Participatory Design Process in Kisumu, Kenya*, Artmonitor, Diss. Univsity of Gothenburg p. 18.

3 Ibid., p. 59.

4 [http://www](http://www.editionsincraft.com/).editionsincraft.com/ (accessed 19 Oct 2019).

5 Elizabeth B-N Sanders, 2013, “Perspectives on Participation in Design”, http://www.maketools.com/articles-papers/Sanders2013Perspectives.pdf (accessed 17 Oct 2019).

6 David Davidhoff, 1965, “Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning”, *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, pp. 422–32.

7 Kurt Lewin, 1946, “Action Research and Minority Problems”, *Journal of Social Issue*, p. 35.

8 Otto von Busch, Karl Palmås, 2016, “Social Means Do Not Justify Corruptible Ends: A Realist Perspective of Social Innovation and Design”, *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics and Innovation*, Volume 2 Issue 4, p. 287.

9 *General Curriculum for Doctoral Degree Programme in Design at the University of Gothenburg*. 2016. Dnr. U 2016/75, University of Gothenburg. p. 1.

10 Nobel. Andreas. 2014. *A Dimmer Switch on the Enlightenment: Text Form and Design*. Nilleditions. Diss. The University of Arts, Crafts and Design, Stockholm.

Åsa Stjerna’s *Artistic Experience   
and Knowledge in Artistic Practice*

Henrik Frisk

**Introduction**

Artistic research has undergone a dynamic and positive development over the last twenty years, but the road ahead is still uneven and a little bumpy. More broadly speaking, even at art schools, there is relatively little knowledge about what it really is, and some questions still remain about what artistic research may contribute. Reports have come out at regular intervals that indicate that the challenge for artistic research, and before it for artistic development work, is that the methodology has been too ambiguous and that the projects have failed to rise above the individual researcher’s private sphere.1 The problem, to the extent that there still is a problem, will eventually be resolved, even though it may seem that it’s taking a very long time. More links with other research disciplines, the rest of the cultural community and a broader swath of society could contribute to a more stable development and to a more focused methodological direction. The lack of defined theoretical constructs and methods, however, may be seen as both a blessing and a curse for artistic research. How can heterogeneity be preserved as a shared field is constructed?

Still, there is no shortage of methods, and one of these that is often forgotten is the actual writing. Writing as a method has become somewhat problematic, however, in artistic research. The question of whether writing as a part of artistic research practice impacts or even inhibits artistic processes has been recurrently discussed.2 That discussion builds on the idea that theory, practice and method are separated from one another and that too much of one will have a negative impact on the other. Instead, as I argued in my contribution to the anthology *Acts of Creation* (2015), which addresses questions about academic advising in artistic research, that it should be possible to think in new ways about the relationships between theory, practice and method.3 The concept and context are not always fixed, but shift in relation to each other. The findings of a dynamic artistic practice can also be analysed through quantitative as well as qualitative methods and can form models for future research. These models can provide stable data even if they do not in themselves represent enduring findings. If the practice that generated the research findings is included in the description, it is more likely that those findings will contribute to knowledge that is useful. Therefore, the findings should primarily be sought not in the reduction, or in the deductive method, but in the complexity and instability – in short, in relation to chaos.4

The core of the challenge, then, is how sustainable findings can be extracted if concept and context are constantly shifting: how are we to select a method if nothing is constant? There are several ways to approach this matter, and I believe it constitutes one example of a problem that has yet to be adequately discussed in today’s artistic research. It would be convenient to draw comparisons to other research, but such a link might easily create further confusion. It is undoubtedly so that the broad field of traditional scientific research is both disparate and in continual flux, and that the view of the ideal scientific method is exaggeratedly uniform and simplistic. Traditional research holds an advantage due to its long history and cultural and social acceptance. At the same time, it is not enough for artistic research to refer recurrently, as it often does, to the fact that there are also experimental qualitative methods in the sciences, or that the field of scientific research is at least as heterogeneous as that of artistic research. The methods and methodological development in artistic research deserve greater focus, whether they differ from the those of traditional science or not.

Artistic knowledge sometimes stands out as being fundamentally different from verbal communication. Part of the challenge for artistic research, therefore, is to conceptualise the research in a way that makes the knowledge in the processes studied useful. One discipline that has long been doing just that, and that consequently is widely used in artistic research, is philosophy. In the dissertation I will be discussing in this essay, Åsa Stjerna’s *Before Sound: Transversal Processes in Site-Specific Sonic Practice*, it is first and foremost French philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s conceptual framework to which we will refer, and principally the books he wrote together with Félix Guattari.

