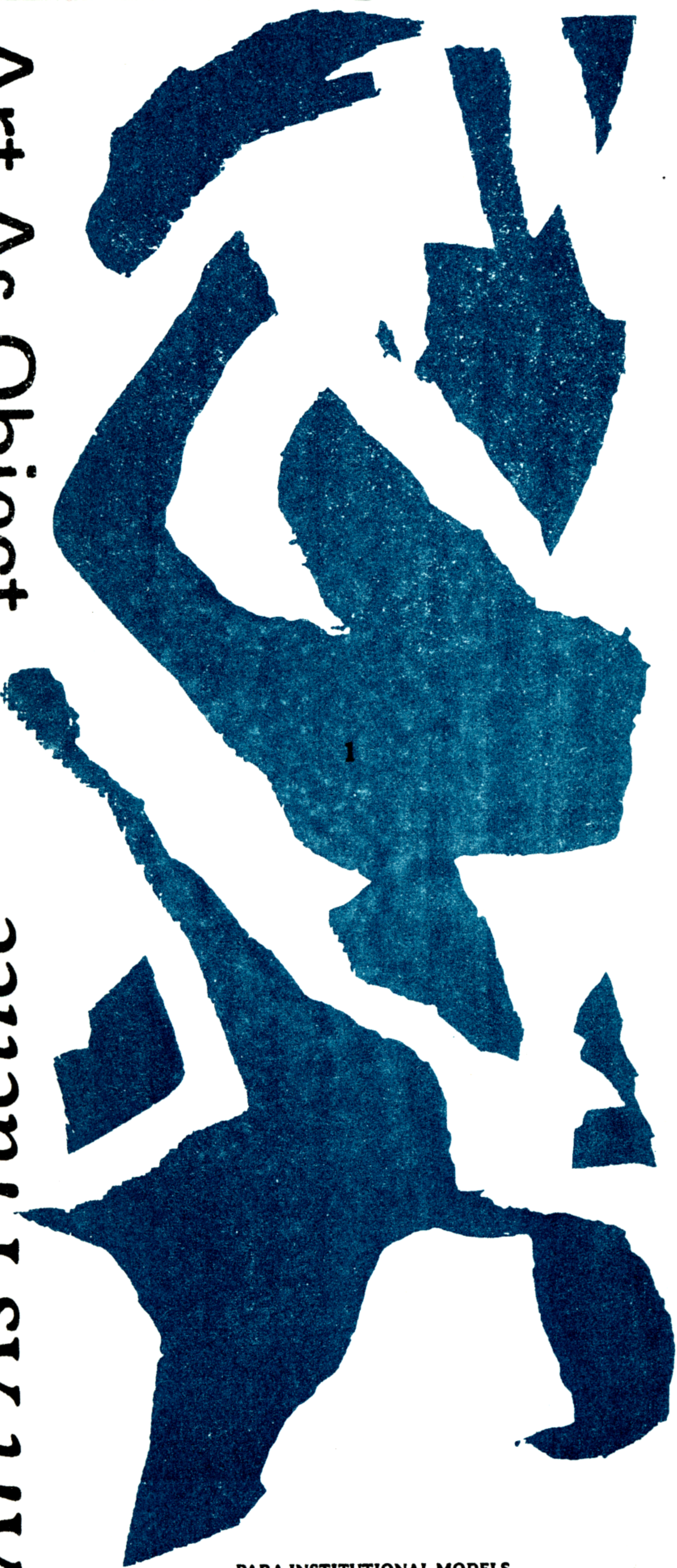


Art As Object —

Art As Practice



PARA INSTITUTIONAL MODELS

Art as object

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Art as practice

Throughout the last year PIM's archive group, consisting of Runa Skolseg, Anders Paulin, Emilia Gasiorek and Oda Brekke, have thought of and through different themes that could support PIM's aim to practice and rethink the negotiation and the mediation of art in public. There is a desire for this publication to support and accompany PIM's coming symposiums and for it to offer discursive frameworks, anchor points and entrances. Through this publication the four of us wish to present material that can manifest various points and positions and support future thinking through the relationship object and practice.

This publication is the first in a series produced and edited by PIM's Archive group consisting of Emilia Gasiorek, Anders Paulin, Oda Brekke and Runa Borch Skolseg.

The concept of the publication has been developed in collaboration with Mika Kastner Johnson.

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"The thing is the point of intersection of space and time, the locus of the temporal narrowing and spatial localization that constitutes specificity or singularity. (...) The thing and the space it inscribes and produces are inaugurated at the same moment, the moment that movement is arrested, frozen, or dissected to reveal its momentary aspects, the moment that the thing and the space that surrounds it are differentiated conceptually or perceptually."

+ Elisabeth Grosz
The Thing



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rethinks the role and format of the art institution. PIM turns to the institution's weight and gravity to create a public sphere, and gathers around art objects in order to practice the negotiation, accumulation, and mediation of artistic work. We are an organisation consisting of around 40 artists across Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland working in the performing arts, architecture, visual art, and literature.

PIM leaves behind the traditional institution's center of gravity—the nation—and replaces it with concepts of sustainability for a slow journey across the Nordic region. We are interested in creating cuts in the accelerated attention economy of the big cities and placing PIM in rural contexts. We ground ourselves in the landscape by travelling only by bus, train, and boat. PIM asks how art production could be sustainable and allows it to sediment through space, time, and discourse.

Our structure developed from a perspective that sees the institution as an apparatus to negotiate what we as a society share and administrate in common. An important parallel aspect of this task is to continuously negotiate the “we” that constitutes a common.

By doing this, the institution can also be seen as a tool that produces a public sphere—an interface to negotiate the different conflicting subjectivities that form a public. As citizens, we take part in this negotiation under the condition that we accept a shared interest in and responsibility for this public sphere—including individuals with interests in conflict with our own. Rather than striving for consensus, this approach resonates with the idea of agreeing to disagree, while accepting to stay in the negotiation.

Another aspect specific to the art

institution is its relation to art work as something oscillating between *practice* and *object*. In this figure of thought, the practice belongs to the artistic subject, while the object is a temporary manifestation of the art practice in a public context. The institution is here a necessary tool for the negotiation, mediation, and implementation of art in a public sphere.

PIM arises from an urgency to find another sort of gravitational point to practice around, redefining how we gather. As artists, many of us live in big cities where the public sphere is increasingly privatized and working conditions are dictated by fast circulation and the attention economy. We abstract time and space with high-speed internet and airborne travel to other big cities. These unsustainable so-called necessities of art production create burned out bodies and superficial work. With PIM, we wish to create a fictional but also practical break from the economy and temporality of the big cities.

The work of PIM evolves from two recurring yearly events: *Mediation*, a public symposium in the spring combining artistic and discursive work; and *Returnal*, a seminar in the autumn for evaluation, where we recollect the past year's work and define a thematic trajectory for the year to come. These events will ambulate between a number of collaborating venues and platforms in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and possibly Island. We will also produce an annual publication.

Current Participants:

Insister Space (dance/choreography platform, Stockholm); Danseatelier (dance and choreography platform, Copenhagen); Skogen (art platform, Gothenburg); studio nav (architecture studio, Stockholm); Museum of Impossible Forms (art platform, Helsinki); Weld (dance venue, Stockholm); The non existent Center (art center, Ställberg); RISK (art collective, Copenhagen); Runa B Skolseg (writer, Oslo), Goro Tronsmo (director/artist, Oslo); Ellen Söderhult (choreographer, Stockholm); Annika Lundgren (artist, Gothenburg); Sara Gebran (choreographer, Copenhagen); Anders Paulin (dramaturge, Stockholm).

of Past Negotiations

Following Traces

Emilia Gasiorek is a dancer and choreographer based in Copenhagen. Within the context of Danseatelier she works with curation, rhizomatic structures and collective organisation strategies. Her work considers the body in relation to feeling, affect and energy and how emotional and physical states shape the matter of bodies and worlds.

Oda Brekke works with dance and choreography, mainly at the artist driven studio højden in Stockholm. She spends a lot of her time maintaining højden's collegial and physical structure, and is also engaged in other collective formations such as PIM, INSISTER SPACE and Interim Kultur.

Emilia Gasiorek

Oda Brekke

Manifestations

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“The work is founded on the conviction of the institution as a necessary structure and interface for the negotiation and implementation of artistic work in the realm of a public sphere. [...] By this we wish to propose a sustainable alternative to the accelerated circulation and capitalization of artistic labor inherent to the current attention economy.”

→ Anders Paulin,
Description of PIM

Emilia Gasiorek, Oda Brekke

PIM is founded on questions related to the *realm of the public sphere* and the negotiation of *art* in it. As a proposal, PIM poses questions around what the public is and what is included in the notion of the public sphere. What kind of work, performance, communication, thing, act, text or speech has the potential of publicly manifesting itself and thus offering itself to a public negotiation? These questions unfold a discussion around the relationality between *art works* and *artistic process*, between *art as object* and *art as practice* and their respective capacities for common negotiation and manifestation. To draw up this connection between art as practice and art as object is already to assume a dualistic relationship, which might be a dangerous move. However, in doing so is it possible not to oppose the two, but to understand them through an interdependency? To look at the two notions through a material and rhythmical relationality, like the ebb and flow of the tide, in order to understand what possibilities their dynamics have on the negotiation of art?

The current capitalization of artistic labour has been linked to the frequent use of the term *artistic practice* which often populates the language of public presentations and the programming of art. Artistic processes are documented, communicated, discussed and attended to as part of public programmes, where the process becomes the work that the audience gathers around, instead of it being a private and mystical sphere belonging to the artist that exists separately from the artwork as the public gesture. The explosion of the use of the word *practice* can be understood as part of an object critical movement and a belief in action as a medium that potentially could

PIM

take place beyond or besides the pressure to produce art works. Practice could also be understood as a means to invest in subjective experience or collectivity for the sake of it and to challenge the commodification of art and the market logics inherent to artistic production.^[1]

This text refers specifically to the use of the notion *practice* within the field of dance and choreography.^[2] In the performing arts the movement away from regimes of representation and the focus on rendering aspects of its specific modes of process visible has been, for several reasons, necessary. A liberation of the disciplined worker, an acknowledgement of hidden labour and an interest in subjective experience, and attending to the very specific potential of embodied knowledge constitute some of these reasons. Today, however, it might be relevant to look again at the two—practice and object—as differentiated and interdependent.

Throughout the last year PIM's archive group, consisting of Runa Skolse, Anders Paulin, Emilia Gasiorek, and Oda Brekke, have thought of and through different themes that could support PIM's aim to practice and rethink the negotiation and the mediation of art in public. We desire for this publication to support and accompany PIM's coming symposium(s) and for it to offer discursive frameworks, anchor points and entrances. Through this publication, the four of us wish to present material that can manifest various points and positions to support future thinking through the relationship *object* and *practice*.

This introductory text, written by Emilia Gasiorek and Oda Brekke, looks back over PIM's initial trajectory,^[3] where

Emilia Gasiorek, Oda Brekke

a desire for materialization, manifestation, and gravitation through gathering around art objects was proposed. It is important to recognise the 'Partial Perspective',^[4] to borrow from Donna Haraway, that the two of us articulate in this text; two trained dancers filtering and understanding information and material through that very specific history, experience and knowledge. We have seen that our work, the work of the dancer, can easily position itself in other ways than that of how PIM proposes a thinking of the object, and we have used this as a force to throw the ball back and forth between different ways of relating to the terms. The text therefore looks at the friction between PIM's visions and desires, as well as the problems and complications of actualizing and operating PIM through the lense of the relationship *practice/object*. We have consciously written the text with a situatedness in dance and choreography, not because PIM primarily consists of, or belongs only to, that artistic field, but from a desire to be specific and not general, as well

[1] For example in Bojana Kunst's book *Artist At Work*.

[2] PIM's first meeting was held at the art venue Skogen in Gothenburg. As a part of the gathering a public lecture was held by Bojana Cvejić. In the lecture she critiqued the way many dance practices are staged as artworks.

[3] An invitation for PIM's (with the working title 'Para Nordic Institution') first gathering at Skogen was sent out by Anders Paulin on 20.02.2018. This is an extract from the first project description attached to the invitation:

PIM

"The objective of the platform is to investigate and develop models for contemporary institutional practices, capable of updating the obsolete narrative of national identity with more updated collective imaginaries and frames of subjectivity. The proposal could be understood as a superstructure connecting the work of a number of autonomous members; not a production platform but rather an archive, accumulating and mediating the existing work of its partners. Para Nordic will circulate the work of our partners in the whole Nordic region, and simultaneously provide a context where collective material is accumulated and sedimented in a local specific environment. Thus the objective is to combine the gravity and anchor of each partner's context with the development of a platform for defining a Nordic field."

[4] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1988, pp. 575–599.

as to support the writing through examples and lived experiences. The format of an ongoing conversation that continuously creates oppositions, that looks at the same thing from two sides and that never reaches conclusion or consensus has facilitated the possibility of looking at these topics from multiple perspectives. The conversation, however, does not represent the two of us, or two specific people, but rather it aims to use actual statements in a fictional play and composed discussion between several voices.

This text thinks through things that were done and said in PIM's bigger gatherings and smaller work meetings. [5]

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This text weaves different voices from writings, conversations, experiences and examples of watching, making and doing works, in an attempt to not

Emilia Gasiorek, Oda Brekke

only abstract the matter at hand, but to anchor it in something concrete. In that sense, the following text should be approached not as a line of argumentation that advocates for one view or angle, but rather as a zooming out and multiplying of ways of approaching the matter at hand.

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Art as practice

[5] In total, PIM has organised 3 gatherings, all of which have included an internal gathering and some sort of public gathering. During these gatherings, the discussions have in various ways shaped what PIM is and what PIM could become.

Gothenburg, Skogen 16.03.2018
Stockholm, c off 26.08.2018
Oslo, Black Box Teater 11.12.2018

To Act in the Presence of Others

"In practice the performer is asked to engage with the never ending task of attending to the always emerging moment. This labour is constantly producing affects, but never coming to conclusion or prefigured materialization. That, on occasion, concrete materializations do come about is a magical accident that appears as a kind of giving voice to some greater field of resonance."

→ two-women-machine-show and Jonathan Bonnici
lexicon that accompanied the work ALITY

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"People use the word differently, at least three different ways. Basically, I like the idea of practice as an active thought or a filter. What's the second definition? A habitual or ritual activity. If you do it often it's a practice. And the third? To try, to attempt repeatedly."

→ Chrysa Parkinson
Self Interview on Practice

"...an activity which finds its own fulfillment (that is, its own purpose) in itself, without objectifying itself into an end product, without settling into a "finished product", or into an object which would survive the performance."

→ Paolo Virno
on the 'Performing Artist' in Grammar of the Multitude

"Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality ... this plurality is specifically the condition[...] of all political life."

→ Hannah Arendt,
The Human Condition

I talked about working with two-women-machine-show and Jonathon Bonnici on their work ALITY, where I understood the work as practice based. I didn't compose, I practiced. I said that, in fact, the moment that I did compose or attempt to choreograph from a desire for something to manifest in space, the piece fell apart. I remember I talked about how the work was of attending to the ever emerging moment and of being ready to act on what that moment called for. You said this connected to your understanding of Chrysa Parkinson's three definitions of practice: "An active thought or filter, a habitual activity, to try." It seems to me that in all three definitions the importance lies in the action and not the outcome.

You said that you understand outcome as something next to or other than the process of doing and that outcome can be looked at separately from the process that made it possible. Action is materiality; it's the doing of something that is the thing. I said that in ALITY outcomes emerged in the shape of constellations, situations, or events. They arose because the different performers' practicing of the practice fell into place in that exact moment to create that constellation, situation, or event but not because we were searching for them or actively making them happen. The integrity of the attempt, and not the composition, was the focus and the place of the work. You said that we also could think of so-called 'practice based works' as the production of an object where the object is not the focus of the production. The how is in favor of the what, but the attention to how also creates another what.

In the performing of ALITY I re-

member organising my body according to my relation with the person. If the person shifted they moved the space and therefore my relation to them also changed. If their shifting did something to me—an internal movement or sense of being touched—then my body had to adjust. You said that the performer deals with the realm of ‘action’, and thus with politics, as an activity that requires the presence of others.^[6] I remember how in many of the rehearsals for ALITY we worked with different practices and exercises that prepared us to be able to enter the practices of the piece. Many of the piece’s practices necessitated the presence of a witness, because they were fuelled and shaped by the dynamic relation that existed in the space between performer and audience.

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You talked about ‘practice based works’ as a work that deals with the unknown, about a potential form that is yet to come, and that is determined by many and not one. I think that in practice based works, where both the choreographers and performers do the practice, the piece is shaped in a very particular way—it is given form by everyone attending to it, and it gives the work another layer of plurality.

I said that action, and therefore performance, is a political negotiation. In that sense, I understood performance as a political matter. Working on negotiating action with others and negotiating how we act in order to create new realities.

You said that you weren’t sure whether that logic could apply today because capitalism has subsumed what used to be political. Performance and acting in relation to others, and thus performance as contemporary art, needs to be rethought

Emilia Gasiorek, Oda Brekke

today. The separation between work and politics that used to be clear is now blurred, as the two have become too similar.^[7] You said that’s why you had come to believe in the object.

As a rupture of work,

The object used to be the commodity, but what is commodified today is experience and action—performance is today’s commodity.

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[6] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*
[7] Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*

Negotiating

How

to

Make

Sense

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"[...] phenomena arrange themselves in a gesture"

✦ Giorgio Agamben,
Means Without Ends:
Notes on Politics

"Coloniality is an overall design or optics determining relations between the world, the things, and the humans. Its control is realized through a naturalized objectifying principle of perception and interpretation of the world, of other human and nonhuman beings, of manmade objects and of knowledge."

✦ Madina Tlostanova
and Walter Dignolo
Global Coloniality and
the Decolonial Option

"[...] a society of performance, in difference to the society of spectacle, entails another ideological mechanism, away from the ocular regime of false consciousness or blindness, distorted image or speech, toward a conscious and self-monitored re-embodied doing and showing doing"

✦ Bojana Cvejić,
Notes on a Society of
Performance

You advocated for the *creation of a work*, something that exists as an entity separate from the artist subject producing it. You opposed it to artistic practice. You said that as long as *artistic practice* is not published as an *object*, activity cannot belong to a proper public sphere and thus it never properly separates itself from the artist. You continued talking about how artistic practice belongs to the subject, whilst artworks are common things, they do not belong to anyone. You used a dancer's practice as an example of its opposite, claiming that it is different from the process of making a dance piece.

I wondered what you meant by object.

You said that *object* was not necessarily something solid, like a painting or a sculpture, in that sense. You said that anything that manifested in the public as practice became an object, it had to do with the separation from the artist, a moment of rupture and transformation where a working process turns into a *work*. In this transformation sense making capacities are altered and everything that made sense in a certain way before has to be approached again, with a different and particular perspective.

I had a hard time understanding why a *dance practice* would not transform in this sense when performed in a studio for a group of people, any less than a *dance piece* choreographed in a more crafted and determined sense for a larger seated audience.

A dancer's practice is a means with an end in itself; the dancer is busy with the doing for the sake of doing. You said that often, if a practice is shared, it usually only manifests itself between people who share a similar experience, background, cultural references and social groups and

norms. In this way, practice becomes politically generic. You said that gestures limited to the sphere of the artist's studio and work do not materialize. Practice is different to a process of making a piece, because in the latter the maker has to, at each instance, deal with what the material might mean for someone else, what it might mean in a public space where different people are gathered.

You talked about Anders Paulin's text 'Speed and Gravity' where he discusses the problematics of how filter bubbles on social media gather similar identities in homogeneous spaces.^[8]

You said that maybe we could compare the space that artistic practices produce to that of social media, a space where people that agree with one another are connected. They listen, speak and discuss, but due to the filters of algorithms that connect similar people with one another any proper negotiation cannot actually take place. In this sense it appears as public, but it becomes a kind of pseudo public, where negotiation between people that disagree rarely happens.

I had a hard time understanding how your critique against the homogeneity of spaces of the 'art world' could be limited to social media or the notion of practice? I said that I thought it was a bigger question of class and exclusive spaces, power structures linked to white supremacy and patriarchal lineages. I said I guess that we need to remind ourselves of how these histories also affect the way in which art is perceived, and how it is possible to make sense out of it.

If the internet makes knowledge, art and culture, in all its forms, free and

accessible, I wondered if it has actually attracted more people to art, and therefore had the potential of opening up structures upheld by a middle class, because it is not 'gate kept' in the same way.

[8] <www.anderspaulin.com/index.php/texts/speed-and-gravity/>

In PIM's third gathering in Oslo at Black Box theatre, the performance lecture Speed and Gravity by Anders Paulin was performed by various PIM participants. In a test run of the performance, a negotiation of language relating to gender and gender-nonconformity was raised which resulted in a collective rewriting of the text for that particular performance.

Distinguishing

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"It is not surprising that the distinction between labor and work was ignored in classical antiquity. The differentiation between the private household and the public political realm, between the household inmate who was a slave and the household head who was a citizen, between activities which should be hidden in privacy and those which were worth being seen, heard, and remembered, overshadowed and predetermined all other distinctions until only one criterion was left: is the greater amount of time and effort spent in private or in public?"