***Before Sound***

Åsa Stjerna’s dissertation “explores artistic transformation in site-specific sonic practice”.5 This practice is multi-disciplinary and transformative, and it takes place in the public realm. This in turn creates contexts and situations that require negotiation and renegotiation in artistic practice, and therefore demonstrates the complexity inherent in all human activity. Four artistic processes are described in detail. These are processes that contribute to what is the central issue of the thesis: the renegotiation and transformation of a place. As is apparent in the dissertation’s subtitle, the term *transversal* plays a central role in the study. Transversal should be seen here as “an understanding of artistic production as the establishment of relationships between components in a reciprocal, continual process of becoming” (p. 293).

Stjerna strives to avoid the traditionally sharp dichotomies that mark our understanding of the work of art and that can be represented by concept pairs such as artist–audience, creating–listening, inside–outside or body–soul. Instead of these ontologically manifested relationships, she emphasises an “understanding of artistic practice as dealing with affective, immanent power relationships in which each component has agency”, i.e. the capacity to both influence and be influenced (p. 293). This is to a great extent in agreement with Deleuze’s philosophical perspective, and thus the dissertation can in part be seen as an instantiation, or an exploration, of the theoretical framework presented.6

In terms of methods, or what are referred to in the thesis as exploratory approaches, Stjerna points primarily to three strategies: “mapping out the affective lines, creating new links and becoming non-autonomous” (p. 294). These three are also linked to Deleuze and Guattari at various levels, perhaps primarily in the method of creating new links, which itself can be seen as part of the transverse intention. A central proposition that comes to the fore in several places in the dissertation, and that provides a background for the title, is that sound is something that should be seen as an effect of affective, transversal and immanent processes, all of which take place before the sound is heard, before it arises or is perceived. The establishment of new links shows the artistic process to be both transformative and transversal (p. 119), and these links are central to the various aspects, or modalities, that Stjerna holds up as important to her own artistic work: sonification, technology and site-specific sonic practice. But it is through transversal processes among these aspects (and others) that new links are created among what can be seen as heterogeneous objects. This is an important part of the artistic practice, and it is as a result of this that the sound arises. It is this part of the process the dissertation studies – thus the title *Before Sound*.

Four different artistic projects are discussed in the dissertation: Currents (2011), An Excursion to Nairobi (2013), The Well (2014) and Sky Brought Down (2017). I will focus primarily on the first of these. Currents was a project initiated by Stjerna herself that developed into a commission by the Ultima Festival, a contemporary music festival in Oslo, that was intended to be displayed in the lobby of the new opera house on that city’s waterfront. The point of departure for the work is data from measurements taken in the North Atlantic current outside the Faroe Islands. These measurements were taken in conjunction with a research project that studies the melting of ice in the Northern Hemisphere resulting from global warming. Stjerna was given access to the data, and her intent was to explore to what extent sound as an artistic material can mediate questions of great political relevance and how these questions can give rise to embodied experiences in a public setting.

**Currents**

The reason I chose this project in particular is the questions it poses about the relationship between representation and expression, and how the focus naturally rests on political and social aspects. In addition, several of the questions are closely related to those I have worked with myself. At the same time, the project is a clear example of what a transversal process can look like. The various components in the different phases of the project – such as the research project that managed the gathering of data, the process of extracting relevant parts of the scientific data, the opera house as a social and political place and the location for the rendering of the work, the artistic development of software and hardware, and Stjerna herself as an artist (p. 133) – are each independent agents and machines.7 The challenge for this dissertation is to articulate how the links between these components are established, how they endure and what they do for the process. It would also have been interesting to see how agency was transformed through the process and whether that change is lasting.

Another aspect of Currents that Stjerna discusses in the dissertation’s fifth chapter is the matter of the artist-subject and her limited independence or autonomy – or rather, Stjerna’s desire to achieve non-autonomy (p. 133). It is clear that the web of relationships she describes throughout the entire work also makes it clear that it will be hard for the artist to claim the right to make unilateral decisions, and that she should instead be seen as an agent of many. But the choice of expressing it as a working model that in itself goes beyond the sovereign subject is interesting and telling. It’s not about the artist being robbed of the opportunity to be autonomous, but that she instead is offered a more comprehensive framework that creates opportunities that extend beyond those afforded to the autonomous subject. The autonomous artist is often seen as an idea, tightly linked to the free artist, though this is a concept that deserves to be questioned.8 In addition to the transversality that Stjerna emphasises and that comes to the fore through the non-autonomous, there are both aesthetic and purely artistic reasons to question the concept of freedom. However, it is important that the three central components here – the site, the work and the artist-subject – are seen as parts of a whole rather than as separate.