— Hannah Arendt,
The Human Condition

"If we take Hannah Arendt's definition of the political—which is still one of the most dominant in mainstream discourse—as being any action that is performed in public, we must contend with the implications of what that excludes. If being present in public is what is required to be political, then whole swathes of the population can be deemed a-political—simply because they are not physically able to get their bodies into the street."

— Johanna Hedva
Sick Woman Theory

"As a result, the physical enclosure operated by land privatization and the hedging of the commons was amplified by a process of social enclosure, the reproduction of workers shifting from the openfield to the home, from the community to the family, from the public space (the common, the church) to the private."

— Silvia Federici
Caliban and The Witch

Public

Anna Gasiorek, Oda Brekke

You talked about how so much of your understanding of what constitutes the public comes from Hannah Arendt's thinking and her distinction between labour, work, and action: where labour is about the necessities of human life, work is about the fabrication of an artificial world of things, and action is about putting ideas into the world and acting on them in the public eye for the sake of the idea itself.^[9]

Through Arendt, you understood that Greek philosophers drew the distinction between the private realm of the household and the public realm of politics, and how within this logic she considers labour as belonging to the private and action as belonging to the public—which is where *politics* can happen.

You had also read how Arendt believed that modern life and the rise of capitalism had directed all attention towards economics, causing labour to take more space in the public sphere, and the fact that labour takes more space in the public blocks than the potential for *political action*.

I said that several thinkers today use the term *reproductive labour* in an expanded sense to mean all the labour required in order to get waged work, or to not get fired from the waged work that you do

have.^[10] I said that both for artists and many other contemporary workers there is a multitude of labours that you have to undertake in order to get the grant or the commission, all the unpaid labor that is not recognised as part of production, but that is necessary in order for production to take place. In this sense, today's reproductive labour could be understood beyond the sustenance

[9] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*
[10] For example Kerstin Stakemeier & Marina Vishmidt in their book *Reproducing Autonomy: Work Money, Crisis & Contemporary Art*.

of life and health or the sphere of the home or the private, but rather as the work that grants the access to systems of production. I said that this work includes tasks like making one's activity visible, sustaining a certain kind of identity that can be consumed, making oneself attractive in order to get work.

You said that, in this sense, a lot of reproductive labour increasingly takes place on social media and could be understood as a part of what makes it a pseudo-public space. In this way, it might appear as leisure time but it is private activities made public. It's work that looks like leisure but actually is unpaid work, reproductive work that makes production possible and is a part of sustaining one's economy.

You suggested that this activity is not political, because it is about selling oneself, or one's performance, it is about showing that one is active rather than being about acting for the sake of a specific action. You said in

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that sense it becomes a kind of means that is not an end in itself. It's an activity that commodifies itself.

I understood what you meant. I thought about how PIM talks about the public sphere as a negotiation between the past and the future, with hooks and traces to make things 'stick'. [11] If the public is about negotiation, but the posting of work is simply a performance of self and a representation of activity and visibility, then the negotiation of these gestures is no longer possible, because it doesn't matter what you say or how you say it. Something new will appear and steal attention in the blink of an eye. You were also concerned that it never stopped, and that the online stream of ongoingness could be defined through what it did not do, which was to end or pause. There is no beginning, no end, no frame, no before, no after that makes it possible to discuss or negotiate what difference something actually makes.

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Art as practice

I spoke about Silvia Federici's book *Caliban and the Witch*. I wanted to add another layer to the discussion, and to understand the public in terms of who it is for, or what is recognised as part of it. In this book, she writes about how the rise of capitalism in Europe shifted reproductive labour of the proletariat from the community to the private sphere, and how a part of what made this process possible was the way the work became feminized (that being

a woman was to be born with a 'natural' calling for house work and in general the home as such).

I said what is interesting with Federici's writing is that she explains that it has not always been the task of the individual or the home to sustain themselves. She argues that reproductive labour should be the concern of the community, but that reproductive labour became privatized to accumulate capital for production. As you understood it, she instead proposes that a political sphere should deal with how to sustain life in common.^[12]

I found that these thoughts resonated with the idea of PIM as a common; a collectively owned and organised structure where the work of building and caring for a community and an environment is fundamental. It also speaks to the values that many of the organisations engaged with PIM work with, including the creation of alternatives to the pressure of individually sustaining yourself as an artist and the pulling together and distributing of resources.^[13] I said I was curious about what these values do to the experience of art.

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Art as practice

[12] Silvia Federici, "Women, Reproduction, and the Construction of Commons," Public talk, presented at MAD on April 18 2013 as part the *Reproducing Value* series.

[13] For example "INSISTER SPACE] work collectively and continuously to question the conditions and methods of artistic work. Our vision is to create a broad platform for professional freelance dance artists to share, collect and reorganise artistic practices. We wish to reshape the neo-liberal structures in the dance-field – instead of promoting individual artists, we create supportive structures where our members can work with their own interests but in solidarity with each other."

Object

Art as object

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Rupture

"The mountains are [...] very special objects; we realise that, after all, it is only man who has isolated these geological ensembles as objects. Physically speaking, a peak of the Mont Blanc mountain chain does not exist, and the act of presenting a point that is higher than its surrounding environment has no special meaning, or in any case does not make it a 'unit' in itself, isolated from the rest. All I mean to say is that sounds belonging to a chain of sonorous events often tend to be these kinds of objects, and are only objects in so far as they are presented under a certain aspect when confronted by human perception."

← Michel Chion
Guide des objets
sonores [14]

You talked about the artwork as an object, a material thing that produces resistance in the continuous flow of work and life's puzzle—a cut in the reproduction of everyday life. An object in that sense could be understood as an obstacle or a counter force. You thought of this counter force both on a societal and individual level. An artwork produces a rupture in society by being a thing that cuts the normal flow of attention and alters the meaning of our gestures. For the audience member, the rupture brings a shift of attention and perception of both themselves and their environment. For the artist the rupture is the distance to their work, where the 'known' material gains new meaning through others' conception of it.

An artistic gesture needs to disrupt the continuum around it. It does not matter so much what it is, or how it is done—it matters that it shifts the status quo.

You talked about the object as a rupture of the rhythm of work. You said that an artwork is never ready to be published, it is always a kind of violent

[14] This translation and modification was found in Francois Bonnet *The Order of Sounds*.

(Paris: INA-GRM-Buchet/Chastel, 1983), 34 [Guide to sound objects, unpublished translation by J. Dack and C. North, 32] [translation modified]"

push where the artist needs to stop themselves from spinning off into future dreams, potential realities and instead needs to deal with the actual, the limit of capacities, the current situation of the place, and the materials that exist.

This is it.)

In this way, the art object—and more specifically the action of making it public—can be understood as a counterforce against the subjects' will to

achieve ever more, and to spiral into the potentiality of what things could become, how things might be changed, developed and improved. An object forces you to face what is actually there and to figure out how to deal with that.

Practice, on the other hand, lives in the sphere of potentiality—of what might become, of how we could potentially alter things as they are.

Gathering

Around

a

Thing

40

"[...] why is there something rather than nothing, why are there some things rather than no things, what is the relationship between something and nothing that animates our understanding of poverty, of the vernacular of the common, of their insurgent force, of their generative but incalculable wealth. Considering that we live within a history with a double violation, the denigration of things and the coincidental devaluation of people that is carried out by what is supposed to be their reduction to things. We have to linger, art allows us to linger between something and nothing, nothing and everything."

← Fred Moten
An Ecology of (Eloquent) Things [15]

"The thing, matter already configured, generates invention, the assessment of means and ends, and thus enables practice. The thing poses questions to us, questions about our needs and desires, questions above all of action: the thing is our provocation to action, and is itself the result of our action."

← Elisabeth Grosz
Philosophy, Knowledge and the Future

"Indeed, circlusion is an extremely common experience of everyday life. Think of how a net catches fish, how gums envelop their food, how a nutcracker crunches nuts, or how a hand encircles a joystick, a bottle of beer..."

← Bini Adamczak
On Circlusion

I talked about the object as the transformation that allows for the practice to enter a public sphere. The artwork as an object that has a gathering force, attracting people around it and enabling them to negotiate what they experience. I remember you mentioned the Nordic notion of the 'thing' as referring to a meeting place, or assembly or community, which makes me think about how the object is doing the gathering. [16]

I proposed thinking about the artist and the audience not as two groups, but as a circle that gathers around the thing. The thing is external to all, the difference is how long one has been attending to it.

I said the artist begins with their point of departure; this hook is the thing or the object which the artist attempts to unfold. Eventually the artist invites others in and more and more people gather around the thing; the circle expands and more and more possible understandings and perspectives affect the way the circle perceives the thing. The more possible ways of perceiving it, the more necessary it becomes to negotiate and discuss it. I understand that this circle metaphor is also a way of countering the idea that the artist is the expert that teaches the audience something.

You talked about how one could think not only of the agency of the object, but that there is also an activity in how the circle gathers. What holds the object together is also the force around it. I connect this action to the word 'circlusion' where the artist(s) and the audience 'circlude'

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Art as practice

[15] Public talk departing from the art and life of Thornton Dial

<www.youtube.com/watch?v=1oRKOHIMmKQ>

[16] From old nordic "ping" meaning a juridical gathering. The same word as for "a thing"- "Tinghus" is still the name of courthouse.

the thing, by gathering around it through their attention.

You said that in the carrierbag festival^[17] the initial focus was on the action of *gathering around* knowledge in order to reactivate, reuse, and redevelop new knowledges. You talked about *how* the focus was on how we gather around, because there was a curiosity to understand how changing the way we relate to knowledge changes the knowledge produced, or how changing the *how* changes the *what*. Later on the festival came to focus on *how we gather around works*, by activating not only the works themselves but also the context and the situation carrying them. You explained how the ‘works’ were understood not only as the performances, but also the workshops and the interventions—essentially the *what*. Context was understood as the different works’ mode of production, frame, history—in other words the *how*. While the situation was seen as the live moment of gathering which talks to the social aspect, the caretaking labour of the actual situation of watching and gathering around the art.

Art as object

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[17] the carrierbag festival is a feminist festival for dance, choreography and performance taking place in Dansateiler, Copenhagen. There have been two iterations of the festival, in 2017 and 2019, both times stretching over a number of days and including workshops, performances and interventions by local and international artists. In 2019 the carrierbag festival was understood as an artistic research between Emilia Gasiorek, Karis Zidore and Stine Frandsen that actualised in the shape of a festival.

Object

as

Point

of

Gravity

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"A thing is less an object than a mode of actioning the absolute unforeseen. Unexpected, unrecognizable, yet clearly there, it expresses its own extraneousness. The thing is determinate vagueness."

— André Lepecki
Singularities; Dance in the Age of Performance

"Without a force that pulls bodies down to some foundation or point zero, the possible consequences of even the smallest event are beyond comprehension. Not because of the force in the act itself, but because there is no counterforce. Totally liberated from any form of inertia or fixating energy of a common center, any move might send me tumbling away in the isolation of sovereign solitude."

— Anders Paulin
Speed and Gravity

You thought that the purpose of PIM is to gather around things or art objects that produce gravity. You understood art objects as oppositional forces countering the neoliberal focus of future potential.

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Art as practice

I said I like it when pieces make me land in the chair. I often experience that when I go to see a work. There is this moment at the beginning, just as the work starts, where I haven't yet landed and am trying to negotiate my relation to what I see in front of me. I am busy with understanding what the work proposes and what that asks of me. The moment where I am not busy with this anymore feels like the moment when I land in the chair and also the moment when I can enter the work.

I heard anxiety being talked about as the condition of our time. The pressure to realize and preserve oneself in an increasingly precarious environment provokes a crisis of the subject. An anxious body is a body that fears the loss of control. I said that this makes me think of a free floating body that no longer feels the forces that pull it down to the ground. The

more abstract the world gets—where we are busy organising potentials, doing administrative work and fixing problems that are not tangible—the more distant we get from the sensation of weight.

There is a link between gathering without understanding instantly what effect is desired, what the purpose of the gathering is, and the sensation of weight. The shift from being occupied with abstract activities and thinking in order to reach goals to a sensing of yourself as a material and a sensing of the forces working on you. I said I think it is about feeling yourself in relation to other things, and understanding yourself as material that is affected and affects. We can think of the artwork as a gathering force, pulling bodies into spaces where we are invited into the concrete, into a specific mode of being with an art object, and as a rupture of the world as we know it.

Art as object

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Art as practice

When

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Performing

"that wobbly, felt sense, misty,
undone place of experience"

— Kayte Coe
She Dancing

"The imprint may well touch us through the adherence from which it proceeds, but this contact ends up, almost fatally, being thought in the element of separation, of loss, of absence. In order for an imprint of steps to be *produced* as a process, the foot must sink into the sand the walker must be *there*, in the very place of the mark to be left. But in order for the imprint to *appear* as a result, the foot must also be lifted again, separated from the sand and moved away toward other imprints to be produced elsewhere; at which point, of course, the walker is *no longer there*."

— L'Empreinte
ed G. Didi-Huberman

It

You said that the object can be seen as a temporary incarnation of practice in a public sphere that disrupts and creates a change in rhythm.

I said that I thought about the transformation of the work when an audience witnesses it. It's that moment where time slows down and the body's physicality feels different because it is being looked at. I am watching you and you are watching me. You tell me about me and I tell you about you. I said that I had been thinking about this meeting around the artwork as the negotiation of the object. I see clearly this movement in my mind's eye and my body likewise recalls the experience of performing a work and realizing, in the doing, that it no longer belonged to me—but was responsive to the dynamics of that very situation and all the relations that came with it.

I said that in this way, I think that practice based works are altered in their meaning when they are performed before an audience. The form produced by the specific way of acting becomes more important and gains another weight. Each instance of materialisation into a specific form gains a second layer of awareness. The way of doing becomes a thing before the audience.

But you also said that the incar-

nation of the object from the bedrock of a practice also happens before this moment of public meeting. You said that we could also consider it as a slow continuous process for the artist that is always at play, a process of relinquishing authorship that reaches one incarnation in the moment of performing.

You went on to talk about how it goes both ways, that the act of performing informs the continuous practice, but also that the practice informs the object. You were hesitant to make these things too distinct. You thought we should consider the connection between object and practice like the movement of a pendulum; a back and forth and not linearly from practice to object as the culmination.

Stumbling

Upon

Something

Else

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"[...] the strategic role of leadership requires seeing far in the temporal sense, prudence, planning for the long term and creating a continuous arc of activity. Tactics, which involves the arrangement of forces, is the domain of followers, who are limited because they act on the interests of a specific group and their concerns are short-term. Their operations require knowing the immediate surroundings in space and time."

✦ Michael Hardt
and Antonio Negri
Assembly

"For many years, I have been moved by the blue at the far edges of what can be seen, the colour of horizons, of remote mountain ranges, of everything far away. The colour of that distance is the colour of there seen from here, the colour of where you are not. And the colour of where you can never go."

✦ Rebecca Solnit
*A Field Guide
to Getting Lost*

Anna Gasiorek, Oda Brekke

You understood art works as material objects with resistance and inertia.^[18] In your logic they had a force which could operate against the way artistic work was affected by the project based market. You were critical to how our attention accelerated between too many tasks, of how artists were forced into focusing on sustaining one's career instead of making the art they wanted to see.

You talked about the art work as a *thing* that gathers. I claimed that it might be important to see this object/practice relation from various points of view and to consider the various roles in a process. I said I often relate to my activity in the making of a piece as being practice. When I think about practice as a dancer's work in a process of making, I think the most important aspect of my work is being with the concrete and the actual condition of the material at hand. One could think that the leader (in this case the choreographer) is occupied with 'strategy'. I said I understand strategy as a continuous work to articulate where the group is going and how the group might possibly get there. It is necessary that the leader thinks in abstract terms, beyond what is here, beyond what we know and are familiar with. The place that the group aims to get to could be understood as the leader's object of desire. Usually no one ever gets to that place. However, that does not mean that efforts are wasted, because on the way we stumble upon things that we could never imagine or plan; we come across things through the doing.

Since finding things you didn't know existed are important in an artistic process, the importance of noticing the terrain, the ground you step on as you walk, is key. It requires a tuning into materials

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Art as practice

[18] Anders Paulin from conversations during the work of editing this publication.

PIM

and a listening that is specific for each process of making. I said I always aim for staying conscious of how perception and sense-making can be molded by action; we can affect what we see through how we see. This active noticing – looking at what is around, how it is affected by what you are busy with, whilst working with a specific proposal, is ‘tactics’. To be with the immediate, to sense the actual things that are there each day. ‘Tactics’ are figuring out how to walk through the river *whilst being in the middle of it*. It’s not possible to figure it out from looking at the map or the end goal, the knowledge is specific to the experience of being in the actual situation and it gets developed along the way. I said that I would call the work of ‘tactics’ practice, which I think plays an important role in the making of art.

Art as object

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Art as practice

The Technology that Makes the Thing the Thing

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"Because Mr. Dial serially lets us know that there is no such thing as nothing, as the out of nothing, as making something out of nothing, of making a way out of no way. Mr. Dial makes things out of things, they are things and they are ways, and he is educated in their eloquence. Mr. Dial allows and requires us to think the impermanence, the extraordinary evanescence and ephemerality of the non-disposable of that which was not made of nothing. A divinity that now must be understood as common."

✦ Fred Moten
*An Ecology of
(Eloquent) Things* [19]

"In Aristotle, the sensible object gives itself to be perceived – that is to say, delivers itself in an act to the senses. Sensation appears when a sensible 'imprints' with its quality the sense to which it corresponds. Aristotle uses the analogy of the imprint of a ring pressed into wax which takes on its form without there being any transfer of matter, and without the metal being assimilated into the wax. The sensible object is considered to be the mediating element that translates a sensible quality for a given sense."

✦ François J. Bonnet
*The Order of Sounds:
A Sonorous Archipelago*

I remember a video of Mette Edvardsen talking about the practice of learning books by heart, about the different layers in the process and about the different methods. There was the sound of the words, the feeling of the muscles shaping the form of the mouth, and lastly the visual pattern on the page. [20]

I said that it was very clear how the process was about returning to the same object many times and feeling the difference, letting it become an imprint in one's body as a complex synthetic memory existing between action and perception, between visual, tactile, and audible.

I talked about the relationship between craft and concept. I said that concept is often connected to maker or thinker and craft to doer, but that many dance practices are challenging this dichotomy. Chrysa Parkinson argues that craft and concept are not binary and that the act of making produces the concept itself: an idea can change by its embodiment in the studio. [21]

You said that dance practices could be seen as next to the process of making the artwork. However, I thought that dance practices cannot be completely separated from the structures and logics that construct a piece, because they affect how to think in structure, material, and craft. There are dance practices that are not directly linked to the end product, but that still affect the work.

[21] Chrysa Parkinson, *Self Interview on Practice*

< www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3a18f91o_1 >

[20] Mette Edvardsen, *On Learning Books by Heart* (with performance), *WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR BRAIN? ART & LIFE IN TIMES OF COGNITIVE AUTOMATION* Was a conference-festival organized by the Gerrit Rietveld Academie that took place 2016 at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

< www.youtube.com/watch?v=1oRKHIMmKQ >

[19] Public talk, held on April 8, 2011. Using the art and life of Thornton Dial as a point of departure.

Sometimes these practices are about getting into a certain concentration, sometimes about getting warm, sometimes just about getting started.

Practice is the form which you fill with something, maybe it's not the end product, but it has molded the end product. I think that the labour of dance practices is manifested as imprints in the object.

In a dance piece, the dancers make the *thing*, the piece, happen. The *thing* is activated by someone, and it has to be activated in a specific way to be that specific thing. Through a practice, you sustain a certain way of doing something, a specific knowledge or technology. If this technology is not maintained, then that *thing* loses its specificity.

I said that as a dancer I found the term *practice* useful for dealing with the uncertainty and constant change when working with a choreographer in the making of a *work*. Practice as a working on implementing the right technology in each instant.^[22] Practice as a way of sticking with a specific logic of being something, and a means of becoming material, becoming the *right* material. Practice as a means of not being yourself in the work, but of becoming that strange thing that is the work, to become a material instead of representing subjectivity.

You said this was what you meant when we talked about text, you thought text was such a clear example. There is writing that is presented next to artwork and writing that is artwork. Writing as practice and writing as object. You said that the latter becomes its own object whilst the former stays in the sphere of practice and in the work that always belongs to the artist.

I said I think a text is an object anyways. I had a hard time understanding why it would be different with dance. In a sense, I thought the same logic could apply—

once someone witnessed it, it had that same way of operating, of being a material separated from the writer or the maker, a manifestation.

^[22] Dance teacher Anna Grip uses the term 'technology' when teaching her classes, which have many names such as *And Then What?*, *Rainbow ballet*, *Fucking ballet* and many more. As I understand the focus on technology (which here can be understood closely related to the word *practice* in dance) is a means of getting away from focus on form or on arriving somewhere, to get away from positioning or placing and instead (in this example) activating the actions screwing, pushing, and falling. The point is that it stays with the form of ballet ('it's not ballet's fault') but radically shifts the pedagogy and also the practice as a political proposal of dance class through the focus on a different "how", where shifting the current activity is prioritized over arriving at an intended goal.

A Score That Makes It Possible to Act

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"Splendour was created through a daily practice where the rehearsals have consisted exclusively of performing the entirety of the piece[...] Through not aiming for innovation, Splendour wants to steer away from improvisation that promotes individual choice and self-expression.[...] The techno suggests a dance where no one is dependent on anyone else to do it but where we insist on doing it together."

+ Stina Nyberg
text about Splendour
[23]

"We never rehearse. If you always practice and never rehearse, you are always ready to perform"

+ Christina Caprioli
Lecture at DOCH,
UNIARTS

"Form is employed as a weapon of real-time concretisation, of the autonomisation of forms of life against the real abstraction of contemporary crisis-ridden capitalist society. This is no longer a subject-centred autonomisation, rather one in which materialisms are not constructed but found"

+ Kerstin Stakemeier
(NOT) MORE AUTONOMY [24]

You kept using Stina Nyberg's work *Splendour* as an example of a *practice based work*. The only thing you could see in it was individuals, their ability to perform the task and thus their ability to perform themselves. You said that it made you think of who you liked best, and that it made you compare the dancers to one another. You could not see *the choreography*, the form of the *art work*, it disappeared into your attention of the dancer's subjectivities.

I also understood *Splendour* as a practice based work. However, in my perception there was still a specific form. It varied from one time I saw it to another, it was the same but different. The choreography was the machinery that put them into and out of sync.

I guessed that what makes it a *practice based work* was the fact that the performers never rehearsed. I said that I thought Stina Nyberg made a clear score and then shared it with the performers. The score was a clear protocol for how to activate the work, and there were no decisions or negotiations over that part of the work.

However I still understood this work as an object, an artwork with its specific way of happening. I thought the relevant question in this context was to ask why it matters to do it in public. What defines the line between public and not public, how does that difference come to matter if the doing of the thing—the performance and the rehearsal—are the same?

[23] <nordbergmovement.se/projects/splendour>
[24] From the book *Reproducing Autonomy: Work Money, Crisis & Contemporary Art* by Kerstin Stakemeier & Marina Vishmidt.

Practice

"The rules of how decisions are made are known only to a few and awareness of power is curtailed by those who know the rules, as long as the structure of the group is informal. Those who do not know the rules and are not chosen for initiation must remain in confusion, or suffer from paranoid delusions that something is happening of which they are not quite aware."

Jo Freeman

The Tyranny of Structurelessness

as Object

and

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"Performance Management, in contrast, attunes itself to economic processes that are increasingly service-based, globally oriented, and electronically wired. Since the end of the Second World War, theorists from Herbert Simon to Edwards Deming to Peter Drucker have argued for decentralized structures and flexible management styles, styles that, rather than controlling workers, empower them with information and training so they may contribute to decision-making processes. The principles regularly cited in management are not uniformity, conformity, and rationality, but diversity, innovation, and intuition."

Jon McKenzie

Perform or Else

"Process has been emphasized and results secondary, which one can also understand as an interest in avoiding experiences that can be assessed in respect of measurability in favour of individual or even affective experiences."

Mårten Spångberg

Practice Based Dance
blog post

Protocol

You said that with art-as-object the object is in primary focus, and with art-as-practice the process is everything, but not necessarily the object. You said that, therefore, practice can imply protocol as a way of navigating through, and being in, the process. This protocol can be more or less visible and its (in)visibility talks to issues of ethics.

I talked about how when a protocol is invisible I therefore don't know how to situate myself in relation to what is being worked on, because there is no anchor or reference point, and it feels like I'm simply swimming in a big ocean with no idea where land is. I said that when some proposals are accepted and some not, but the conventions of the decision making have not been made clear, I end up in a bizarre search for 'rightness'.

Art as practice

You talked about the experience of working with choreographers where the choreographer would give a creative task, watch what each dancer had made and then select material that made it into the piece. This was such a clear example of where there was a sense of rightness being followed without anyone knowing. You talked about how clearly you remembered the stress and confusion of this moment of not understanding why some and not others' material was selected. The protocol for selection was not shared with you, causing you to doubt the 'rightness' of your material, but without any clear guidelines of what the desired form would be.

To work on the practice whilst making a work must

then be to work on articulating the relationship between leaders and followers, between where we are now and where we want to go, and to spend time negotiating the possible ways of articulating something that no one knows.

I said that when I am involved in works that operate with a practice based logic, I am invited into the thinking as a co-thinker. I often experience that when someone(s) shares a practice with me, then I am invited to follow the guidelines of that practice and **to fill with my own understanding** expression and interpretation.

You said that protocol might be connected to practice, while rightness might be connected to object. Practice based work is about naming *how* we are together, how we do something—it enables a kind of self-determined participation that can create a sense of autonomy.

You said you were more concerned about the autonomy of the art work,

and not the artist. It was important not to confuse the two.

Object-orientated works talk about *what* they are, what they aim to become. Practice-oriented works talk about *what they want to be busy with*. What you work on is not separate from the end result, but molding the object through molding how you work with it is **a different process, which creates a different outcome.**

Rightness

Art as object

66 "If not now, then later; if not like this, then not at all."

+ **Bojana Cvejić**
Lecture at Skogen
during PIM's first
meeting

"Another way to address the overwhelming projective temporality could be to intervene directly in the rhythm of production and actually continuously and excessively produce plenty so that every "(non)significant" moment in the project is overproducing myriads of traces, evidences, suggestions, discourses, etc.; somehow the project itself may be overrun with the sheer power of activity."

+ **Bojana Kunst**
The Project Horizon:
On the Temporality of
Making

"Like it or not, there comes a point, or rather several points, when you have to decide whether what you are making is working or not"

+ **Jonathan Burrows**
A Choreographer's
Handbook

[25] Proposed by choreographer Rasmus Ørme as part of a public discussion at the Post Dancing conference at MDT. The discussion was held as a response to Jeanine Durrings performance practice non stopping and a lecture by Reggie Wilson. The response/discussion was led by Josefine Wikström, the discussion kept returning to the question of whether dance should be understood through language or be understood as something beyond it.

'Dance a day' is a practice of making. You remember learning it from Eva Meyer Keller. It was Susan Rethorst that taught it to her and also wrote the book 'A Choreographic Mind', where she further develops the method through autobiographical writing.

You said that the book talks about intuition, bodily sense making, and the feeling of things being in the right place at the right time. A sense of rightness that is hard to articulate. How we feel something extra for certain structures, colours, shapes and not for others. You said Rethorst advocates for making things without aiming to understand or explain them and without aiming to communicate something.

The practice 'dance a day' is to make a new dance every day for a period of time, and it is about being non-judgemental and accepting the material that gets produced without question. To mass produce material without rationalizing its meaning or value. I said that it's all about decision making, to make a set of decisions that leaves you with a particular and specific dance. After a while you have lots of material and in my experience there is usually a lot of material that feels meaningful, and it starts making sense in relation to other things, thoughts and interests that one has. The filtering happens by itself after some time, and I guess at that point it could be possible to start articulating how it feels that way: what is specific and characteristic about the things you feel more for?

You said that you had heard an aesthetic experience defined as that which we are close to articulating, but cannot yet articulate. [25] Something that is on our tongue. Something that does not really fit into the structures we are already thinking through.

Ethics

Art as object

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"Because cinema has its center in the gesture and not in the image, it belongs essentially to the realm of ethics and politics (and not simply to that of aesthetics)."

→ **Giorgio Agamben**
*Means Without End:
Notes on Politics*

"Through these poetic and experimental relationships to dance, we may develop ethical relationships to everything we are part of, as implicate or entangled subjects."

→ **Alice Chauchat**
*Generative fictions, or
How Dance May Teach
Us Ethics*

"Ruin was everywhere, for cities had been abandoned by the rich, by politics, by a vision of the future. Urban ruins were the emblematic places for this era, the places that gave punk part of its aesthetic, and like most aesthetics this one contained an ethic, a worldview with a mandate on how to act, how to live."

→ **Rebecca Solnit**
*A Field Guide to
Getting Lost*

Aesthetics

You said that dance brings about a specific kind of self reflective thinking. Simultaneously creating awareness of how you already are, and an opening up of how you potentially could relate to other people and things. Watching people perform creates this heightened layer of awareness. It shifts how we perceive, it teaches us to change perspective and thus to understand our actions and relations, as well as its implications, differently. A dance piece stages meaning making. It is not that it necessarily aims to convey a particular understanding or communicate one particular thing, but it opens up the potential of meaning making itself, setting forth a particularly different way of making sense.

I asked if you meant that dance merely makes the spectator focus on actions and their political implications, instead of on the quality of the piece as an aesthetic thing? ⁶⁹ *Art as practice*

I said one argument could be that dance carves out a space where we can be with one another through aesthetics, thus offering a different way of being together than what the rest of society proposes. When I watch a piece I read different colours and shapes, textures and dynamics. I am also often busy with thoughts like: Do I like it or not? Is it beautiful?

You disagreed, and said dance can also be seen through the lens of ethics; how humans relate to each other. You said that you found the political potential more relevant, because it requires an activation, it makes us active just for the sake of it. Dance therefore also points towards the notion of politics as acting in the presence of others—of communicating with one another. Dance creates self awareness and reflection around the ways we act with others. You said that dance also points towards continuation, it

reminds us of endurance, it whispers: **How to carry on? What now?** Artworks that make us attend to continuous action could be understood through the notion of gesture; an action that is not set out to reach a specific purpose, that has no sight of an end, that never completes itself and that does not finish at a predetermined goal.^[26]

I said that aesthetics and ethics are not necessarily two separate things, that most works hold a proposal for how to be together, whether that is to ignore the relations that produce an artwork or attend to them with care. There are artists who always attend to the desire of the object they want to create. They put the realisation of that object above all relations producing it. Other artists would first and foremost attend to the production of the object—how the relations within the process are framed—and are curious about what form or object might arise within that frame which is less directed towards a result.

I said that the focus on gesture, on process, on means instead of ends is something that had its peak in contemporary dance during the last ten years. After choreographers in the 90s claimed choreography's independence from dance, dance practitioners likewise developed their practices autonomous from choreography.^[27]

You said dancers began claiming authorship over their work not as producing a work but rather work as a continuous process or, if you will, the work of dancing. There has been a shift of focus from the dance piece to experiencing the subject dancing, and witnessing this continuous, ever changing activity gained more recognition. You asked if one could argue that practice has attained status as a sort of aesthetic object in and of itself?

I was thinking about Alice Chauchat's dance practice, where she talks about dance as an horizon. She works through scores that describe relationships functioning as figures and metaphors framing one's relation to dance. She describes dance as an unreachable horizon that still accompanies us. In the scores, the fundamental aim of the work is to keep on going without any external purpose, and to be attentive to perceptions of the sensorial, kinetic, intellectual, emotional experiences that we train to perceive and be part of, despite never being able to comprehend them completely.^[28]

I got caught up in the fact that when she described one of the scores 'Companionship Dances' she described it as work. The metaphor is the lady of companionship. A woman employed and paid to keep another (rich) woman company without any other work task or expectation. You said that Alice Chauchat's scores recognise dance as work. The lady of companionship is not an activist, nor is she purely seeking pleasure—she is at work. Thus dancing is both dealing with ethics and with work, or maybe most importantly the combination of the two.

^[26] Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*.

^[27] A manifestation of this specific knowledge is The Dancer as Agent Collection was launched on Dec. 1st, 2014. <sarna.be/pages/The_Dancer_as_Agent_Collection>

^[28] "The Dancer as Agent Collection is an unwrapping of *The Dancer as Agent* conference (DOCH Stockholm, November 2013). Several dancers who attended the conference accepted commissions from DOCH to draw, write and speak about ideas that had been present there and have continued roaming since, occupying other times and places. Various objects were made, including essays, conversations, maps, films, materials and active texts. Eight booklets, a card and a map appeared in print, and the complete collection is housed on Oral Site. It creates a context in which the contours of agency that emerge from dancers' artistic practices can be bounced off, wandered through, felt, fit and shared. The essays are accessible through this page, and also embedded in the larger *The Dancer as Agent Collection* at Oral Site."

^[28] Alice Chauchat, *Generative Fictions, or How Dance May Teach Us Ethics*: "Dance is a horizon and a companion; a partner that remains unknown, whose unknowability obliges and displaces".

Performing

to

Sustain

Things

"By maintenance I am referring to durational practices that keep 'things' going: objects, selves, systems, hopes, ideals, networks, communities, relationships, institutions.

+ Lisa Baraister

Touching Time: Maintenance, Endurance and Care

"With every project we are moving towards the end of something; from invention to completion, from the start of the process to the end, we are – in a very specific way – progressing to a final projection."

+ Bojana Kunst

The Project Horizon: On the Temporality of Making

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"Today it is very fashionable, in several areas of the left, to speak of immaterial and material labour. Dealing with reproduction, that distinction between material and immaterial labour does not hold."

+ Silvia Federici

Women, Reproduction, and the Construction of Commons [29]

"It has also become much more visible in the disciplinary domain, with aspects of 'socially engaged practice' commonly included in the agendas of neoliberal social management, often in areas 'plagued' by disinvestment and 'diversity'. If these developments reflect additional and more direct roles for art as commodity or as social palliative, there is a further shift in the exclusive relations between art and labour, as object critical and post studio practices emulate various social services, whereas waged labour is encouraged to be more 'creative', in the most simplified and exploitative terms"

+ Marina Vishmidt

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'AUTONOMY' AND 'REPRODUCTION'? [30]

You said that practice is labour, the reproduction of life, of ongoing continuity and sustaining things. You asked why I found art that merely stages this kind of labour interesting. Art that remains work, instead of producing something external through work, something that creates a rupture in the ongoingness of everything else? Should art not be the opposite of maintaining the necessary?

It made me think of how Bojana Cvejić claimed that our parents worked to live, whilst we live to work.^[31] She talked about the neoliberal approximation between waged labour and artistic labour; a worker within the service sector is expected to be creative and invest personally in their work, to be personally motivated to perform their role with vague directions, but more efficiently and with better effects.

I said that I could understand her critique but that I thought it felt strange to equate artistic labour with other labour. If we consider choreography as a power mechanism, a structure that determines the hierarchy of things and people, a choreographer who invites dancers to "practice", "do their thing", "make themselves useful"^[32] is proposing a regime of power similar to that of neoliberal management. This "freedom" is a pressure to be creative, where the person in

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[29] Public talk, presented at MAD on April 18 2013 as part the "Re-producing Value" series.

<youtube.com/watch?v=zBBvypmRP0&t=4845s>

[30] From the book *Reproducing Autonomy: Work Money, Crisis & Contemporary Art* by Kerstin Stakemeier & Marina Vishmidt.

[31] Bojana Cvejić, lecture at Skogen during PIM's first meeting

[32] In the blog post *Practice based dance* Marlen Spångberg talks about a Swedish insurance company that doesn't give any other instructions or requirements than this simple statement. The company relies on the self discipline and creativity of the worker.

<10082.me/2020/04/02/practice-based-dance>

power capitalizes on the workers creativity and personal desire.

You said that when practice got separated from the making of a work, or was staged without a choreography making it transcend into something else, it became too similar to the kind of performance that service work is today—people performing themselves and their subjectivities.

I said that I believe that dealing with the actual is the critical and crucial point of practice. I think that dance as practice is about tuning into the actual status, the tension or quality, entering it with a specific but open ended attention, which includes a kind of noticing of the current emotional, intellectual and social material of oneself, others and the relations between. It is to edit and rewrite all of these aspects through a specific set of instructions, molding and processing it in a vague but particular direction. Through this work, bodies and subjectivities are produced. It produces the particular body that a particular choreography needs in order to function. It is a highly complex and physical, material work and it cannot be reduced only to its potentiality, because it is thinking actualized^[33] and ideas operated—specific means of intervening with the actual. In this sense, it does not stay in a sphere of potentiality, nor does it simply act or execute in order to complete something.^[34]

I wondered if this kind of physical work—actualising force, dealing with weight and tension—could also be some sort of rupture in a society where work has become abstracted. If dance as practice is not an abstract system or plan, but rather the actual implementation of a way of doing something and the actual shift in ma-

teriality. Could understanding the word *practice* as something one does in opposition to something one plans to do, think of, or theorize, offer another entrance than the idea that practice stays in a sphere of potentiality that never materializes?

You wondered if the similarity between performance as a contemporary service labour and performance as a dance practice could open up for something interesting. Does the similarity between neoliberal performance and dance as practice open up for a critique of the first through the latter?^[35]

I said that maybe the turn towards practice also has to do with a desire to recognize the reproductive work that makes it possible to work productively. What maintains the material conditions? What work is necessary for a gathering to happen, or for an object to appear in the moment of performing?

^[34] “We ask ourselves: Which tools and theories are we using? Which are still not developed? Is practice in art a means to understanding or a narrow path to professionalizing? Does it diminish the works we make or help to situate them? Is art embedded in a world of social practices or in a struggle against them?”

What do we talk about when we talk about practice?

“Practice has often been opposed to theory, but the use of the term ‘practice’ in the world of art is often highly abstract and intellectualized. If art has become practice, what does this have to do with thinking, with making, with action, with transformation, with discipline, with repetition, with training, with habit and with performance?” – Marcus Boon and Gabriel Levine

A seminar initiated by Runa Borch Skolsej, Nikhil Vertukattil, Alexandra Tveit and Marie Ursin in collaboration with Black Box Theater. With invited guests:

<blackbox.no/tittel/seminar-working-title/>

^[35] In Mårten Spångberg’s blog post *Practice Based Dance* he points at the potential to “make performances that create the illusion of submitting to the dispositive of the theatre at the same time as it engages the audience in practicing the possibility for alternative ethics, of cohabitating space, caring for each other and so on. In other words, engage in the possibility of different social ecologies.”

<10082.me/2020/04/02/practice-based-dance>

^[33] From a workshop with Manon Santkin where she talked about trying to generate a thought that is actionable, to work with notions that exist in readings that inform and transform experience, notions that you make up because of an experience to make it come true. The workshop was part of *How Dance Thinks*, course at UNiARTS DOCH, Stockholm, directed by Eleanor Bauer.

You said that an artistic practice loses its political weight when it gets framed as an instrumentalized activity to produce something that is valuable.

It feels like there is a pressure to turn practice into an abstracted commodity or a service through requiring a beginning and end date, with a sense of development and producing an effect or innovation or social change. Is it the potential of the artistic practice or the practice itself that gets commodified? Practice, then, follows a logic of continuously having to reinvent itself as a tool for the improvement, achievement and creation of a better future.

I said that I think that project logic commodifies artistic practice. Practice is continuous, iterative, and sustained, while the project is (often) short term and projects its own completion from the beginning.^[36] In the project, we work towards its end (and then another project)—the project wants to go somewhere it is not, instead of staying in the doing for its own sake. I wondered if the commodification of practice becomes clear when the project logic objectifies artistic practice.

Between the Past and a Possible Future

The Present Oscillation

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“...there exists a large difference between understandings of the work which are durational, meaning it lasts through the working activity, and those which are projective, meaning it is moving towards its own completion. This difference can be compared with the difference between adventure and quest: a project is much more similar to an adventure (it has a myriad of open possibilities, however they have to lead to the consuming end if the adventure is to be adventurous) whereas, in a quest, time is consummated in the activity itself, in its endurance.”

Bojana Kunst

*The Project Horizon:
On the Temporality of
Making*

I said that the situatedness of Covid-19 and the fact that all gatherings are cancelled or moved into the future underpins the significance of gathering, meeting and having frames to relate to. When countries are asking their populations to practice ‘social distancing’, gatherings dwindle. Visiting the inside of each other’s homes, hosting and guesting are replaced by online initiatives for assembling. Art has also moved into these online platforms, and its ability to gather is reduced to private and abstract spheres of social media. Time and space become even more abstracted in the speed of the internet.

I said that I spent a whole day on Zoom and my eyelids are sore.

I wondered if the technological and social performance that happens on the internet could be understood through how it is constantly accelerated and multiplied. Things are being said and done, speech acts are being linked, there is a constant connectedness of statements and judgements, but fewer discussions take place. It has become apparent how much people engage in making what they are doing visible, but it almost never truly engages people in negotiations about what things imply or what kind of action should proceed. It feels like a sphere of endless performative utterances that never manifest into anything.

I said that during this period of being stuck at home, where performances and projects have been cancelled, it became clear how easy it is to get caught up in the potential of future work. I wondered if therefore what PIM can offer is a returning to and a staying with, instead of a constant catapulting into the future. PIM can be that which is steady, continuous and thus

enables art to be the present oscillation between the past and a possible future.^[37] I thought about how we could deal with art in terms of gravity, aftermath, accumulation and sedimentation instead of endless islands of performance of self and the spinning off into the future potentials.

You said it was a question of how to build ethical structures that don't rely only on the subject's personal decision making or morals, but rather make it possible to respond to one another, enabling response-ability.^[38]

You said that this crisis also made you think about how the role of institutions as a tool for producing a public sphere is compromised. As theaters cancel programmes their gathering force—and their ability to provide time and space for the negotiation of different perspectives and subjectivities in public—is also paused. You talked about how the importance of meeting, being in the same room, and thinking together became more apparent for you these days.

I agreed, I thought that in fact the whole notion of the public had become more difficult to talk about. I wondered what impact the pandemic will have on our understanding of the public.

I talked about how staying at home creates a heightened awareness towards the cycle of the reproductive labour of the home, but also of society at large, where I thought particularly of the health care and public transport sectors who do not have the possibility to work from home. Not only is there more attention towards this work, but the people that execute the work and their lack of rights also become more visible. The fact that many of these

Emilia Gasiorek, Oda Brekke

professions are executed by a racialized working class makes it even more apparent who undertakes the necessary maintenance labour of society and who has the privilege and the option to work from home.