The issue of sonification as a method and how it can be understood as a transversal process is also discussed. Sonification is a scientific as well as artistic method, and Stjerna gives an account of various aspects of the different approaches. As a scientific method, sonification is about creating a correspondence between the data to be sonified and the sonic result so that the latter becomes a representation of the former. The purpose of sonification in these contexts is to offer a resonant entrance to a quantity of data. For example, it could be about looking at extremely complex and stratified data that is impossible to read but possible to hear. This is a kind of representation that does not agree with the theory on which the work in question rests, nor is it necessarily particularly interesting artistically, as Stjerna points out. In Currents, sonification has a substantially broader political significance, and as an artistic method it is closely interwoven with the theoretical framework of the dissertation.

On the process level, it is not hard to see that the sonification process must be viewed in all essential regards in relation to the transversal current on which all other parts of the installation rest. At the same time, it is challenging to see how this can be experienced in the sound installation.9 The data from the ocean currents is divided into two parts, of which one is read in real time while the other has been rendered in non-real time, which underscores the significance of seeing Currents as spatial rather than temporal. This opens the door to another question that would have been interesting to dig deeper into, namely the relationship between the spatial and the temporal, particularly based on Deleuze.10 I have primarily understood Deleuze’s plane of immanence as an alternative to Western philosophy’s preoccupation with the spatial in favour of Bergson’s temporal thinking. This poses an interesting question about the relationship between the temporal and the spatial in *Before Sound* in general.

In *What Is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari simplify certain questions by distinguishing three modes of thought – art, science and philosophy. Although none of the modes is dependent upon the others, the authors’ description of them offers a potential refinement and a possible interaction, as well as a common goal: to confront the chaos named above. However non-hierarchical the relationship among these modes may be, it may appear from the quotation below that art is not primarily knowledge, nor does it form stable concepts, but instead is based on timelessness, sensations and feelings, or affects:

What defines thought in its three great forms – art, science and philosophy – is always confronting chaos, laying out a plane, throwing a plane over chaos. [...] Art wants to create the finite that restores the infinite: it lays out the plane of composition that, in turn, through the action of aesthetic figures, bears monuments for composite sensations.11

Based on this reasoning, we can ask ourselves the question of what artistic research can be in Deleuze and Guattari’s description. They express a certain traditional view of art, in the sense that it is primarily art’s potential they discuss. Phrases such as “the act of painting that appears as a painting”12 nevertheless suggest that process and result are overlapping, but what does it mean for the kind of transversal and radical practice that Åsa Stjerna conducts? Is their argument still relevant to the hybrid that is artistic research, or is it primarily an analytical view of aesthetics and artistic knowledge? And what is the relationship between philosophy as a concept-creating activity and art as an activity rather than an object?

Judging by the great interest given to Deleuze and Guattari by artistic researchers, there is no doubt that their thinking is, and has been, relevant to the field of art. In the early 2000s, it was primarily in the visual arts that Deleuze was seen as art’s theoretical figurehead. Over time, these philosophers have also attracted attention in music. In December 2018, the third international conference on Deleuze and artistic research – “Dare” – was held at the Orpheus Institute in Ghent, and Leuven University Press recently published the second part of the book series *Deleuze and Artistic Research*.13 Last year, a project was completed at the University of Gothenburg called *At the Conceptual Limits of Composition.* Led by Anders Hultqvist and funded by the Swedish Research Council, it too was based on Deleuze’s theoretical constructs.14 Klas Nevrin’s project, also financed by the Swedish Research Council, Music in Disorder, based at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm and completed in December 2018, is also clearly rooted in Deleuze’s thinking. Almost simultaneously with Åsa Stjerna, the composer Fredrik Hedelin was working at Luleå University of Technology on his dissertation, in which he conducts an analysis of three of his own solo concertos in which the term *ritornello* becomes a link between the music and Deleuze’s philosophy.15 This is by no means a complete list; my purpose instead is to point to the interest in Deleuze is in the field of music.