You agreed and said that this was different than talking about art workers sustaining themselves.

I thought back to Federici's argument that reproductive labour should belong to the community, and wondered if through a communalization of reproductive work there is a potential to transform and propose an alternative to capitalism.^[39] I said that art practices carry this knowledge and have methods for transformation and for implementation. Could the link between reproduction and practice, or reproduction and performance, have a transformative potential in relation to this work?

I talked about how a gathering of resources creates meeting points around the necessary, and that in these meetings, other relations and non-necessary actions can emerge—bonds of solidarity, support, pleasure, love, friendship. I wondered if, possibly, it could also be a space for aesthetic experiences. I wondered how art

could take place in a local building up of a community rather than a network that shares and circulates infinitely.

You talked about how PIM insists on being an art object, on precisely not reproducing the necessary conditions for artists to sustain their profession, or to support artistic production. You thought of

^[37] From statements about PIM gathered by PIM's Board Group before and at the Oslo meeting 11.12.2018

^[38] Donna Haraway

^[39] Silvia Federici, *Women, Reproduction, and the Construction of Commons*, Public talk, presented at MAD on April 18 2013 as part the "Reproducing Value" series.

all of the work artists do in order to sustain frames and how it is linked to the desire for art to happen. However, you wondered about who could afford to join such a structure, that by existing as an art object, it could be argued as existing beyond the necessary. Who has that freedom, or free time, to be with art as something beyond work?

I said that if object and practice are not separable but understood in a relation to each other, where one does not exist without the other, maybe the question that remains is how to define PIM's practice and protocol. On what terms will people be invited to join the structure? If PIM is a common, how does it propose itself as a structure that can manifest an alternative to the current society we live in?



Emilia Gasiorek

Oda Brekke

With
Objects

Dealing

Art as object

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A series of exercises about the seemingly simple (f)act of perceiving an object as object in the world.

Fabulations about things, the world and the practice of self-defining objects as an emancipatory act by Manon Santkin, dance artist, thinker, storyteller.

Manon Santkin

Disclaimer: The following text is suggested as a thought experiment. In order for its content to reveal itself tangibly, the reader is invited to engage with it much like dancers are used to working in their daily practice: to engage embodied experience in the scenarios that are presented to them. This is one of the fundamentals of what dancing means. In this perspective, I recommend that you, the reader, dance the text rather than reading it and consider each sentence as a form of instruction for something to do or feel.

Manon Santkin 1982) is a dance artist living in Belgium. She works as a performer, choreographer, artistic advisor, teacher and writer. She graduated from P.a.r.t.s. in 2004 and completed an MA in New Performative Practice at DOCH (Stockholm) in 2015. Amongst numerous collaborations, she performed with Mette Ingvarsten, Salva Sanchis, Sidney Leoni, Cecilia Lisa Eliceche, Eleanor Bauer and Xavier Leroy. She is part of the Stockholm based group together alone, together with Pavle Heidler, Samuel Draper, Mira Mutka, Ilse Ghekiere, and more dance artists. She is the author of *A Glossary Of The Atlas Of Interpretation* (2015) and hosted the *We Happen Things* performance series with Tove Salmgren and Moa Franzen (2015-16). Since 2014, her artistic practices revolve around the act of paying attention, its modalities and implications for interacting with an environment. She created the performance *New Measuring Rites* (2018), questioning the logics and abstraction implied in the act of measuring. In a collaboration with visual artist Fabrice Samyn, she created the duo *Undressing Time* and the group piece *Vanity's Ballroom* as part of his *Breath Cycle* project (2018). Since 2018, alongside her artistic activities, Santkin works as a pedagogical coordinator for the Training Cycle at P.a.r.t.s. (BE).

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Object-making

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The capacity to distinguish an object amidst the otherwise inseparably entangled world should not be taken for granted. It is an act involved in the overall (re) configuration of the world, nothing less. Conceiving of an object and acknowledging its existence is like generating space for that *thing*, that phenomenon, like discovering new space amidst a place that didn't seem to contain any empty space up until then. It is an act of distinction which can—and actually does—change the course of things. We could see it as generating space within space. World-growing from within. We will call this capacity *object-making*.

Thinking of this text as a thought experiment, we will bear in mind that *object-making* is less about stating the truth than it is about proposing a hypothetical segmentation of the world. The segmenting we go for, consciously or unconsciously, plays a key role in how we behave in that world and how we interact with the parts we perceive and conceive of. Segmenting the world conditions what the world can afford^[1] us, and in return, what we can afford the world.

[1] The concept of affordance was coined by American psychologist James Gibson (1904-1979). According to Gibson the affordance of an object refers to the possibilities the object offers to the one who interacts with it. It emerges from the relation between the sentient being and the thing. The affordance of something is always and only defined by this relation and valid within it. In French, the term *affordance* is sometimes translated as *potentialités*. We can understand the notion of affordance as the potential for use and interaction that an object offers to the being interacting with it; what it enables. In his theory of affordances, Gibson suggests a casual way of naming what the object affords the being interacting with it by turning the benefit it offers into an adjective finishing in *-able*. To a human like me, the ground is walk-able, an apple is eat-able, the air is breath-able, a chair is sit-able. Walls, on the other hand, are not cross-able. They do not afford crossing. They afford leaning on them, so they are lean-on-able. One can invent new words as one discovers the affordances of things. Gibson, James, *The ecological approach to visual perception*, ed. Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

The point of object-making is that once you forge or discover the existence of an object, you can potentially interact with it in a more conscious way than you were already interacting. Object-making opens the possibility for composition.

What new options
does a newly discovered
object provide
you with?

*What will an
object enable you
to do once you
have acknowledged
its existence?*

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How will this object
change the course of
things?

When an object is defined, entrusted and shared by a larger community it becomes a sort of currency,^[2] something that enables trade and communication. Like money, the more an object is entrusted and referred to, the stronger its power as a currency becomes. An object acknowledged by one is a poor currency. An object acknowledged by many is as powerful as gold. Trust attracts trust, attention attracts attention. Therefore, the more public an object

Manon Santkin

is, the more public it is likely to become. Acknowledging objects is political in this sense. The act of perceiving and conceiving objects holds power—it is a way of populating the world with things that were potentially already present but unacknowledged. It is creating space inside of space, and it is generating potential currencies yourself.

Due to being linked with behaviour and the possibility for action, the question of perception(s) and the act of object-making participates in the overall process of the constitution of the world as it is, nothing less. Object-making is a powerful intervention in the course of things. One could even daringly suggest that it intervenes in the overall choreography of life as we know it.

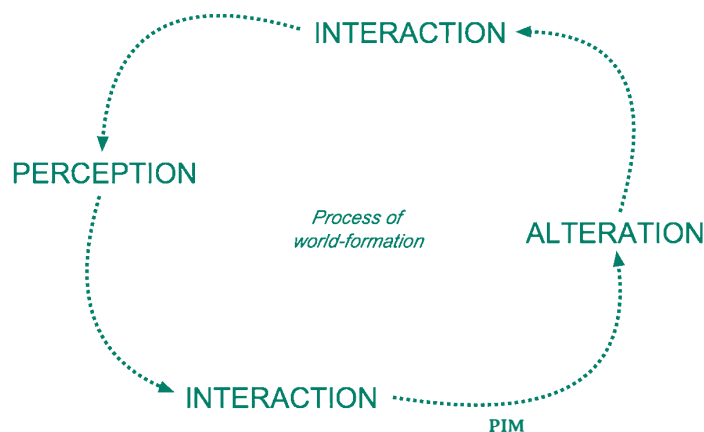
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[2]

The word currency is understood in its expanded meaning: as a means of exchange enabling communication and trade. Words in this sense function as currencies, as they enable people to exchange, agree, disagree.

fig. 13 Cycle of worldmaking



What

is

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an

object?

What is an object and how to perceive one?

Let's start at the very start. The definition of object I want to present here is rather expanded: an object is any *thing* that has been identified by any kind of sentient agent. Understood as such, objects can be material or immaterial. Understood as such, time is an object as much as a wooden table is an object. As Tristan Garcia unfolds it in his book *Form and Object, A Treatise on Things*, a table, a

is

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carved flint, a quark, a gene, a human person, the word "truth", a red dress, the colour of an abstract painting, one third of an acacia branch, the chimpanzee species, five seconds, a rite of passage, the non-existence of a fact or a square circle, are all objects.^[3] Understood as such, all objects exist equally. They co-exist next to one another, inside one another, before, during and/or after one another. Understood as such, all objects exist as much as one another.

[3] Garcia, Tristan. *Form and Object, A Treatise on Things*. Ed. Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

Remember those cliché tests that you sometimes encounter on social media platforms;

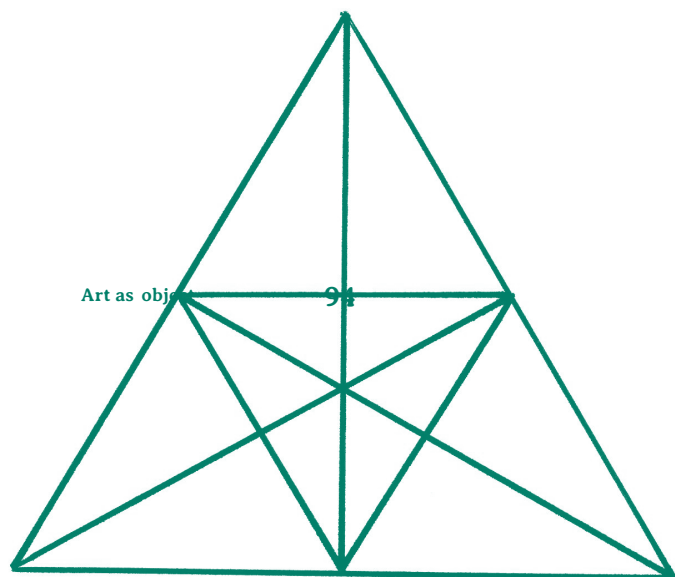


fig. 23 Triangle test

“How many triangles can you identify in this picture?” they ask.

So, you look for the triangle in the triangle without forgetting to zoom out and consider different scales. Not unlike the way the nearest emergency exit in an airplane is sometimes located behind you, in this test some triangles are sometimes found *around* the others, not next to them.

Exercise n°1:

Do the test now and make your own calculation. How many triangles have you identified? [4]

Exercise n°2:

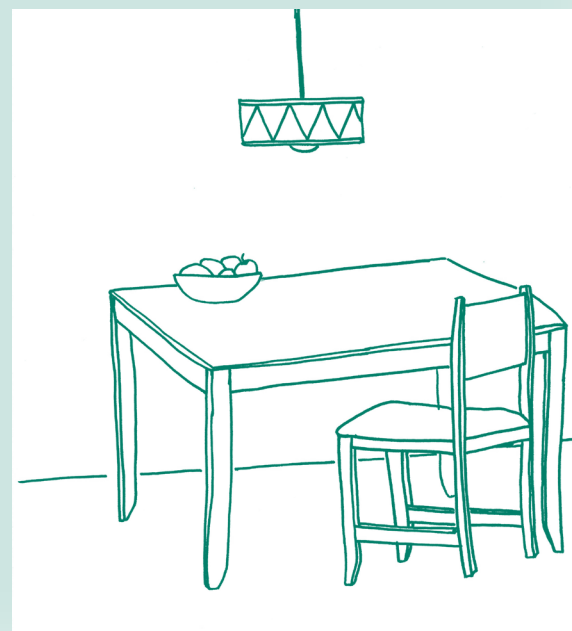
Now, let's do the same test but with the question of objects (we could also speak of “things”): How many different objects/things can you identify in the following picture?

Try to be exhaustive and don't forget about scales: you might find things inside of things if you zoom in or if you distinguish the parts from the whole. 95 Art as practice

fig. 3, 4, 5

fig. 6: Dining table

[4] For those who cannot bear not knowing the solution to this test, I have personally found 34 triangles nested in there but, apparently, the correct answer is 47.



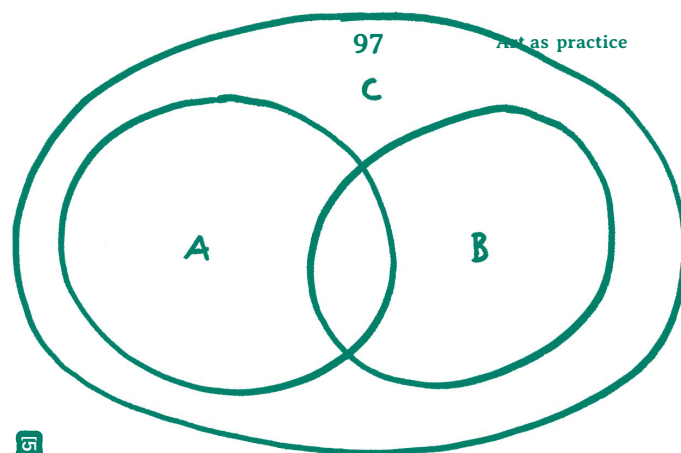
There is a table
and a chair and fruits
and a bowl and
and and the
light bulb and light
and and the
legs of the chair and
cushion on the seat
and ---...- and air
and and the
distance between the
lamp and the bowl
and and
and the colour black
and and and
..... and the floor
and and
and ... andand
..... and etc.

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fig. 78 Venn diagram ABC



[5]

A Venn diagram shows the relationship between two groups of things by means of overlapping circles.

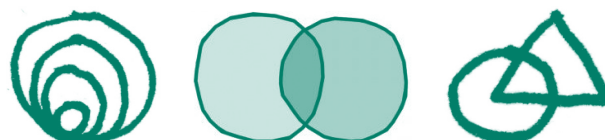
fig. 8, 9, 10

As you notice, even though the elements present in the image are rather scarce, your list is very long, whilst probably remaining forever incomplete.

What is worth noticing here is that the *objects/things* on your list co-exist not only *alongside* but also *inside and across* one another.

Let's notice this and agree with it for the time of this thought experiment: the way objects co-exist in the world (and as world) resembles more a Venn diagram^[5] than a horizontal shelf where objects would be displayed next to each other. In such a Venn diagram, each circle represents a different object, a thing which has been detected by at least one sentient agent of the world.

If we could draw an exhaustive Venn diagram of the world, each circle/object would intersect with some others according to the qualities that they have in common.



PIM

To include the vastest number of objects and represent how they co-exist and overlap in the world, this diagram would be most pertinent with volume, in multiple dimensions, with crooked forms instead of circles and various areas of intersections of different size, not all symmetrical.

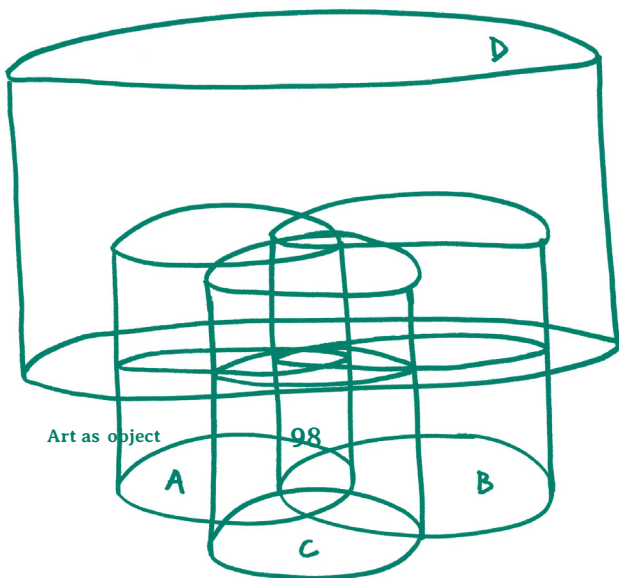


fig. 11: 3D Venn diagram

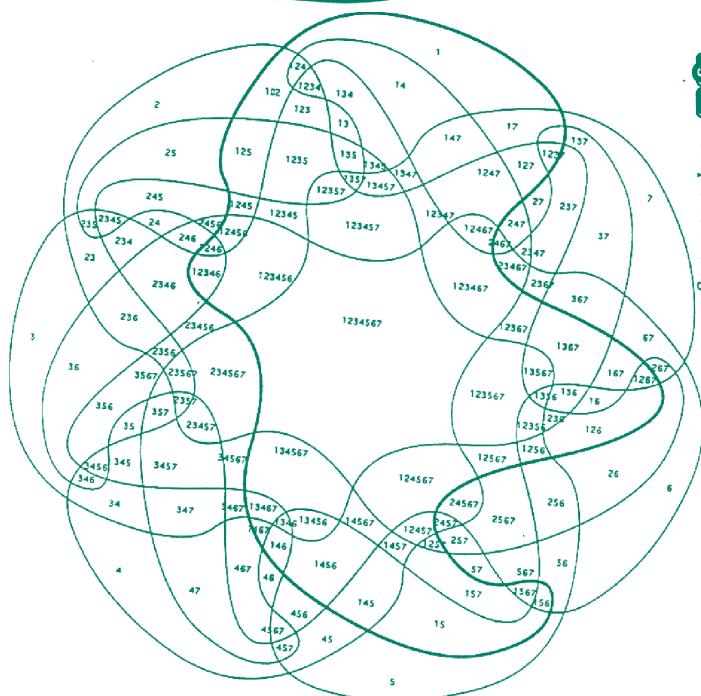


fig. 12: multiple Venn diagram

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If you would try to visualize this all-encompassing Venn diagram in an even more multi-dimensional way, you could simply look at the world as it manifests itself. Look around now, wherever you are.

We will say that understood like this, objects are always “intersectional” [6]. To embrace such an intersectional approach to object-hood implies two things:

- 1 That the outlines are ambivalent.)
- 2 That objects of the world only exist in interaction with those intersecting others.)

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[6] In this text, the word *intersectional* is used pretty literally as that which is intersected, inspired by the zone of intersection between two ensembles. But the analogical concept of *intersectionality* proposed by feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw is a welcomed analogy for the point made here. Even though Crenshaw's concept refers more to the question of identity and the overlapping material and social realities that condition a person's life, her intersectional approach benefits the question of objects as well.

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Ambivalent

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Outlines

Leon Santkin

With the Venn diagram metaphor in mind, we could speak of each circle/object as being constituted by a certain coherence.)

But why and how are such coherences recognized as coherent? And by who—or what? What is this coherence made of and which processes enable you to distinguish it from everything else? What delimitates it? How do you know where to place the outline?

Let us think simply: an actual contour. A boundary. When one thing-object is identified, it means it is distinguishable from its surroundings. It becomes separable from the background, so to speak. To identify an object as object means to cut it out of the whole, to render it distinguishable as a unity in its own right. Drawing its edges as a fine imaginary outline, like the outline that would make the form of a circle emerge from the rest of a unicolour surface of paper, emphasizing the distinction between the inside and the outside, between the it and the non-it. This reminds me of an inspiring interpretation of the graphic symbol zero that I once came across: a line surrounding a void, so as to emphasize this special emptiness. Thanks to the outline, the emptiness reveals itself. For the sake of this entire thought experiment, and to emphasize the ambivalence of defining an outline, we will consider that the outlines of all perceived objects-things are always dotted. All outlines are ambivalent.

fig. 13, fig. 14



Now, the interesting question is: Around what entity would you draw a line? To what do you give a contour? What elements do you distinguish from the whole?

PIM

Exercise n°3:

Boundary crossing

Pick an object to observe.

*Focus your attention entirely
and only on it.*

*Observe its body, the details of its shape,
its material. Observe it as if you were
touching it with your gaze.*

*With your tactile, attentive
gaze, let your eyes meander all
the way to one of the edges of
the thing.*

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*Observe this
edge for a bit,
this specific
boundary.*

*Now take your gaze over the edge and let
it fall on the first neighbour, the thing that
is there right beyond the edge.*

*Observe that new
thing for a bit.
Meander till its edge.
Observe the edge.*

*Go beyond the edge
and find out
what is there.*

*Continue this continuous trajectory as
long as you want, traveling from one ob-
ject to its immediate neighbour, crossing
edges after edges.*

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Along your attentive travel, you have forged various objects: defining for yourself what a *thing* was, how the next *thing* was separated from the previous *thing*, where one *thing* ended and where its direct neighbour began. Sometimes the *thing* was a recognizable daily object, sometimes it was a visual spot on a surface, sometimes it was just a shape delimited by a clear change of colour or texture. You created distinct perceptible objects thanks to your various perceptual and conceptual resources.

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Pluralism

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Ideally, as stated in the introduction, it would be possible to consider that all perceived objects exist equally, as much as one another.

Unfortunately, some objects appear as mutually exclusive. Some objects indeed do not allow for the existence of others—or this is how they are being presented at least. On (too) many occasions in history, it has been proclaimed that if object X exists, then object Y surely cannot. If rationality exists, then the spirits of the forest do not. A scientific approach, for instance, often mistrusts the vernacular popular knowledge (which would probably be called *belief*, until it can be verified). This exclusion can also be temporal: while object X exists, object Y is impossible.

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Exercise n°3:

Find more examples of such exclusive objects, ones you either agree or disagree with.

A frequent question asked by philosophy about perception is: “how much of what we perceive is really a feature of the world, and how much is a feature of our minds? In other words, how much of what we are perceiving is really out there?”

Another interesting question to ask is: how much of what we [7] are *not* perceiving is really out there?