What Stjerna refers to as the transversal processes, and which she uses to demonstrate how artistic practice is rhizomatic in nature, resonates quite well with other artistic research, even when it does not make explicit reference to Deleuze. The intention to break down the political and social hierarchies that have characterised the musical world for centuries and that have taken off as a result of the institutionalisation, and to some extent the professionalisation, of the music world16 has been discussed in many projects, and it is something in which I too have take a great interest.

**Method and Findings**

The three general and exploratory approaches used in the project are: “1. *Map out the affective lines*; 2. *Create new links*; and 3. *Become non-autonomous*” (p. 294). These establish a close link between theory and method, and in a way make it easier to discuss the challenges in the project. If we continue based on the line that Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy here deals with concept creation, it is not far-fetched to imagine that their tools can be used to create the concepts we need to understand and analyse artistic practice. The question is whether the result of that process first and foremost is knowledge about art or whether it is philosophy, but regardless of the answer the result may have some validity as research. Another challenge stemming from this use of method is that, for obvious reasons, theory, method and results can begin to blend together in a way that undermines the conceptual stability. Nevertheless, this is a relevant way to treat method and theory in artistic research. In Stjerna’s dissertation, the way she builds up the theoretical and methodological framework largely harmonises with how, in my previously mentioned essay “Thinking in Practice”, I propose that the prevailing understanding of the relationship between theory, method and practice needs to be reformulated. Even if Stjerna does not describe it explicitly, my understanding is that she formulates a definition of the term “sound art” and its ontological foundations by correlating her own experience as a practitioner with a philosophical and musicological explication of how the term has become established.17

Nor do any problems emerge in the dissertation having to do with a negative blending together. This may be in part because Stjerna is so careful and extremely consistent in her use of the terms. In addition, it should not not be forgotten that the theory in *Before Sound* is in large part related to the contextualisation and positioning given in Chapter Two, “Contextualisation: Artistic Strategies Within the Field”. This kind of contextualisation is sometimes overlooked in artistic dissertations, which can lead to the artistic results being difficult to judge: if it is unclear which artistic field the artist/researcher is working in, it can be hard to correlate the artistic results to the field of art generally. The same problem arises if the field that is described is too disparate or comprehensive or too narrow.

The accumulative knowledge building that can result from a stable research environment – in which researchers in various ways build on one another’s work in a transparent and consistent manner – is a precondition for artistic research gaining respect and trust as an independent field of knowledge, but also for the internal knowledge development taking off. This is already happening today, but there is great room for development here. In a new field, one often turns to theoretical constructs from other fields, but now it is important to turn our gaze even more toward other areas of artistic research in order to evaluate and build further on their theories, methods and findings. I believe that artistic research is not just transdisciplinary, but also multi-disciplinary – that is, in some cases it is even dependent upon disciplines other than the purely artistic ones if the knowledge is to be communicated both within and outside of its own domain. Symptomatically, Stjerna describes the work with sound installations as a multi-disciplinary practice, and the dissertation as a whole can itself be seen as multi-disciplinary. However, it is important to understand the political dimension toward which the interdisciplinary points. Interactivity is a watchword at every university and college today, and transdisciplinary science has in some cases become an end in itself for neoliberals. This does not always benefit the development of a research field, where the needs also have to be defined from inside rather than being added on from the outside. The multi-disciplinary approach presupposes that the different parts of the study are linked and communicate with one another, which goes to the heart of how the term transversality must be understood. In an environment that is genuinely multi-disciplinary, it is necessary to have a method that allows unbroken communication among the different parts of the project. The term transversality is originally used by Guattari with a similar purpose – as a criticism of the dualistic view of the relationship between analyser and analysed.18

Thus, the term itself from the beginning confers what Stjerna describes as one result: an interwoven transversal process that reformulates hierarchies into continuous and in some cases spatial systems. This includes the relationship between the artist-subject and the public, which has certainly been the subject of critique since the 1960s (p. 48). In *Before Sound*, the focus lies on the processes involved in the creation and production, and the audience does not directly feature as an agent that is discussed. The transversal therefore plays out primarily between the site, the artwork and the artist-subject:

In this doctoral research, the concept of assemblage has enabled me to articulate a mode of artistic practice in which site-specific sonic conditions and production operate as immanent, inter-relational, mechanistic, and transversal processes. I acknowledge the importance of this way of thinking in the subtitle of the thesis, *Transversal Processes in Site-Specific Sonic Practice*, and its influence can be seen in the previous chapter’s presentation of the field. (p. 92)

Perhaps one could thereby draw the conclusion that the transversal process is both method and result? At least, it is as a method that transversality is described in the above quotation, and as such it ought to be of interest in other artistic research as well. If transversality can contribute to conceptualising what happens in the artistic process as well, it would be of considerable benefit – and *Before Sound* shows that this could be possible.