The two questions need to stay combined if one wants to practice the difficult exercise of acknowledging objects of perception that are not your own: giving credit to the existence of an object perceived by someone else—or by *something* else for that matter.

To conceive that more than one truth can be possible at once, as suggested by thinkers such as Vinciane Despret^[8] or Nelson Goodman^[9], amongst others, isn't easy. When it comes to objects of perception (or we could say “objects of experience” or “experienced objects”), a widespread reflex is often to verify whether or not the reported experience is justified, whether it had “real” causes or if it is misconstrued by the one who supposedly experienced it. If it cannot be traced to an agreeable cause, it will, more often than not, be denied. The experience isn't rooted, some will say, it has no object, it is barely valid. The objects the experience refers to are mistrusted or discredited, they do not *really* exist. The experience occurred though, that is a fact. It was felt, embodied, lived and as such, it will bear consequences. Just like the deceased who continue to guide the acts of the living long after their bodies have disappeared,^[10] the unreal objects interact with the real ones and influence our actions just as effectively.

What of these object(s), then?

Manon Santkin

What status to give them? Do they exist?

In what manner do “real” objects distinguish themselves from simple objects of perception? In which ways do they differ? Are there “real” objects that aren't perceived objects? Aren't all objects always perceived or conceived^[11] in one way or another?

[7] In this sentence, the pronoun “we” can stand for any *who* or *what* which could be asking this question. “We” stands for the origin of the perspective of *who/whatever* could invest in this question.

[8] During a public talk held in Paris on the 2020-02-26, Belgian ethnologist and philosopher of science Vinciane Despret,

[9] Goodman, Nelson, *Ways of Worldmaking*, ed. Hackett Publishing, 1978.

[10] Despret, Vinciane. *Au bonheur des morts. Récits de ceux qui restent*. Paris, La Découverte, coll. “Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond”, 2015.

[11] It is suggested here that perceiving and conceiving something conceptually both imply a similar relational premise.

Exercise n°5:

Umwelt mapping /
experiential
cartography

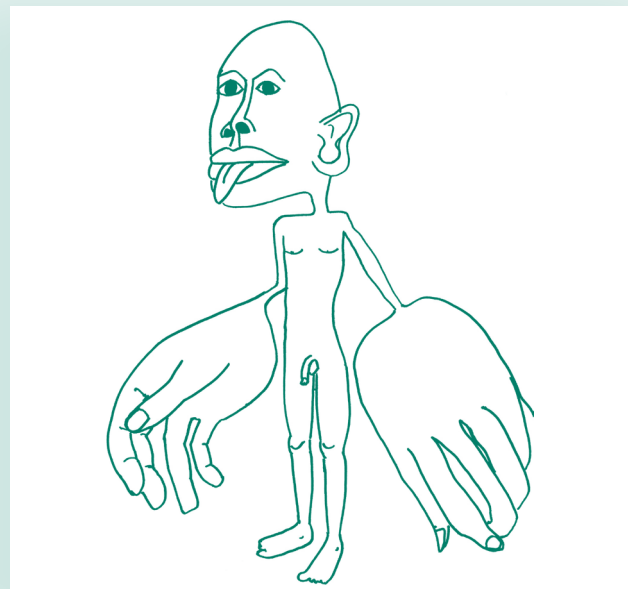
If you were to make a map of the room you are in, based on the order of importance that the objects/elements constituting the room have in your perception, how would it look? We can imagine a system of resizing the elements according to their importance and presence in your perception: the ones that stick out the most would be bigger, and those which almost go unnoticed would be smaller. Those you do not perceive or think of would not be present at all on the map.

This map could take inspiration from Penfield's homunculus...

... where the parts of the body are represented bigger or smaller according to their sensorial sensitivity. In your map of the room, the objects you detect and draw would be upsized or downsized according to their degree of prevalence in your appreciation of what constitutes the room.

Draw your map.

fig. 15 Drawing based on Penfield's homunculus.



If you were to do this exercise with more people individually mapping the same room, you would probably end up with very different maps. Some elements present on all, some not. It would highlight the drawers' different sensibilities and their matter of concerns, what matters to them. If you could imagine this map being drawn absolutely exhaustively (all perceptible details included), the map would actually represent

the room as it is experienced by the drawer.

This map would somewhat reflect the *umwelt* of the person: the way the world appears to them in accordance to their sensorial-motor-conceptual-cultural capacities. In *A Stroll through the worlds of Animals and Men*, biologist Jakob Von Uexküll unfolds his approach to animal perception and the way the world appears or takes on meaning for specific creatures according to their needs and psycho-sensorial-bodily capacities.

[13] Von Uexküll, Jakob. *A Stroll through the worlds of Animals and Men: a picture book of invisible worlds*. Originally published in *Instinctive Behavior*, trans. by Claire H. Schiller (ed.), 5-80. Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1957.

[12] For an example of a femunculus, look online for the drawings of artist Amisha Gadani.

ities. One of his famous examples is that of the tick—blind, deaf and only sensitive to temperature, touch, and the smell of sweat, whose world only acknowledges events related to those elements.

fig. 16 Drawing based on an illustration from *A Stroll in The Worlds of Animals and Men: A Picture book of Invisible Worlds*, by Jakob von Uexküll, 1957



tick

To the tick, the world isn't visible, since it is blind. The world is this tree branch on which it can stay waiting, immobile, for long stretches of time until a living animal approaches, the scent of its sweat perfuming the air, the warm surface of skin the tick falls onto after letting itself drop from the height of the tree, the nutrients from the blood once it has found a soft spot to bury its head. **The rest literally doesn't matter in the tick's world.** It bears no meaning for its life and falls outside of its perception. By now, we have heard of animals with totally different senses than humans: the bat who perceives distances ultrasonically, the shark who perceives electromagnetic fields, the dog whose sense of smell may be more accurate than vision, etc.

Von Uexküll proposes to envision the *umwelt* through the metaphor of the soap bubble: *"the space peculiar to each animal, wherever that animal may be, can be compared to a soap bubble which completely surrounds the creature at a greater or lesser distance. The extended soap bubble constitutes the limit of what is finite for the animal, and therewith the limit of its world; what lies behind that is hidden in infinity."*

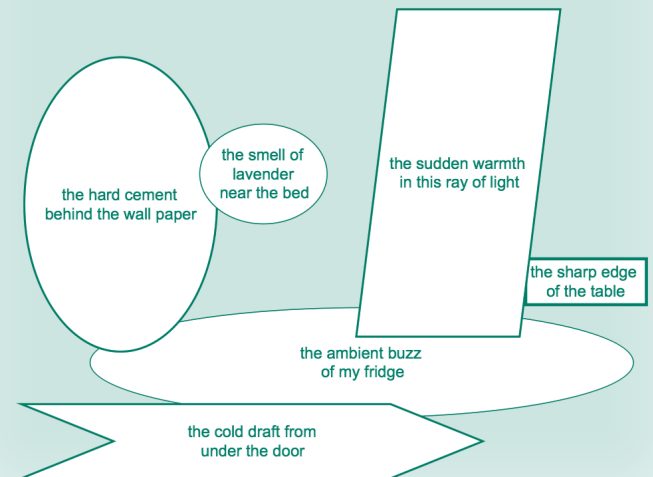
With Von Uexküll's notion of
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umwelt in mind, we can wonder how to access worlds that are not ours or simply wonder which world(s) do each of our senses portray? Would different objects or phenomenon appear on my map had I drawn from my hearing perception, or from the tactile sensitivity of my skin, or from my sense of smell, or from the sensitivity to light behind closed eyelids, or from my sense of distance...?

It would be interesting to even extrapolate with other understandings of what senses mean and can be. For instance, using dance artist Chrysa Parkinson's suggestion in her *Art Practice as Ecosystem Questionnaire*: *"When I ask about senses I mean any kind of sense, including sense of justice, proportion, humor, smell, vision, taste, history, hearing, language, kinesthesia, proprioception or any other thing you think you have a sense for. Having a sense for something means that you perceive it, either subtly or intensely."*

Add new elements to your map based on sensorial channels you had not acknowledged previously,

fig. 17 Diagram with bubbles of extra non-visual elements



PIM

Intra-action

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- [14] Karen Barad even uses the world as a verb space-time-mattering and defines it as follows: "spacetime-mattering is a dynamic ongoing reconfiguring of a field of relationalities among 'moments', 'places' and 'things' (in their inseparability) where scale is iteratively (re-)made in intra-actions." Barad, Karen, *No Small Matter. Mushroom clouds, ecologies of nothingness and strange topologies of spacetime-mattering*, published in *Arts of Living On a Damaged Planet*, edited by Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt, Ed. University of Minnesota, 2017, p.111.
- [15] Barad, Karen, *ibidem*, p.110.

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What if we now reversed the common understanding of how things come to be? We reverse the reductionist scale and go, not from 1 to infinity, but from infinity to one. First there was *everything*, and then *some things* came to be distinguished. Let's imagine that there never was a blank page: things were always already in relation. Never only one, always already plenty. Imagine the world with no "one" thing. Things amongst things, yes, but one single one on its own, no. Except for the *whole*. Other than the whole, no *isolated thing* has ever existed on its own. Never ever.

In this sense, there exists only a state of entanglement and intersection. Only a state of mutual constitution between things, which are ever re-organizing themselves. Karen Barad calls this dynamic bond ***intra-action***: the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. While speaking of quantum physics, she beautifully mentions the inseparability of all space-time-matter: [14] "The Newtonian nature of space, time, matter, and the void are undone by quantum physics. In particular, it undoes the Newtonian assumptions of separability and metaphysical individualism. There are no self-contained individual entities running in the void. Matter is not some givenness that pre-exists its interactions. Matter is always already caught up with nothingness. Bodies, space, time, and the void are not ontologically separate matters." [15]

fig. 18: A moebius ring



PIM

Let's practice how to detect objects which are imbricated inside others. There are two ways of finding objects inside other objects:

- 1 By zooming in on parts or details within the object.
- 2 By looking at the object as in a microscope: thinking of small degrees of magnitude ^[16] (scales!)—as beautifully illustrated in the film *Powers of Ten* ^[17] by Charles and Ray Eames (1977), which presents a casual picnic situation in various powers of magnitude. It can be easy to forget that all things presented in the film are all visions of the same instant, which we could call *now*. In daily life, also, it's easy to forget that all magnitudes of *now* happen at once.

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<youtube.com/watch?v=0FKBhvDjuy0>

^[16] de Rosnay, Jean, *Le macroscopie, Vers une vision globale*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil, coll. Points / Essais (no 80), 2014.

^[17] Powers of Ten, a film dealing with the relative size of things in the Universe, by designers Charles and Ray Eames for IBM in 1977. Available online:



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^{fig. 19} drawing based on a screen shot of movie "Powers of Ten"

Exercise n°6:

an object inside an object inside an object

For this exercise, you can mix the two approaches of zooming in and looking into the microscope.

Pick an object that you are able to perceive right now, from where you are. Don't think long, pick it already.

Ok.

Now, with your attention, look into the object and find another object comprised inside its form.

Focus some more and find another object inside that one.

Focus some more and find another object inside that one.

Focus some more and find another object inside that one.

Art as practice

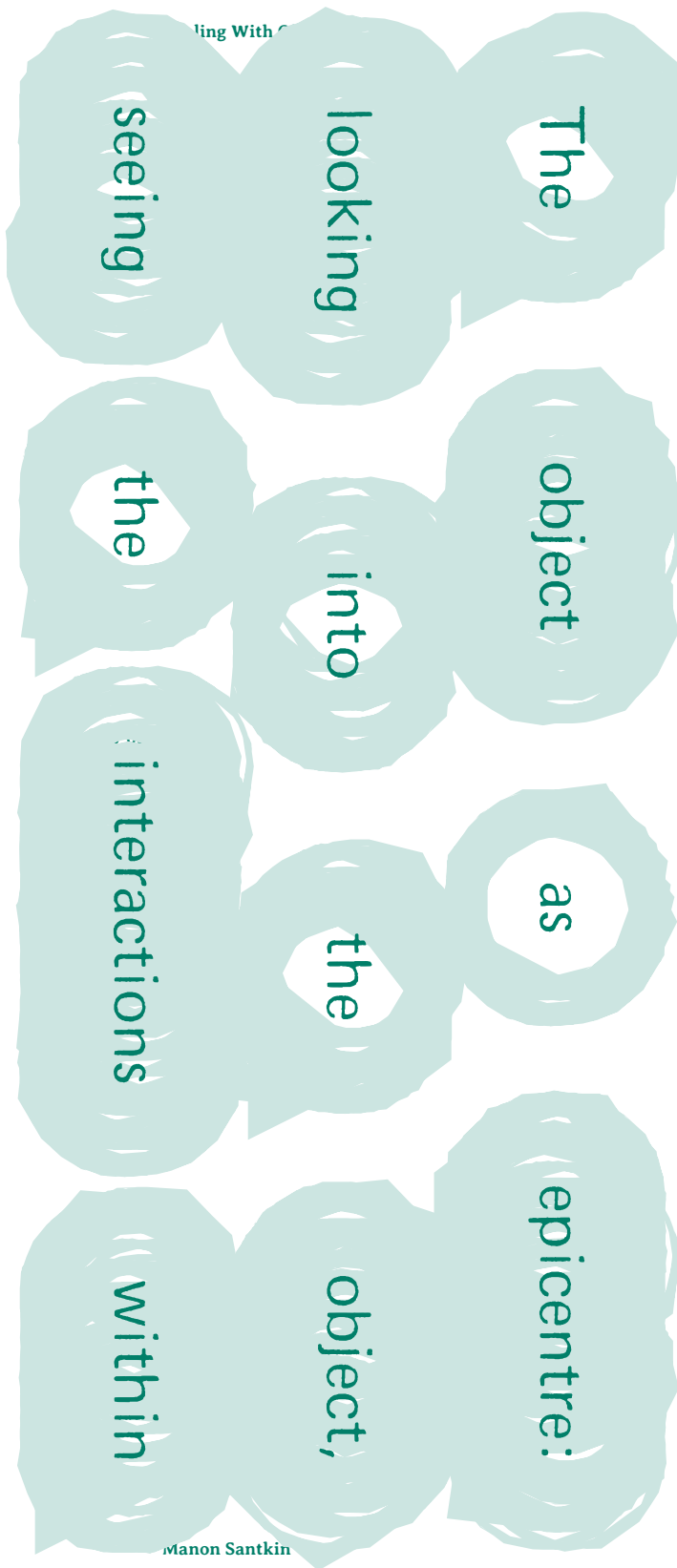
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^{fig. 20}



*That makes 5 objects,
co-existing inside one another.
This could be the beginning
of an infinite song.
Space growing inward.
World-growing from within.*

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Now let's go back to the intuitive way we started detecting objects in the room, and let's flip the notion of object inside out: let's consider everything you were able to identify as an object as the *outcome* of intra-active relationships. The object is no longer an isolated entity that waits for a companion to interact with it, but it instead becomes a symptom, always already itself generated by one or several interactions. Entities (possibly of different scales) are coming together to enable this object to be. The object is no longer an independent unit but the epicentre of multiple interactions. What are the protagonists of these interactions, you ask yourself? Exactly. That your concern should be deviated to that very question is the point of this approach.

What happens when we remove the unity of the object, when we split it open into interacting constitutive forces?

We leap in an **open, boundary-less field of relations**, where the act of defining becomes a way of acknowledging networks of relations already at work, instead of forming an illusory unit independent from the whole. The object is not one, it is the symptom of multiple entities at work. This definition changes what "defining" means: not to unify but to **plurify**. A tiny shift in approach that could change the world and our actions in it (and what else to do, if not to change the world a little bit constantly?).

To consider an object as epicentre of interactions is also to say that an object is the result of intra-action(s) between multiple forces or agencies. In both formulations, same same: we look inside and around an object and become interested in the relations that allow(ed) it to emerge. Remember the intersection. Now the object is the intersection between several agents.

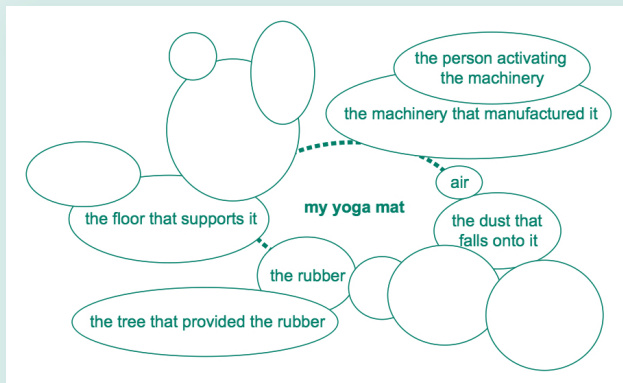


fig. 213 diagram plurifying my yoga mat

Exercise n°7:

*To plurify an object,
find the intersect-
ing agencies that
enable(d) the object
to emerge.*

Choose one object you can see or think of right now. Consider it as a composition made possible thanks to many disparate elements. Figure out and name the elements or forces that play(ed) a role in its constitution. Things, agents, and forces that were or are involved in its composition. Think of any elements that allow(ed) it to be exactly what it is, where it is, how it is. Don't forget about scales and look into the present, the past, and the future of this object.

So what has been said so far? That, once acknowledged, an object's affordances might give us new options to interact and compose with. That objects can be found inside, around, before, during and after one another. That outlining an object is ambivalent, relative to one's own psycho-sensorial-socio-cultural capacities. That several truths can exist at once. That the edges that define objects start and end in surprising places—not where we necessarily assumed them to be. That object-making is empowering and can enrich one's *umwelt*.

Let us thus try to unlearn the objects we have learned to acknowledge, the distinction and contours we were taught. Let us give ourselves this occasion to segment the world anew.

Hearing choreographer Rasmus Ölmé quote philosopher Timothy Morton, I am reminded that "the minimal level of activity is to let yourself be affected." Being affected is where object-making begins.

Exercise n°7

THE BIG NOTHING

We will now try to conceive of the world as one big whole with no distinction within it whatsoever. Imagine that all outlines could be erased so that no parts could be differentiated from the whole. It would be the absolute body without organs. Since the whole would include everything it is made of, it wouldn't even distinguish itself from any outside. There would be no inside nor outside, there would only be the whole-world as everything-everywhere-all-the-time. I suggest to call this state of the world "The Big Nothing" so as to emphasize the fact that it has literally no isolated thing inside of itself.

Imagine yourself taking a walk in this Big Nothing. You navigate amidst it, encountering all impressions for the first time. The only things you are now sensitive to are the shifts and

differences of intensities. The Big Nothing has many shapes and textures. You can sense these variations without needing to know what causes them.

Take a walk across the Big Nothing (take an actual walk and physically experience the place you are in right now as if it were the Big Nothing)

To help you get into this embodied experiment, you can downplay the use of your eyes for the experiment. Try trusting your other senses more than usual.

As you walk across this place, you physically encounter various surfaces, densities, resistances, temperatures. Do not waste your attention trying to guess what the things you are encountering are, rather focus on the feeling of them as shifts of texture of this Big Oneness you are in right now.

Try describing your impressions of the Big Nothing verbally, in terms of these "differences" you experience. Focus your description not on what it is but on how it is.

Keep a trace of your description, either in writing or as an audio recording.

Pavle:

Tell me how is the current situation on your side?

Maeva:

Well. At least I can move my arms around me. There's nothing preventing me from moving above, or in front of me, even behind. But there is one direction in which I cannot move very freely, it is under me. I cannot go downwards. There is something hard and I cannot go through it. It's preventing me from moving in that direction. Actually, I can stand on it and it's good: I'm not falling.

Manon:

Me neither, I'm not falling! I can feel the hard thing as well. It seems that it extends. I can spread my legs quite far and it is still there. In several directions! It is quite wide. It's very stable and strong. I can walk on it.

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Pavle:

I recognize the hard surface that supports walking. It seems to be very generous with its presence. I can move rather freely. There is no indication as to which direction I should take.

Maeva:

There is an obstacle in front of me. I cannot go in that direction anymore. It's a bit warm here, especially around my head. Well, actually, I can follow its edge and then I am able to go on.

Manon:

Oh, there is a sudden change of consistency here. It's gentle but it resists. It's a bit warm. And magnetic.

Maeva:

There's a corner here. I cannot go further in that direction. But I can slide this way. It's very interesting: now I can go

Manon Santkin

upwards. That's very different from before. I can climb.

Pavle:

I can go sideways! Oh, I have found a tunnel. I can enter it. The tunnel is changing consistency. It feels a little bit like skin now. If I turn around it is still there, on my right, in front and on my left. Also behind me. It's everywhere I go.

Maeva:

It's very high here. Ho, something just moved into me and doesn't want to let go. It's stuck in my hand and it is moving with me. Well. I don't mind, it's quite smooth.

Manon:

I also found something to hold onto but it doesn't help.

Maeva:

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Oh, I can wrap my hand around some parts of it. Some parts are not so easy to grab though.

Pavle:

Here I can walk. It's heavy on my right side and it's hard to coordinate, but otherwise it's fine...

[18]

New Measuring Rites is a performance I created in 2017 together with performers Maeva Cunci and Pavle Heidler, dramaturg Moritz Frischkorn, music composer Lieven Douselaere and Light designer Henri-Emanuel Doublier. Embracing various approaches to the act of perceiving, measuring and comparing, the piece portrays the journey of three rather naive anonymous figures discovering their surrounding and creating their own idiosyncratic system of values and ways of interacting with their environment.

– Excerpt of the performance
New Measuring Rites, 2017 [18]
PIM

Now that we have relativized the usual boundaries of objects that we had learned, feel free to redefine the objects that matter to you and play a role in your living experience and/or the one of others. Since, by taking part in a society one always already takes part in the proliferation, dissemination and/or confiscation of objects (even without noticing), activating the compositional mind on that matter isn't superfluous.

The act of generating objects of perception/conception holds power. It is a way of populating the world with things that were potentially already present but unacknowledged. It is creating space inside of space. It is generating potential currencies yourself.

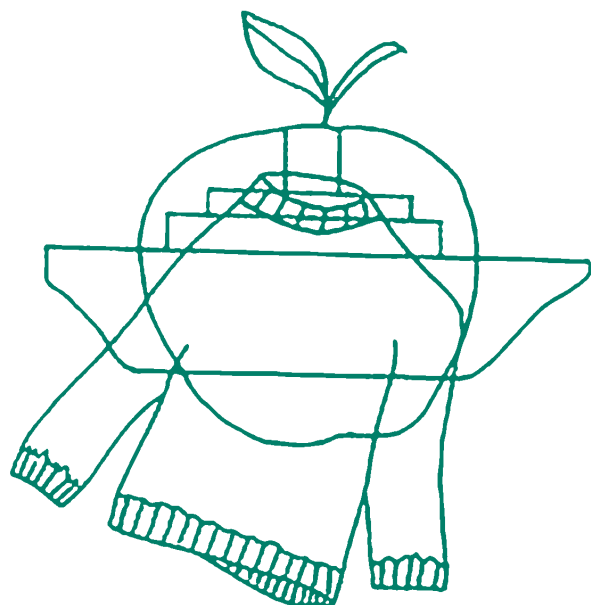


fig 23: contour room



Exercise n°9:

Look around you:

There is an object in an object, next to an object, crossed by an object, under an object, after an object, for an object, while an object, inside an object, on top of an object...

Take some minutes to observe the particular cohabitation of things in the room you are in now. The meeting points, the intersections, the discrete inter- and intra-actions. Write your observations as a long continuous enumeration of self-defined objects.

fig 22: overlapping objects

Intersections, intersections. Objects of the world only exist in interaction with those intersecting others. The outlines are ambivalent. By generating objects of perception/conception one changes the course of things. By segmenting the world into distinct things, one intervenes in the course of things and populates the world with things to interact with. Creating space inside of space and generating potential currencies to be disseminated.

March 2020

Manon Santkin

As I am finishing the writing of this text, the Corona virus hits Europe and provokes a sudden state of crisis. Everyone is asked to stay confined in their homes, going outdoors only for vital reasons. Suddenly the intimate bond between various strata of our lives appears dramatically concrete, all the scales of phenomenon tangible at once, objects interconnected and nested inside one another. The relevance of acknowledging multiple agential entities, factors, or objects couldn't be stressed more clearly.

Therefore, as appendix to the thought experiment on object-making we just went through, I feel compelled to quote the wordings of Bruno Latour in a recently published article and to bluntly bridge the concreteness of the current situation to all of the above:

"(...) I make the hypothesis, like many, that the health crisis prepares, induces, incites us to prepare for climate change. This hypothesis still needs to be tested. What allows the two crises to be linked together is the sudden and painful realization that the classical definition of society—humans among themselves—makes no sense. The state of society depends at every moment on the associations between many actors, most of whom are not human. This is true of microbes—as we have known since Pasteur—but also of the Internet, the law, the organization of hospitals, the capacities of the State, as well as the climate. And of course, in

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spite of the loud noise surrounding a "state of war" against the virus, it is only one link in a chain where the management of stocks of masks or tests, the regulation of property rights, civic habits, gestures of solidarity, count exactly as much in defining the degree of virulence of the infectious agent. Once the entire network, of which it is only one link, is taken into account, the same virus does not act in the same way in Taiwan, Singapore, New York or Paris. (...)” [19]

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image credits:

Image 1, 2, 6, 7, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 23:

by **Manon Santkin**

Image 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, 21:

illustrations by **Nicolas Couturier** for *A Glossary Of The Atlas Of Interpretation* (2015)

Image 12, 18, 22:

Results from google
image searches
PIM

[19] Latour, Bruno, *La crise sanitaire incite à se préparer à la mutation climatique*. Published in *Le Monde*, 25-03-2020
<lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/03/25/la-crise-sanitaire-incite-a-se-preparer-a-la-mutation-climatique_6034312_3232.html>

Not a Free Floating Body That Is

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Completely Lost or a Structure Too Rigid

for New People to Enter It and Change It,

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but a Definition That Is Clear Enough —

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to Make People Return

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This text is the outcome of a group conversation between Oda Brekke, Emilia Gasiorek, Maia Means, Carl-Oscar Sjögren, Sara Parkman, Leo Preston, Veronica Thorseth and Johan Forsman which took place over Skype.

The text has been edited by Oda Brekke and Emilia Gasiorek.

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Emilia Gasiorek

Oda Brekke

Not a Free Floating Body

Stållbergs gruva is a place for various arts and thoughts, run by the art group **The non existent Center (TNEC)**. In the group there are persons with a background in, among others, art, production, music, design, direction, choreography, philosophy, human ecology, architecture, carpentry, energy engineering, psychology, human geography, writing and gastronomy.

The group has worked at the mine since 2012, and moved in for continuous work in the spring 2013. Residences, festivals, documentary community theatre, courses and exhibitions are examples of activities. The past years, over 500 artists from 15 countries have participated at the mine. In 2015, The non existent Resources, associated to TNEC, bought 9 hectares of land and the buildings around the mine. The ambition is to transform the mine area to a place for cultural and social purposes, with new solutions for energy production.

TNEC often works on common issues with transparency between different fields of work, languages and experiences.

The work in Stållberg is described as a performative social survey in the personal, local and global, where the past time and present complex capitalist society of consumption can be understood through longer and ongoing artistic and social processes.

Carl Oscar Sjögren is artistic director & member of group The non existent Center and has a background in performing arts.

Sara Parkman is a folk musician, composer, violinist and member in the group The non existent center

Wrap provides professional workshops, studios and tools to artists on a project/need basis. The aim is to provide a supportive, interdisciplinary hub for art production, outside established institutional frameworks. While most art schools provide industry standard facilities and state-of-the-art technology, it can be hard to establish a fulfilling workflow with equivalent facilities beyond the school. Wrap strives to combat this issue, and to create an environment that supports the development of new ways of working, collaborating and learning. Wrap offers extremely low rental prices, and projects that meet specific criteria can apply for residencies at no cost. It is also important for many artists to experiment with ways of presenting what they do. Wrap offers a simple arena that can be adapted to suit many different types of events, and collaborates with artists to find the best solutions for this. Wrap is generally thought of as a place (in Bergen, Norway)

but it is run exclusively by freelancers in various part-time positions as a project coordinated by History Disposal Unit. This way Wrap can offer work opportunities to artists who need them in periods, although much of this work goes currently to Leo Preston and Veronica Thorseth.

Leo Preston is co-founder and curator in HDU which is the formal organisation behind Wrap, and an artistic partnership in its own right. As a performer and multidisciplinary artist he has worked with various companies in Norway and Portugal (Mundo Perfeito/Tiago Rodrigues) as well as creating several performances with his own company. He is also known as a lighting designer, musician and video artist.

Mai Veronica Lykke Robles

Thorseth is co-leader at HDU and Wrap. She collaborates with Leo Preston as a curator, producer and interdisciplinary dance artist/choreographer on projects initiated by History Disposal Unit. She also creates work as thud! moving endangered spaces. Her most recent work are collaborations with Leo Preston, musician Ingvill Espedal and dance artist Elisabeth Breen Berger. Veronica is educated from Laban Centre (GB), University of Bergen, Academy of Art and Design in Bergen and Wrap.

SKOGEN is an artist run house for performing arts, supporting artists from Gothenburg and abroad, organizing their work and research in formats like residencies, study groups, thematic blocks, productions, presentations, lectures, publications and seminars. We work with artists over longer time-spans, beyond the logic of single projects. We try to expand themes over time and to build connections between our city and the world, between the academy, the civil society and the arts.

Johan Forsman är sedan 2012 konstnärlig ledare för Skogen, en scen och plattform för konstnärer han också var med att starta upp. Förutom att undervisa, handleda och arbeta som projektledare har Johan har också under 25 år arbetat med konstnärliga projekt, de senaste åren i samarbeten med bland andra Anders Paulin och Leif Elggren.

höjden is a transdisciplinary coworking space with studios and office at Östbergatorget in Stockholm. It is an artist run production platform and a context that makes low budget self production possible. höjden aims to produce continuity and context for freelance artists as a collective space and collegial structure.

INSISTER SPACE is an artist driven organisation, platform and network for freelance artists within the field of dance and choreography. We work collectively and continuously to question the conditions and methods of artistic work.

Our vision is to create a broad platform for professional freelance dance artists to share, collect and reorganise artistic practices. We wish to reshape the neoliberal structures in the dance-field – instead of promoting individual artists, we create supportive structures where our members can work with their own interests but in solidarity with each other.

We work to create experimental and solidaric meeting points that value the potential of many. It's important for us to acknowledge the entire work included in maintaining a professional artistic practice – and treat administrative work with as much criticality and care as the work in the studio. Maia Means is a dancer who sits in the board of the organisation INSISTER SPACE and is a part of running höjden, a studio and ateljé house in Östberga, Stockholm.

Maia Means is a dancer who sits in the board of the organisation INSISTER SPACE and is a part of running höjden, a studio and ateljé house in Östberga, Stockholm.

Danseatelier is a place and a group of 11 colleagues, dancers and friends working in the field of dance and choreography in Copenhagen. The initiative stems from a need for continuity, a space for sharing of knowledge, as well as social and artistic support – to stand together in our relationship with dance, dancing and choreography. A large part of our work consists of finding ways for how to deal with the 'thought-action' of rhizomatic structuring and multiple hierarchies. By insisting on togetherness and taking time, we want to take steps away from individualization and loneliness. It is an ongoing organizational and creative research in collectivity, morphing with time and needs. Danseatelier consists of Sandra Liaklev Andersen, Ingvild Bertelsen, Marlene Bonnesen, Isolde Daun, Stine Frandsen, Meleat Fredriksson, Emilia Gasiorek, Snorre Jeppe Hansen, Nanna Stigsdatter Mathiasen, Olivia Riviere and Karis Zidore.

Sara:

Due to our current situation with the pandemic, it has become very clear to me that most of my work and practice as a musician is actually going between places. I feel really happy that I am now able to recognise that, because I can see that it has a lot of value when I'm not able to do it. Right now in the crisis I find that the feeling of belonging to different places is really strong.

Johan:

I don't know if it's just Corona but I think we are in a situation where we are re-thinking and I feel it's therefore difficult to say what Skogen is and what we are doing. It's a strange time. I feel that how to think ahead in terms of what is needed and how to think about art centers and institutions from here is very open.

Oda:

Emilia and I have invited you to this conversation centered around the topic of place and situated art practice, as each of you have a connection with the establishment and caretaking of specific places. We have been thinking about the specificities of place and space, considering place as contextually specific, sited and situated locally and temporally, and space as locally and socially generic. One of PIM's concerns is the rhythm and dynamics of acceleration and attention in contemporary society, where we have been discussing the notion of place as a potential gravitational force and are therefore interested in opening this discussion up to hear your thoughts and experiences on it.

Specifically, we are curious about what working with a specific place and the long term commitment that it

The initiative began really from a need for continuity, a place for sharing of knowledge, where we work with social, emotional, and artistic support in order to take steps away from loneliness and individualisation.

← Emilia Gasiorek

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We were interested in housing everything under one roof in order to have a place that could remove some of the constant need for cash, and other distracting factors, from the equation of working with and producing art.

← Leo Preston

We bought the land and the buildings. We try to think together, developing questions about how we can understand the society we are in and the making of art. We think in very long terms.

← Carl-Oscar Sjögren

højden focuses on how to create a queer space, a non-institutional space, where we employ do-it-yourself methods. We got offered the building as part of a wish from Stockholm Stad to make the area more attractive.

← Maia Means

Skogen started from a desire to question the project-based thinking. It was a wish to create a kind of institution, one that cares over time and that thinks long term. We are interested to see how learning is happening in the process of working together with different artists and constellations.

← Johan Forsman

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brings does to organisational work. What kinds of knowledge are produced through maintaining structures in relation to a place? Are you working with it specifically or is it something that you have been thinking about in relation to the structure that you maintain and the activity that you organise?

Carl-Oscar:

I think there are many reflections around 'place' and Ställbergs Gruva. From the beginning I think one important thing was to find a place where we could dream together in a very **long term perspective** and for that we needed to own the place. I wanted to commit to a place, because there are many things that say that you should not commit to a place, or that makes it hard to commit. Through owning a place we, the cultural workers, gained control over the situation. **The desire to own a place was also a reaction to living in this project economy, travelling from place to place and project to project.** I wanted to be in a place with people that have different experiences and different ways of thinking together. I wanted to see what it could lead to. It was not only about committing and owning, but also living with the commitment and living with a group that has a contract together. A part of this journey is also owning something together and being responsible for each other and all those that we collaborate with. I'm still working with the same ethical questions as when we started.

Sara:

Ställbergs Gruva exists as a thing between the idea of total freedom of movement and a super local perspective of a place. It's about getting to know people living in Ställberg, getting to know the history

Emilia Gasiorek, Oda Brekke

of the area, a history of exploitation and of societal inequality. I have been longing for a very local place where, for example, you need to live with and meet elderly people. But I also grew up in that kind of a place and I have therefore also always longed for the bigger world where you can find bigger ideas. The work is of trying to combine these two opposites, which are very tricky to combine. It's easy for us to talk about how we really care for the local society and that we really want to be a part of it, but actually only one of the group's 11 people have moved there. Most of us are still living in Stockholm and Gothenburg, in urban communities, and we go to Ställbergs Gruva during the summer time. That is a clash of solidarity, because we don't live there when it's hard.

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Oda:

I'm curious to hear about this contract that you have between the 11 people at Ställbergs Gruva. What kind of contract is it?

Sara:

That we own the place!

Carl-Oscar:

Yes, that's the visible contract. But of course most of the work is relational, it is about how we can work together. Throughout the 8 years we have found different ways where it's meaningful for each of us to still be a part of the group. There is a lot of negotiation and continuous work around what structures we need.

Emilia:

The fact that Ställbergs Gruva own their space, clearly brings with it a long-term commitment and longevity. But I'm thinking about those of us that rented or have had to rent multiple spaces and

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have therefore been invested in the building up of different physical places. How does renting a space, in comparison to owning, affect the sense and gravity of place?

I'm thinking about how, for example, Danseatelier is now in our third space, where we have built a place. But before this we were in a period where we were without a physical place, a house, and had to deal with a lot of questions about how to keep on going in that 'homeless' time. We were busy with trying to understand if Danseatelier is the people, the place, or the connection between the two. Leo and Veronica, you mentioned that Wrap has existed in multiple places, how do you experience the process of place building across different spaces?

Leo: Art as object

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Our first space was very different to the place that we are now. We didn't want to pay rent and we still don't pay rent. We don't own our space. Veronica and I were squatting in London and my dad squatted in London when I was a kid, so I have a strong relationship to the idea of inhabiting disused space, re-using space, and appropriating different spaces. This has always been something that fascinated me. In our first space, we needed to convince Bergen Council and the 'powers that be' that we could appropriate a space in a way that would be really useful for the cultural scene. We found a space that Bergen Council owned, but it didn't have any windows, electricity, water, sewage. So we had to rehabilitate the whole place in exchange for being there. By the time everything worked we already had a big community from the work of appropriating the space and making it usable.

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Veronica:

To get the space was like doing a bachelor in Sociology and planning permission. It was really a lot of work. We had to convince in a lot of strange ways and we had to use a lot of different tactics in order to get the space. In this sense, we were already really invested in the space.

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Leo:

We were there much longer than anyone expected and we had to move on because Bergen Council wanted to demolish it. The situation became quite controversial because Bergen Council planned to sell the site for developing new property. But because we had been there for such a long time, they decided that the site couldn't be sold to a property developer, because no-

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body wanted to be the property developer who kicked the artists out. Bergen Council had to kick us out themselves and demolish Wrap in order to be able to sell the site. The culture department then moved us into a big industrial site which is where we are now.

So we can really relate to the idea that owning your space is a good idea. Well done. Congrats!

Oda:

I'm thinking about how when you rent a space the potential threat of being kicked out exists and there can also be the pressure of having to prove your usefulness. In the sense that the art should be useful enough for the society, in some way, to be worth the rent. Does this disappear when you own a place? Do you feel it gives you the opportunity to be more autonomous at Stållbergs Gruva?

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Carl-Oscar:

We want to be useful for society, we want to be a part of society and understand its conditions, which we are also a part of. But I think that owning our place has another impact on the small municipality where we are located. We put something at stake when we bought the land and buildings. It was a promise that we will stay there because we are actually investing our lives, money, and desires in that place. I think that affects the whole situation. We still need funding to run all the activities we do, so we are always in dialogue with the municipality, region, and the state. But we are not so fragile if we don't have a huge income. For example right now, if we are heading into an economic crisis, we believe that we can still do something because we still have the place and we are not going to get kicked out.

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Sara:

I think that the fragility that you talk about is about the social relations. There is the ownership contract which is like "it's yours, now you have to deal with it". However, it is also interesting if you read about collectives from the Green Movement when they created the small village of utopian ideals, because they always fell apart in some way. Today those elderly people always talk about how the social relations are the hardest. I think the social relations are also the most fun part, which I relate to other collective processes such as being a musician and playing in a band. But I wonder why you don't learn about collective relational processes and dealing with conflicts when studying at The College of Music. You can always learn to apply for a grant but to be a professional person in a collective process is very complex and hard. You need to train and practice that skill set. That's the biggest thing with owning a place. It's like a marriage. You don't give it up or run away after the first fight, you have to deal with it. This is what I am currently interested in with Stållbergs Gruva.

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Leo:

I think that we pretend that we own our space, because we want to invest in it. Wrap is a part of our artistic practice. I think it's very true what you say, Sara, about community interpersonal relationships. The most challenging and rewarding thing about having a physical space is the social choreography of trying to develop structures and ways of working that maximise the positive aspects of the cross pollination of ideas and inspiration and the sharing of knowledge.

We're working on how to create

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a utopian environment, or an environment in which people feel really welcome and in which hierarchies are continually evaluated along conscious ethical lines. We want everyone who is working at Wrap to feel that their work is as important as everyone else who is doing work there, regardless of who got the most project funding or who has the most famous director or whatever.

Oda:

When you talk about **social choreography** it makes me think about how to structure relations and how to create structures to deal with the hierarchies and hegemonies that exist. It brings me to think about how INSISTER SPACE was working even before we planned to get a space.

Maia:

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INSISTER SPACE started out from the experience of being within an institution. We were a group of people who were studying dance at DOCH and experienced structures of gender inequality and systems of individualism. It gave us an impression of a field that we did not agree with. We wanted to propose ways of organising artistic work and work environment differently. In the beginning when we graduated, we were moving from place to place, different venues, theatres, houses, and we always had to justify why we had the right to be there. Like; you want us because we are young and feminist and this will tick some of your boxes. I think when we moved to höjden two things happened that I think are relevant for this conversation. One is that I feel that we did not have to justify ourselves anymore, and I guess this is the problematic freedom of paying. As an organisation we pay to be at höjden, and also personally, I pay to be at höjden, 800 SEK a month.

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So because of that I can go there and I can do whatever I want, I don't have to have to have a showing in the end of the week, and I don't have to talk to a funding body about it or to talk to höjden about what I did. With INSISTER SPACE, the organisation doesn't have to justify itself to take place there in the same way as it had to before. However, there is another economy.

When changing space from being in an institution to being a free floating body, and then to being at höjden in Östberga, it really put another perspective on what we are doing and why we are doing it. If INSISTER SPACE would have just taken over the house as an organisation, it would not really have made sense for us to be a group of 30 white young girls, saying; "We're gonna fight for gender equality", when we are in an area that confronts us with other issues. We could not move in without taking intersectionality, racism, and class more seriously and put that into consideration more than we did before. I think if we moved into an old industrial area we would have asked other questions.

Oda:

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I was thinking a bit about the specific social contract that also started INSISTER SPACE, before it had anything to do with place. It was constructed due to the individualized pressure graduating as an artist from a dance school, a situation where the pressure to realize yourself was felt strongly. INSISTER SPACE was somehow initiated as a social contract, like: let's organise ourselves together and find ways of structuring things so we don't have to adapt to that system. I guess similar logics exists in your different initiatives?

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Emilia:

Danseatelier was also born from a critique of the individually orientated market logic that existed post-graduation. We wanted to find a way of supporting each other, to resist the individualization, and the pressure to compete against each other for funding or jobs. In that sense Danseatelier started really from the need to find social support for living the life of a freelancer through the frame of a space where we could go to every day and be together. We also don't have a booking system; we can all work there whenever we want, meaning that we have to deal with all the complications and positive contaminations that occur working in a space at the same time as each other. We started with morning training together, which we would take in turns to facilitate for each other. Now five years later, we still have no booking system but rotational morning training is no longer what we need. Now we invest into other support structures, beyond the social and into the artistic, that exist both for ourselves and for the community in Copenhagen—through applying for funding together, but for individual solo research, and through a variety of different public activities.