Returning now to the question of how artistic knowledge is constituted and to what extent it is hidden, in contrast to verbal and immediately accessible knowledge, and how it might be able to be translated. The question is whether it is in fact less about translating from hidden processes into visible ones and more about understanding how we can relate to various forms of human communication. Guattari wanted to get around what he termed the “personological” use of language in psychotherapy,19 and in another essay worth reading Gregory Bateson points out that art has a communicative capacity that makes it more akin to things like spiritual experiences, intoxication and dreams.20 The challenge is not that there are different logical types of consciousness and knowledge, but how we can understand them through a communicative whole. It is clear that the transversal processes can play a large role, but the question remains as to whether the transversal in itself can provide a more rigorously formulated artistic research in which it is easier for other researchers to understand and relate to the findings, process and method, or whether it is more about an analytical method.

It cannot be emphasised enough that what I have simplistically termed the hidden and the visible, or the inner and outer, are not separate paradigms for understanding, knowledge and communication. Art has long been pervaded with the idea of the inner and “pure” that is sometimes contrasted with the outer “stained”. In such a model, the inner is idealistic, honest and transcendental, while the outer can be calculating and unreliable. Even if it is easy to distance oneself from this roughly hewn description, similar thoughts have had a profound influence over aesthetics. The inner and the outer are juxtaposed in contradiction to each other, and the pure impression – that which reaches our consciousness without passing through a phase of conceptualisation – is seen as the ideal. Sometimes the striving for originality – the actual source of searching for expression unsullied by consciousness – is coloured by the Enlightenment’s image of identity. If each individual is unique and independent, then genuine personal expression should be original.21

One reason there is a tendency to see artistic practice as an individually articulated form of knowledge is that the making of art is mainly viewed as something undertaken by an individual. And of course it sometimes is. And this romantic image of art is, without a doubt, something that revolves around the idea of a solipsistic genius. Stjerna objects to this image when she discusses her method:

[E]stablished traditions in contemporary art practice still harbour segments of binaries that separate an autonomous active (white, male) subject and a (passive) urban text. Rejecting this traditional view in proposing that we become non-autonomous, I advocate that we view the artist-subject’s agency in artistic production as transversal. (pp. 119–20)

There are many reasons to counteract this normativity, and artistic research is an extraordinarily well adapted way to do it.

**Discussion**

In the dissertation *Before Sound*, as I’ve mentioned previously, the boundaries between practice, method and theory are not clearly articulated. Instead, they are in constant flux. The terminology from Deleuze and Guattari is in some cases both method and theory and in others clearly related to the findings, and it is not always self-evident from the outset what the objective was. However, this should not be seen as a weakness in Stjerna’s case. Stjerna’s first research question – “How can I as an artist develop exploratory approaches that support a transversal creative process?” (p. 294) – clearly shows that the transversal creative process is a goal in itself. In Chapter Five, however, it is equally clear that at the start of the project Stjerna had already established transversal links through her practice (p. 145). Stjerna points to a great need for new conceptual tools and approaches that can go beyond representation and transcendent hierarchies, and especially for theory that can illuminate how transformation is established based on a solid understanding of artistic processes (p. 85). This is what the dissertation then demonstrates by viewing the sound installation itself as a transformative practice that links together multiple artistic strategies, each of which is a transversal process.

It is still difficult to see artistic research as a discipline that generates clear results based on well-proven methods. On the other hand, there is a series of different articulations of knowledge development that all indicate that there is an epistemological potential to be found in artistic practice. This potential knowledge system, if it can be conceptualised, can be very influential. In this context, is can be noted that this belief in art as bearing knowledge agrees in part with Deleuze and Guattari’s reasoning in *What Is Philosophy?*22 Actually, one could go even further and say that it agrees in principle with Deleuze’s entire philosophical body of work to see art as a form of knowledge, or as a form of thinking, or both.