Forming a group also requires a responsibility not to close in around ourselves and to remember the privilege of being a part of a group. We're busy with questions around how we can open up and how to create other encounters, so I am curious to hear how others of you deal with that kind of thinking?

Maia:

INSISTER SPACE is not trying to be "a collective", and through this aims

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to avoid this inside outside logic, but of course these structures appears anyway. Basically you can sign up to become a member on our webpage, we have a lot of members, some are active and some are not so active. The fact that you can just sign up to be a member and that even though you are a member you don't have to do anything creates some insecurity. Some part of our ideology is to not centralize power. The board is chosen from who is interested in being in it. I have been part of the board from the beginning, so there is some continuity, but I think that we are interested in how it can be a changeable body. It is the same with höjden as well, the people that are there make up the thing. We also have an interest in letting people change what we are and what we want continuously.

Sara:

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How long have you existed? INSISTER SPACE and höjden, like how long have you been working?

Oda:

We started INSISTER SPACE In 2017 and höjden 2019.

Sara:

And WRAP?

Veronica:

We started in 2003

Sara:

So then some have existed a very short time, and some for a very long time. I'm interested in hearing if you feel that you have needed to compromise stuff that felt really important for you in the beginning? If you realized that after some time you actually needed to compromise on an idea that was really important because the collective's voice was stronger or that something needed to change in order to con-

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tinue existing. What is your experience of compromising?

Leo:

We are very conscious that our role is mediation and a kind of guardianship. We are interested in the idea that people should feel welcome and equal, but on terms that are very much dictated by Veronica and I. Veronica and I don't always agree about everything, but we are coming from the same place, we live together and we agree on quite a lot of things. So our board is made up of myself, Veronica, and one other person. We always had a board with three people on it, so that we always have the majority in the board. WRAP is actually kind of a dictatorship, and that is a very conscious decision.

It's just that we are aware that this organisational stuff can get super complicated. I mean we have to make compromises all the time because we don't own our space, and the council, the political bodies, impose things on us. We have to adapt.

Veronica:

We always have to compromise on economy, things take longer than you think, and you might have to cut out some things or you can't buy the new tools or whatever.

One of our strengths is that we don't compromise on some things and that we always push to really try and fulfil some really important poles in our thinking, pushing to really make sure that it is a place where you can treat people equally, that it is a place where you don't have to pay so much rent. That's really important to us. You learn not to be afraid of trying out some new things that might be uncomfortable.

Johan:

There is something really interesting in this tricky thing between becoming somehow professional, or trying to become something that is not completely lost all the time, and at the same time staying open for new people and new ideas.

There has to be some sort of stability in the structure, but on the other hand we do not want to build a structure that does not open up for new people to invest their energy into it. How does this kind of organisation merge when new people come in and invest their work into it? There might for example be people who invested their energy in the organisation, but then stopped doing it, but now have a formal position in the structure. You can easily get a situation where you have one formal structure that is not anymore the same as the informal structure for those actually working within the organisation.

I think it is very tricky to facilitate the change that happens when new people engage; to open up the organisation to change with that engagement and to not say

we always do it like this” or “I’ve been here longer than you”. How are we actually open to learn about ourselves and being together; to have an organisation that supports change within us and in-between us—or in the end to have the organisation to learn about ourselves and become with it, and not that it just claims a stable identity for us to withhold?

Its not just about the ones that are engaged in the organisation, but also those who are visiting. How is that kind of

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internal/external blurred in the sense that even if you just come once in a while you are still part of changing the place. That we do not become a group giving the audience the events or the products, but that we are in this together; from those that might invest a year, two months, or twenty minutes of their time. It’s just that we have different amounts of time to invest. That is a very tricky and interesting question.—

Veronica:

It’s so difficult to be open sometimes, however it is also rewarding to be open and to not be frightened of criticism and questions, and at the same time keep your values.

Leo:

We have invested a lot of time and energy into creating a space to empower other artists. We’ve been doing it for nearly 20 years and we’ve seen people establish careers in the arts while using our space and tools very actively. Sometimes you feel like some people don’t really relate actively with anyone else at WRAP or that they are quite egocentric and they are really just in this to establish their career. We have no protection against that. The way our centre is set up, it is possible to do that. However, we are very interested in this symbiosis, a community of artists. We have ways of dealing with and reusing materials that get left behind in the workshop. We have lots of ideas about how this recycling can produce symbiotics and how there can be cross pollination between artists and their work. However it does not always work, but it is a very exciting challenge to think about.

Johan:

It is very different to think “we are a group of people that need an organisation

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tion" (which is also how our work at Skogen started). You know you want to do your thing and you need a container for it. But as for today, I rather like to think that what we build is some kind of point of gravity, something that attracts and facilitates engagement, and that this engagement will be the material that you work with, that will become the program, but also the material that will change us.

We decided to have an external board, not to have the board within the community. The board is chosen by the community, but those on the board are completely external. That makes it possible to make a distinction between the formal part of it and the more informal part of it.

There needs to be a formal part to keep the organisation going and to "guarantee" its survival, but then there is also an informal part that needs to stay dynamic: someone said that "it is just about giving out keys", and I think that is in a way very true. You can have a lot of theories and ideas, but who is actually able to open the door, use the studio, or make coffee?

Emilia:

I come to think about two things in relation to what you are talking about, Johan. One thing is that, within Danseatelier, we call ourselves a 'dance home' and then when we have different activities where we are opening up, we consider it as inviting people into our home. Within this dynamic we become the hosts and those that visit our space are guests, that when interacting or engaging with Danseatelier become a part of informing that space. How are we informing each other and how can we then learn from that meeting together? Because we are a fixed group this has been

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an important element in our work.

Another way of dealing with the fact of being a fixed group is to allow Danseatelier to continuously respond to our interest and our needs. It started from a particular need, but that need changed over time. To allow a fluidity in what Danseatelier holds and to give space to the difference between us. This is where I think compromise comes in. I think that compromise and consensus are important words that can be used as tools for navigating with collectivity. I think it has been important to make visible when compromise and consensus are happening, to call them out, to name them. From there it's possible to decide whether they are what we want. Consensus is not something that we search for, but that we use as a tool when necessary.

I think that both consensus and compromise, when not made visible, could cause the death of a collective or could be what strangles a space.

Emilia:

I'm thinking also there is something that happens when a group of people gather through an idea(s) or physical space. The more time you invest in a space the more clear the workings sometimes become, as well as the naming. It touches for me on issues of branding, which I think, Johan, there is something about on Skogen's homepage. How do you deal with market logics of branding? Is that something you are busy with? Is that something you work to resist?

Johan:

You are sometimes really haunted by these texts you wrote like eight years ago. Yes, of course there has to be something that is possible to read from the outside.

To make this gravity I talked about to happen. If a space can be just "anything" it just does not attract or basically it does not bring people in. At the same time I don't want the space to be defined. Skogen changes every year depending on who spends a lot of time there. It is always different people and so it becomes different things. I would say that it is an intentional choice not to have a professional marketing person, or someone who defines the space too much. I think that is very important, maybe you should aim at having the worst marketing person.

Not the worst, but... there is something about not falling into that trap of making it too clear what the space is about.

That it is open for us to think from new perspectives, or to use new notions; that we can see things in new ways with the structure, and not that the structure demands us to think in a certain way. When we have an event, there are different people making the introductory presentation about Skogen, and they all do it differently. I still think it is very interesting to listen to how people do it, I get inspired about their ways of understanding it, and maybe that makes me want to say something else the next time that I make the presentation. It is about listening to us who are using the space and trying to stay open and curious up through that. If someone visits us a lot then we might even ask them to help us to do the introduction of who "we" are at a public event. In that sense, Skogen is a kind of floating thing. But on the other hand, in applications and other formal presentations, it easily becomes a copying and pasting of these texts you have and where you write we are this and that.

I think it was nice to hear that you call it a dance home, Emilia. When I hear your reflectionss on the dance home, the question of what the institution should care for comes to mind.

I mean that is also an ideal of how we deal with all of these relations we are in when we are building a group or a place. How do we see the people around us? The citizens: are they customers in the market place, or can we actually establish another kind of relation that also cares for the idea of what a place is.

What should we actually do there and what is the goal? What is the aim and for whom?

I think that for us branding is really important, even though none of the people who started our organisation are interested in it. I think it is very important to reach out to people who have not been to the same education as we went to, or that don't have the same way of using language. We think about how can we formulate ourselves in a way so that people who are not already part of the kind of space that we are trying to create feel welcome?

We need to ensure that we are different people, and that we have different backgrounds, and that we did not all go to the same school and have the same references.

I think this is really something we are struggling with, and it is such a fine line between aiming for that and just becoming a commercial thing that is easy to swallow and is too similar to a commodity or a service. I think we do not have an answer to this, but right now we are trying to solve it by delegating our branding and our communications. If someone thinks we have a bad image, or that we look too boring or think our language is too academic, then we ask them to rewrite it or to take some pictures and post it on our Facebook

group. If they have the time they can define it themselves. Of course, there are not so many people who actually have the time to do this. I think that also comes back to what Johan talked about; the tricky in-between, being a free floating and constantly changing thing or having some clarity and gravity. INSISTER SPACE does not have the same economic responsibility that höjden has. It makes it possible to have this attitude. But for höjden it is more tricky because the branding actually has a vital function, because we have to get the money in order to pay the rent, etc. Branding, PR, and communication is such a huge part of our work even though it actually has nothing to do with art.

Whom and how you invite the audience into a space is an ethical question. It is about dealing with communication between people and about meeting strangers, whilst branding is about commodification. Isn't a part of the problem that they are so similar and that we cannot really separate them today? It is such a grey zone when it tips to one or the other.

Yes, and I want to say that the two people working with our communication are doing a fantastic job. It is just not fantastic in the way that marketing people usually are fantastic. I think also for us, the idea of always serving food is an important part of our strategy. It takes a bit of pressure out of the event, what people come for is a nice evening and then you hang out. If you don't know so much about the artist presenting the work you can still come. In this way, it doesn't become so important to brand the evening or to brand the artist, its

more about hanging out and eating together. One of the first ideas with Skogen was to take the money that organisations usually put on marketing and put that into making food. If people come and they think the food is good enough they will come back and there will become some kind of gravity, making people return to the place.

Veronica:

I think what we are discussing is also about becoming visible, and those things take time. It can be one person that is suddenly a hub for lots of other people. Unless you managed to do the right kind of communication it is so important to be able to have honesty and patience. Or creativity like you have exchanged commercials with food, which I think is a great post in your accounts. If you are too quick about these decisions, you might fall flat on your face.

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Johan:

Time is important.

Oda:

Johan, several times you have mentioned the place as gravity. What does this mean to you?

Johan:

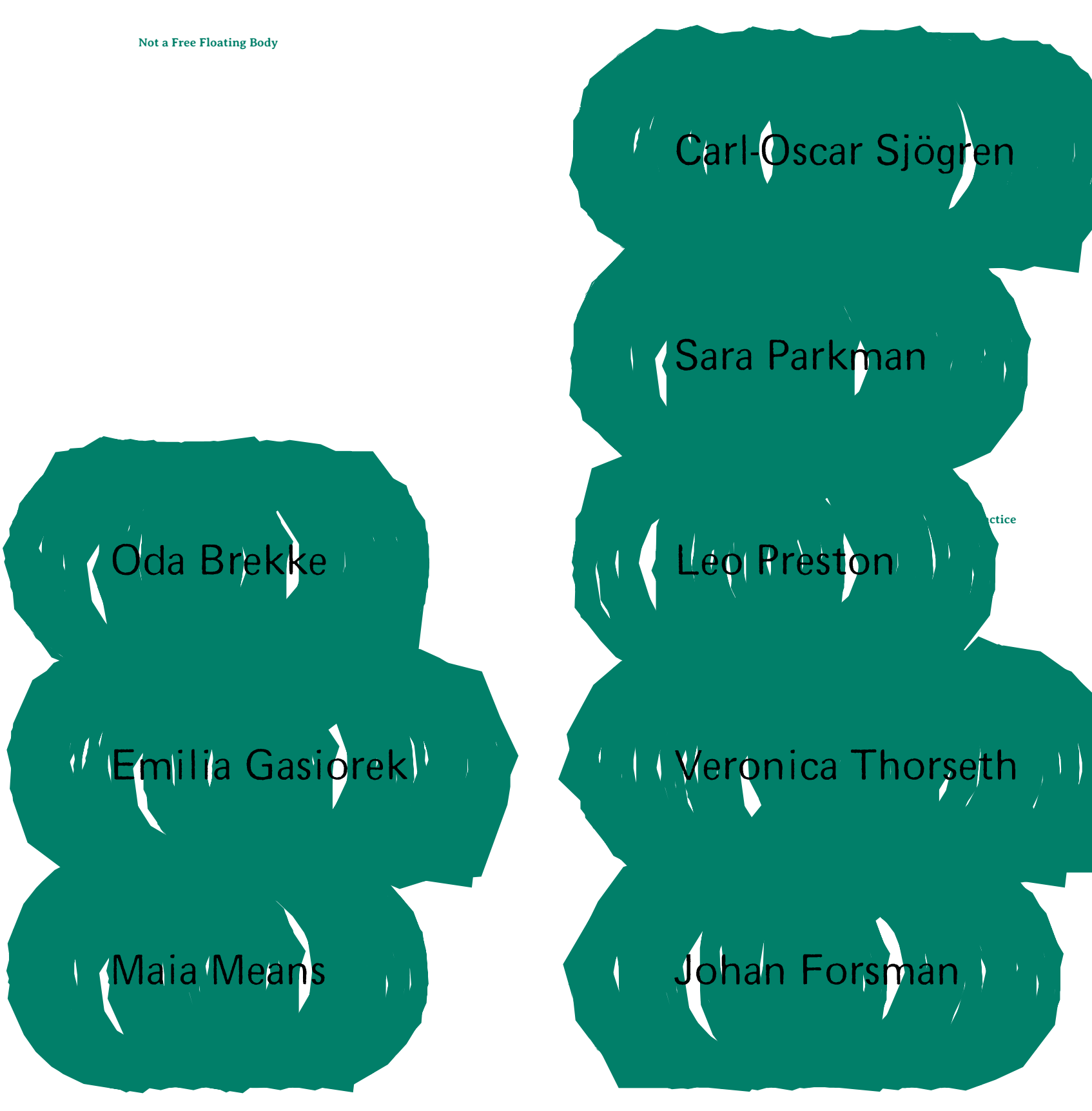
Maybe it is a way to work with relations. I don't know how it is in other countries, but at least in Sweden there is a pressure to reach target groups, to reach new people all the time. For me it was important to have people coming back as well. What does that do? If there's only new people all the time then we won't learn together. To have groups that come back is maybe what makes the space, and maybe also what makes it into a place. There has to be some kind of gravity, a gravity that makes people come back and share what they do, artists as well as visitors. This is also something dif-

ferent than a strict contract, where a "we" is the group. It is not that, but it is also not like always new cool things, and everyone is welcome. It is about doing something that keeps people returning. It's vague, but it is a way of thinking that I have been trying to use to get out of this pressure of finding a target group, to get out of asking the question: "who are you? Who is in and who is out?" I aim at a structure where those that come back, they are in, and if they come back often enough they get a key. If you can encourage them to come back then they will probably start thinking with you and doing things, and then they will be part of changing the place.

If you think of a solar system with all its objects, there might be the sun that they circle around, but the sun is affected from the things circling around it. So everyone is kind of giving gravity to each other. It is not that we are this unchangeable thing and everything else circulates around it. Everything that circulates around something changes how that thing itself is behaving. I like that idea and it's abstract enough to get away from most branding logics.

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Society and Its Art Objects

The Dematerialization of

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Recent publications include *Kunst als Sozialer Raum*, (Cologne, König Books, 2002 / 2017); and the edited volumes *Brave New Work. A Reader on Harun Farocki's film, A New Product'*, engl./dt. (Cologne, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2014); *Scandalous. A Reader on Art & Ethics* (Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2013); *New Communities* (Toronto, Public Books/The Power Plant, 2009) and *Art and Its Institutions* (London, Black Dog Publishing, 2006).

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Nina

Möntmann

The nature of ideas is immateriality

– Hanne Darboven
(1968)

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(2015)

– Srećko Horvat

The market reacts to Merkel's smile at the EU summit

Nina Möntmann

These quotations from the artist, *Hanne Darboven*, and the philosopher, *Srećko Horvat*, each assert in the context of their time a valid concept of dematerialization. Darboven conceives the process of dematerialization in its completed state of an assumed immateriality as a characteristic quality of the idea—the idea of the individual that is exchanged, that is stimulating communication, underlying an artistic process or inciting a revolution—it is fleeting, impalpable; it can withdraw.

Horvat, by contrast, describes a mechanism of virtual economy underlying global finance capitalism. The gesture, possibly precisely controlled, the rumour put into circulation, occasions a fluctuation in profits and losses located likewise in virtuality. These profits and losses, however, are transposed with effects on the material existence of the individual through accumulation or debt.

At this point, it is important to differentiate the notion of dematerialization from immateriality. While dematerialization describes a process of reducing materiality, which does not necessarily end up in immateriality, it instead addresses the implications of material and the abandonment of it and allows for a critical reflection on the status of things and objects. In more current approaches of media theory, the concept of materiality is clearly rejected.^[1] This is particularly relevant when we talk about the materiality of digital technologies, which is indeed below the radar of human perception. Although there is no innate digital materiality—code and electrical signals have no physical tactile matter—strictly speaking it is not immaterial either, because information is on the one hand me-

[1] See for example Bernard Stiegler, *Hypermaterialität und Psychomach*, Zürich (Diaphanes), 2010.

diated by hardware and on the other hand it consists of the fluid materiality of bits and bytes.^[2]

In that sense, the mistakable description of Conceptual Art practices as “objectless” has been criticized many times, for instance by Pamela M. Lee in her essay “The Conceptual Object of Art History”^[3], and also in the thesis of the exhibition *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975*—which took place in 1995 at MOCA in Los Angeles, curated by Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer—can also be understood in the same way. Lippard herself later conceded that it was not a matter of completely rejecting the object, but that dematerialization merely put the content of the works into the foreground vis-à-vis their object-like character.

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The initial thesis of my research—as already hinted at in the two quotations—is that in the late 1960s and 1970s a concept of dematerialization, taken up by artists working conceptually and based on the power of ideas, was still available to guide practice subversive to societal contexts. Today, however, these very societal contexts have become determined by processes of dematerialization in themselves.

Dematerialization has become the founding principle of an omnipresent monetised space that is fundamental to

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information society, as well as an elementary factor in governmental mechanisms of control and repression. What role does art production play in this scenario and how does art position itself as an analyst or corrective to these developments?

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In the discourses of Conceptual Art in the late 1960s—as well as of Conceptual Art in the information age—labour, economy, and communication take a central place, which therefore will be the main subjects of my reflections.

Dematerialization, according to further elaboration of my thesis, is activated in both periods, each in a differently defined reference system of art and political action.

How could the concept of the respective ideas of dematerialization be described in relation to their specific histor-

[3]

Pamela M. Lee, “Das konzeptuelle Objekt der Kunstgeschichte”, in *Texte zur Kunst*, Mar. 1986, Vol. 6./No. 21, pp. 121–129

[2]

See for a comprehensive analysis of the subject: Paul Dourish, *The Stuff of Bits. An Essay on the Materialities of Information*, Cambridge, MA/London, England (MIT Press) 2017.

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ical and societal contexts, how do artistic and curatorial practice position themselves vis-a-vis each concept of dematerialization, and which concept of politics is activated in each case?

Over the course of this essay, the concepts in the diagram here below will be concretized.

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Art as practice

Dematerialization

Political action

Part

I:

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1960s/1970s

The concept of the *dematerialization of art* was first introduced by the art critic and curator Lucy R. Lippard and the author John Chandler in 1968, in an essay of the same name relating to conceptual forms of art.

[4] Almost simultaneously, it was mentioned by the Argentine art critic Oscar Masotta, who used the concept of dematerialization in his talk titled 'After Pop We Dematerialize', at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella—the most important place for advanced art in Buenos Aires at the time—in order to demarcate new conceptual forms of art from the *happening*.

In their essay, Lippard and Chandler describe how an “increasingly non-visual tendency in art emphasizes almost without exception the conceptual process which could lead to the object becoming completely superfluous.” [5] In line with this thesis, the artist Sol LeWitt described, in relation to his own artistic practice, that “the idea becomes a machine that makes art.” [6] The so-called “instructions” for LeWitt’s works contain the primary information for their execution, including simultaneously—in their concise formulation—the potential for random execution as part of the creative process.

Like Lippard and Chandler, Oscar Masotta also puts dematerialization at the centre of his analyses of Conceptual Art. His focus, however, is on the potential for mass communication, where it *is de facto* much more a matter of actual objectlessness than in the work of most Conceptual Artists in the United States,

- [4] Yves Klein's *Le Vide* from 1958 represented more an ontological reflection on emptiness.
- [5] Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialization of Art”, was written in 1967 and first published in: *Art International* 12:2 / February 1968, pp. 31-36. <<http://sol-lewitt.livejournal.com/1263.html>>
- [6] “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art”, Sol LeWitt. *Artforum*. June, 1967.

on which Lippard concentrated.