I believe that the question of what artistic research is, or what good it does, is not correctly formulated. The question we ought to be asking ourselves instead is: What will society be like if it no long actively works to develop all the forms of knowledge that influence human existence, including artistic sensibility and philosophical reasoning? This must be a question that is actively discussed throughout society and in artistic research as well. There is no doubt that we live in a distinctly scientific society, and that it in turn has created a strongly technological civilization. Therefore, it is even more important that we have access to all types of thinking if we are to resolve the challenges that are confronting us in the world today. Åsa Stjerna’s dissertation shows that thinking through artistic practice in particular is a useful tool.

1 CF. Halina Dunin-Woyseth et al. (2007). *KONTEXT, KVALITET, KONTINUITET: Utvärdering av Vetenskapsrådets anslag till konstnärlig forskning och utveckling 2001–05*. Technical report for the Swedish Research Council, p. 10.

2 Cf. Dieter Lesage’s survey that discusses this matter: D. Lesage (2009). “Who’s Afraid of Artistic Research? On measuring artistic research output”. In: *Art & Research 2.2*, pp. 1–10.

3 H. Frisk (201S). “Thinking in Practice”. In: *Acts of Creation: Thoughts on artistic research supervision.* Ed. H. Frisk, K. Johansson, and Å. Lindberg-Sand. Symposion, p. 120.

4 G. Deleuze and F. Guattari (1994). *What is Philosophy?* Verso, pp. 117–18.

5 Å. Stjerna (2018). *Before Sound: Transversal Processes in Site-Specific Sonic Practice.* PhD thesis. University of Gothenburg. Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts, p. 291. Henceforward, page references to the book will be given in the body of the text.

6 Cf. Chapter 8, the section “Machinic Interferences in the Oslo Opera House as a Smooth and Striated Space”. Ibid, pp. 240–45.

7 Machine should be read here in the sense Deleuze and Guattari use machine and “machinic”. Stjerna also uses the term “recurring”, which can be seen as a method of explaining a type of movement that operates rhizomatically and that can create transversal links to other machines. On p. 91, Stjerna refers to a definition of Deleuze and Guattari from Mille Plateaux that refers to the term “machinic” as a synthesis of heterogeneities. What they denote as the actual machine is based on a comprehensive deconstruction of Freud as well as Marx.

8 Cf. Gary Peters (2009). *The Philosophy of Improvisation.* University of Chicago Press, p. 21.

9 However, it is important to acknowledge that I have not heard it in person, so I can only make a theoretical judgement based on the text and the short documentary video that is available.

10 Now there is no doubt that *Before Sound* focuses on the spatial aspects of sound art, so this discussion is actually off topic.

11 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 197.

12 Ibid.

13 Together with Anders Elberling I contributed to a chapter, “Machinic Propositions”, to this volume with some bearing on this discussion. It is based on some of the theorems for deterritorialisation described by Deleuze and Guattari in Mille Plateaux (H. Frisk and A. Elberling 2019). “Machinic propositions: artistic practice and deterritorialization”. In: *Aberrant Nuptials: Deleuze and Artistic Research* 2nd ed. by P. Guidici and P. de Assis. Orpheus Institute Series. Leuven University Press, Leuven, pp. 121–29. The first part was called “The Dark Precursor: P. de Assis and P. Giudici” (2017). *The Dark Precursor: Deleuze and Artistic Research*. Orpheus Institute Series. Leuven University Press.

14 A. Hultqvist (Jan. 2018). “Komposition vid det konceptuellas gränser. En krympande tomhet – mening, kaos och entropi”. Website accessed 27 Dec 2019.

15 Fredrik Hedelin (2017). *Levande musik: Ritornellen och musikens skapande.* PhD thesis. Luleå University of Technology, Music and Dance, p. 202.

16 H. Frisk (May 2017). “Hell is full of musical amateurs, but so is heaven”. In: Seismograf. http://seismograf. http://seismograf.org/fokus/composer-performer.

17 Stjerna, “Before Sound: Transversal Processes in Site-Specific Sonic Practice”, see Chapter Three.

18 Andrew Goffey (201S). “Guattari, Transversality and the Experimental Semiotics of Untranslatability.” In: Paragraph 38.2, pp. 231–44, p. 234.

19 Goffey, “Guattari, Transversality and the Experimental Semiotics of Untranslatability”, p. 234.

20 Gregory Bateson (1972). “Style, Grace, and Information in Primitive Art”. In: *Steps to an Ecology of Mind.* 2nd ed. University of Chicago Press, pp. 128–82, p. 139.

21 Identity, and its recontextualisation, are also central concepts in Deleuze’s philosophy, as in much of post-structuralism.

22 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*