Masotta, departing in his analysis from Pop Art, presents mass media communication in a positive light, proceeding from an immaterial informational art which "consists in nothing other than the processes, consequences, facts and/or phenomena triggering information that is put into circulation through the mass media."

Thus, he sees in the new media of the time the opportunity to enable large parts of the population to participate in political actions which, although not explicitly pronounced, could work as a tool to be critical of the system and against the ruling military dictatorship under Onganía. In this vein, Roberto Jacoby, one of the artists Masotta was promoting, writes in 1968, "The future of art is not tied to the creation of works, but to casting new ways of living, and the artist becomes a propagandist for these recastings."^[7]

In 1973, Lippard then published her pioneering book *Six Years*, a collection of notes, articles, reviews, and interviews.^[8] As a feminist critic, curator and protagonist, of a young, politicized, art scene in New York, Lippard wrote from an involved, committed perspective. According to her, "The era of Conceptual Art was also the era of the civil rights movement, Vietnam, the women's rights movement and the counterculture."^[9] In this context, it seemed to be a suitable strategy to reduce the object-character of art in favour of text-based, performative or ephemeral practices in order to subvert the anti-intellectual public debate about the political crisis as well as the marketing of canonized abstract painting. The emergence of Conceptual Art in the 1960s therefore closely linked with

the politicization of a certain part of the art scene at the same time, mainly in the United States, Argentina, Brazil, Central and Eastern Europe.



- [7] In *Message in the di Tella* from 1968/9.
- [8] With the full title, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*; a cross-reference book of information on some aesthetic boundaries: consisting of a bibliography into which are inserted fragmented text, art works, documents, interviews, and symposia, arranged chronologically and focused on so-called conceptual or information or idea art with mentions of such vaguely designated areas as minimal, anti-form, systems, earth, or process art, occurring now in the Americas, Europe, Britain, Australia and Asia (with occasional political overtones), edited and annotated by Lucy R. Lippard.
- [9] Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1997, p.7.

At this point, the concept of politics can be made concrete: The dematerialization of the art object in Conceptual Art was a strategy based on co-operation and communication in the public domain, which could be joined to Hannah Arendt's concept of political action.

In the afterword to the 1997 edition, Lippard, however, concedes that the hopes that Conceptual Art would be in a position to escape its commercialization remained mostly unfulfilled.^[10] In the foreword to that same 1997 edition, we also read that the democratic implications of Conceptual Art were "fully appropriate", but

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that they could not be realized.^[11] How is this to be understood?

According to Lippard, Conceptual artists placed "the idea above the material" as a way to reflect on or stimulate a "Utopian extreme". And as a "Utopian extreme", this, of course, was not conceived within reach of individual social actions, but as the result of a structural transformation of society, starting with the re-organization of work and consumption.

In fact, the relationship between Conceptual Art and change in the worlds of work did not develop uncritically: the increasing outsourcing of production processes, communication as an integral component of work, project work, partnerships, etc., were taken up by artists, which contributed to shaping artistic work more conceptually, thus inaugurating a post-studio artistic practice. In this context, in his book *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, Alexander Alberro asserts that the "dematerialized object cannot be regarded as independent of the reprogramming of

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[10]

Hopes that "Conceptual Art" would be able to avoid the general commercialization, the destructively "progressive" approaches of modernism were for the most part unfounded.

[11]

"The era of Conceptual Art – which was also the era of the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam, the Women's Liberation Movement, and the counter-culture—was a real free-for-all (I mentioned this before, but at this point I am adding its continuation, which slightly changes the perspective) and the democratic implications of that phrase are fully appropriate, if never realized.

industrial forms of production within the already immediately imminent information society and its economy of knowledge.^[12]

Accordingly, a **complicity** between dematerialized art and emerging cognitive capitalism developed, whereas Lipard wrote still of a “Utopian extreme”. The attempts to escape market mechanisms were actually already inscribed in economic trends. But even this positioning of critique as implication and absorption of the hegemonic economic logic was to become a characteristic of the emerging network society, when opposition as a strategy was to be deprived of efficacy.

Gerald Raunig writes that “what distinguishes a fundamental category of the political for Hannah Arendt, the presence of others, exposing oneself to the gaze of others, cooperation and communication”—that is, precisely those qualities that were decisive for Conceptual Art, “now become fundamental qualities of labour.”^[13] Thus, political action becomes assigned and subordinated to the cognitive (immaterial) work-process.

^[12] Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the politics of publicity*, Cambridge, MA/London, England (MIT Press), 2003.

^[13] Gerald Raunig, “Modifying the Grammar. Paolo Virno’s Works on Virtuososity and Exodus”, in: *Artforum*, January 2008, 245–249.

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Today

Indeed labor, or precisely “immaterial labor”, plays a central role when we have a look at conceptually oriented art practice today, which is no longer concerned with the process of dematerialization in the production of art objects. Instead, artistic labor, or labor in the cultural field in general, is increasingly characterized by a focus on communication, the production of knowledge, and affectivity. It can therefore be described with Maurizio Lazzarato’s definition of immaterial labor as the “capacity to activate and manage productive cooperation” with a function to produce “informational and cultural content of the commodity.”^[14] In that context, self-management becomes a major capacity, which includes the management of social relations and requires the (re)presentation and performativity of all working processes.

Under this kind of shift in the notion of the concept of dematerialization, today no common political objective—or even an active striving for liberation under the umbrella of dematerialization—can be discerned, as asserted by Lucy Lippard for Conceptual Art. Digitization as a motor for restructuring the order of production is reflected upon art in multiple ways, and digital media are employed artistically as a matter of course. In addition, a turning toward ephemeral and performative practices can be observed, which likewise deal with a dematerialization of artistic work and of the artistic process.

[14] Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor”, in: Paolo Virno and Michael Hardy (eds.), *Radical thought in Italy: A Potential Politics Minneapolis MN* (University of Minnesota Press), 1996, pp. 132–147, cit. p. 134 and 132.

veillance and storage of personal data, as well as the increasingly complex demands of immaterial work, are often classified or imagined within the context of threatening scenarios, as interpreted in a particularly impressive way in the excellent British TV series *Black Mirror*.

Black Mirror, running since 2011, sketches out multifaceted dystopic scenarios which come into being through minuscule aberrations of our digital everyday behavior, which could occur in 5 or 10 years, leading to entirely incomprehensible dimensions. Much of it is recognizable to us. In *Black Mirror*, the screw of technological evolution has only been turned those few crucial turns, and so—for example in the episode titled *Nosedive*—we experience a terror regime of “liking”: Every social contact is instantly rated through an app on the participants’ phones. Through the resulting evaluation, a person’s status, with all its social privileges, is calculated. As a consequence, you can be a popular 4.5 or 4.8, or just a *homo sacer* like 1.4. The title of the episode, *Nosedive*, heralds a woman’s fate as she desperately aims to increase her status by being given five stars. **But everything goes wrong, and she eventually ends up an outcast behind bars.** The series also speculates frequently about implants and their varying functions, as for example in the episode *The Entire History of You*. Memory implants never miss a moment and can always **replay** everything for everyone’s eyes

What is striking is that the material world in *Black Mirror*’s dystopian settings shows little to no change to our environment as we know it. It also doesn’t matter that much for clothing, cars, houses,

interiors, nature... all of this corresponds to our experience of today. The pivotal developments happen entirely in the virtual part of reality, which is increasingly dominating social and individual experiences, and which is introduced in *Black Mirror* as a life-destructive anti-human development. Their effects on the material reality, on subject and society, however, are existential and menacing.

In its setting of a conflicting relation between the virtual and the material parts of our reality *Black Mirror* qualifies as a relevant analysis of the fears of our society, precisely because its stories are set in our material reality, in which algorithms, artificial intelligence, virtual economy,

and surveillance technologies can be recognized as coming to power. This points to a set of ontological questions, which ensue with an upcoming anticipation of a total overcoming of a perceptible gap between real and virtual, as announced at the Facebook conference in 2015 with the prominent statement:

"all reality is virtual."

In this context, *Black Mirror's* dystopic visions imply a critique of capitalism on the one hand, but it also has conservative aspects in its centralization of the human is threatened in an increasingly digitized environment. This dystopian perspective of a loss of the human excludes for example any positive vision on post- or trans-human futures.

Artists like Melanie Gilligan, Tyler Coburn, Simon Denny, Cecile B. Evans, and many more, who are sometimes labeled by art critics as "post-internet artists", address different aspects of this dematerialized reality, from which they derive dystopian or non-dystopian scenarios.

Melanie Gilligan's video works, for instance, extrapolate these realities of a completely digitized world of living and working into disturbing and darkly dystopian scenarios of a not-far-off future, not unlike the series *Black Mirror*.

The 10-channel video work from 2014, *The Common Sense*, is a drama in the style of a short television series. It turns upon a new affective technology, a so-called 'patch' that is applied to the palate which enables the corporeal experiences, feelings and emotions of other people to be felt, sold as the key to instigate a more collective and empathetic society. The 'patch' also can be employed in the work-world to derive profit from previously non-commodifiable behaviour, as an entertainment device and as a means for surveillance. The film presents a moment in the future when the widespread use of the device has already induced a marked neuro-plastic modification of its users' brains through which their abilities have changed, leading to far-reaching alterations in relationships between self and oth-

ers, between individual and collective, and also between subjects and their economic survival. Gilligan's work is a speculation on the possible effects of digital technology in a sci-fi setting. The dematerialization of working processes and leisure here opens up a future scenario of endless possibilities for surveillance, manipulation and instrumentalization.

If you follow this path, dystopian scenarios of a complete loss of control and freedom are not too far away. The media scientist, Alexander Galloway, for instance, assumes that not only power relations, but also ideological views, are already embedded in the formal structures of the internet.^[15] Thus, in his 2004 book, *Protocol. How Control Exists After Decentralization*, he argues that the basic principle of the internet is control, not freedom. He views the internet not as a metaphor or a theory, but as a technical diagram. In his view, the power of control resides in the technical protocols enabling network connections and disconnections (for example, TCP/IP, DNS, and HTML).^[16] He speaks of "distributed control" that moves within lateral networks. McKenzie Wark formulates it even more fundamentally, namely that the all-encompassing logic of informatization of all conceivable contents is already assuming an expropriating function exercising control.^[17] The extension of power over social behaviour employs digital and technological infrastructures used in surveillance and data-storage initiated by the economy and the State. Each medium also possesses an intrinsic logic; the superstructure of technological development, however, composes the narrative in which the media are embedded.

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[15] Basically, Galloway argues that such protocols are the way that control is exercised in our globalized "network society", one where power is "distributed" laterally, rather than being hierarchically structured, stratified, and centralized or even (merely) "decentralized". A distributed network is a rhizome rather than a tree, in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari. Note that, although Deleuze and Guattari often seem to be praising the rhizome in opposition to hierarchical "arborescent" models, Deleuze also sees rhizomatic structures as key to the "society of control", which increasingly replaces Foucault's "disciplinary society" as the way in which power is exercised in our postmodern world. Galloway expands on this Deleuzian ambivalence.

[16] HTML/Hypertext mark-up language: Program code for web-sites; Http/Hypertext transfer protocol: the protocol, with which the network works; TCP/IP transmission control protocol/Internet protocol.

[17] Using the concept of the 'informatization of work', we can understand the influence of the digital information and communication technologies on the modern work-world. In the informatization of work, it is a matter not only of the use of computers and the fact that working life can no longer be conceived without them, but especially of their influence. In this way a new form of economic life arises: new management and control processes, new work-structures and a new form of education.

Eventually, the reference system of art, dematerialization, and politics could be sketched out in such a way that the dematerialization of economic and social relations facilitates biopolitical mechanisms of control and guidance which are not only reflected upon, but also thought through in art, taking them one step further.

We can summarize that the notion of the concept of dematerialization in art has changed from developing a strategy critical of the power of the market and the modernist canon by reducing material in favour of ideas and concepts (1960s/70s), to exploring the complexities of the digital society to which people are exposed today, such as mass surveillance, data storage or algorithms.

While in the 1960s and 1970s dematerialization served as a socially subversive practice picked up by conceptual artists as “Utopian extreme”, it today represents an elementary factor of corporate and governmental control and

suppression, which leads to critical—and in many cases dystopian—perspectives of the future being formulated in contemporary art and theory.

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Nina Möntmann

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Institution As Interface

This text is the result of an online conversation that took place on 13th and 17th April. Participants were Anders Paulin, Maryam Fanni, Thomas Paltiel, Goro Tronsmo and Kim West.

The text has been edited by Anders Paulin.

Anders Paulin

Anders Paulin has been directing 40+ productions at theatres as Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, Nationaltheatret in Oslo, Stockholm City Theatre, Theater Basel and The Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. Lately his work has been exploring performative protocols based on narrative and performer as interface and medium, for example in the accumulative performance/archive *Three White Soldiers* together with Johan Forsman. 2014-16 he did the research project *Non-Mimetic Performativity* at the Danish School of Performing Arts in Copenhagen. In 2019 his publication *Twin Figure of Mimesis* was released by Skogen Community Press, Gothenburg.

Goro Tronsmo's praxis lies between visual art, performing arts, architecture, curating and writing. Her work is concerned with extracting and staging institutional structures through large scale context specific living installations, film and manipulation of graphic design. Since 2013 she has worked on a project series called *Staged Institutions*, with projects consisting of architectural installations, mediastrategy and a durational live-activating of the installations. As a curator she i.a. developed the structure for an exhibition context of the music festival ØYA in Oslo 2014 and 2015, using the implementation of the festival to a new urban area to comment on the festival's impact on the city development. As a performing arts critic she often deals with exposing the institution's mediastrategy as part of the performance of the production in public space.

Maryam Fanni is a graphic designer based in Stockholm and Gothenburg. She runs her own design studio specializing on printed matter and book design for cultural and non-profit clients, alongside research-based artistic, often collective, practice focusing on right to the city and ownership in the built environment. Since 2018 she is a PhD student in Design at HDK Academy of Design and Crafts with a project on signage systems as technology of control of the aesthetic order in the city.

Kim West is a critic, based in Stockholm. PhD in Aesthetics from Södertörn University, 2017: *The Exhibitionary Complex: Exhibition, Apparatus, and Media from Kulturhuset to the Centre Pompidou, 1963–1977*. Writes regularly for Nordic online arts journal *Kunstkrav*, as well as other publications, in Sweden and internationally. Is a convening member of the independent research group *Agentur*, currently working on the research project "The Aesthetics of the Popular Front".

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studio nāv consists of Carl Fransson and Thomas Paltiel. As a practice the studio engages in the expanded realm of architecture, both in research and through spatial designs. The duo is based in Stockholm and have worked and exhibited at numerous venues including The Venice Biennale, Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York, and The MAK Center for Art and Architecture in Los Angeles.

Anders

Paulin

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Anders

Welcome. I am very happy that we could meet like this, given the current conditions.

The thematic frame of this conversation is *Institution as Interface: The negotiation of Public Sphere*. For me this is a key logic for how I understand what the art institution is about: A tool to negotiate visions of that which we share in common. The conversation will be part of the publication *art-as-practice / art-as-object*. The title associates to a connected perspective: on the one hand art defined as a practice, which to a large extent is a concern of the individual or collective subject doing the art, and on the other the art object as the temporary manifestation of this practice in a public context. In this sense the notion of art object does not relate to the material status of a work, but rather to a certain **dislodgement from the artistic subject**. The art object in this logic is something that doesn't necessarily belong to the artistic subject, it is a thing exterior to the artist as such. In this context the institutional apparatus is a central instrument, because **the subject can speak for itself whereas the object needs mediation**, and this mediation I think is a central function and task of the institution. This figure of thought owes a lot to Hannah Arendt; that politics is somehow what appears in public. This is something that I as an individual, or we as a collective, have difficulties providing by ourselves. We need some sort of instrument for this operation to work.

Maybe we start with a short introduction of who we are, since we don't know each other.

Thomas

I'm part of studio n v together with Carl Fransson. Our background is in architecture so everything we do deals with spatial questions. We haven't really worked that much with architecture in a traditional sense, we've done installations, scenographies, film, and also theoretical work. We often work in collaborations—even if we are a duo, we like to expand this to a larger body of participants. Two formative projects for us have been two public memorials: one for the holocaust and a regional memorial for the massacre by Breivik at Utøya 22 July. The public negotiation of memory as a collective thing, the existence and non-existence of this, and how it is materialized in memorials has been very influential for our work and how we think architecture and space, and has led to a strong interest in the public and how the public is negotiated.

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Maryam

I am a graphic designer, and have been working a lot with publications, designing books and other kinds of printed matter. I've worked for cultural institutions and non-profit organisations, and also collectively, mainly around questions of right to the city and ownership in public space. I've recently moved back to Stockholm from Gothenburg where I'm a doctoral student at the Academy of Crafts and Design, writing a dissertation on signage systems as aesthetic steering documents for how signs in the public sphere are presented and articulated.

Goro

I'm originally from the theatre field, and made productions within the touring system until 2010. After that I've been mostly in the visual arts field. I have always

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worked context- and site specific, incorporating the hosting institution as part of the work. Coming from the context of touring between the black boxes of the performing art world, and the structural relations connected to that, I've found that the touring and funding systems are essentially formed for a certain type of production. So opening alternative readings of spaces as part of my artworks has been about finding new ways to talk about the format of production.

Kim

I'm a critic and researcher within the field of aesthetics, art history and so on. I did my PhD in 2017 on something that I called *The Exhibitionary Complex*. It was an attempt to devise a set of concepts for thinking of the art exhibition and the art institution as media systems, and for understanding how they sought to respond to shifts in the media landscape in the 60s and 70s. It was a kind of empiric and specific investigation where I traced the development of a project related to Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden: the project to devise a new kind of museum, rethinking what the modern museum of art would be and replacing it within a widened notion of culture and a different relationship to other art forms and media.

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This year I am working with an independent research group called *Agentur*. It's a collaborative and interdisciplinary project in which we are studying something we are calling the "aesthetics of the popular fronts". Essentially we're looking at cultural histories of anti-fascist organisations.

Anders

I am a dramaturg and director. This conversation is within the context of a structure that I have initiated called *Para*

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Institutional Models. My background and competence is mainly theatre, and for a major part of my career I was working in rather big theatre institutions. I think from that I have inherited an interest in, and concern for, what that institution is, the problems of it, and why I increasingly have come to think that it has a really important function. Throughout these 25 years the theatre institutions have also changed a lot, to a point where I would say that even if they today still are called institutions, it is very doubtful if that actually is what they are. So, starting the structure *Para Institutional Models* had to do a lot with my perception of how institutions increasingly have ended in an identity crisis of sorts. What actually is an art institution today? What would be its task and responsibility? And what is it that they are supposed to be good at?

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Maryam

I think counter narratives have been very useful in my own practices. And I read what you are saying in relation to that; to find ways of working to counter things that are already existing and established as a means to articulate something that is beyond.

Goro

My practice is all based on the institution not working (that is, in Anders' definition of an institution). And that's usually when the art work becomes the best, when the curating is at its worst and the institution is most non-existing. What I bring into this context is a negotiation of what the institution's potential could be, and this negotiation becomes the work itself. I am on board with your definition, but that doesn't mean that I think the institutions should necessarily be mediating

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the object, and I also in one way disagree that the practice needs that. The touring system of the performing arts is favouring easily transportable solo performances for black boxes, preferably with scenography that fits in your hand luggage. Undoubtedly it's the best way to get a career within the performing arts field, and that in itself is really so defining a certain type of object. I've been concerned with the question of when the institution itself starts to lock the object into something read as an autonomous thing, in a different way than it was intended. Because of the history of the institutions not behaving as institutions, there is a parallel praxis of the artists creating an apparatus around themselves to negotiate the non-existing institution, and this has opened up a new discourse.

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Kim

That's an interesting approach, and a very nice way of framing a problem. I'm also very interested in hearing more concretely what you mean when you say that the art work is best when the curating is the worst. I think you are probably right.

If we speak of institutions in a non-qualified way, there is a sort of wild polysemy to the word. It can really cover almost anything. But if we talk about institutions in the visual arts field, that unavoidably brings to mind the genre of institutional critique, a genre which of course had a major influence on any art practice since the 70s. One key model for thinking of what institutional critique set out to do in the 70s is the text *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* by Brian O'Doherty. There, O'Doherty claims that what the gallery space—which would include the public art institution—does is 1)

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to separate the art work from the rest of the social world, and 2) to impose a strict model of spectatorship as passive contemplation.

I'm mentioning this in order to get to another term that you propose, which I think is very interesting in this context: the notion of the **interface**. One thing I try to do in my research is to devise a way out of, or to circumvent O'Doherty's conceptual set, which essentially describes the institution as a container which isolates the art work from social reality, and instead to think of the art institution or the exhibition as media: as something that mediates art works, rather than separating them from reality. Something that realises art works publicly. This unlocks a whole different set of problems. If we think about the institution as something that isolates the art work from social reality, then the critical task of the institutional critical artist becomes to negate the institution, to liberate oneself from this prison which the institution is, in order to realise the art work in social reality. So art should take to the streets, art should be saved from this great tomb or this graveyard which is the museum. This is the whole avant-garde tradition, in fact, which is about "rescuing" art from the museum, "escaping" from the institution, and so on. If you frame the institution instead as an interface, then you face a different set of problems. How do institutions operate as media? How do they interface with other media? How do shifts in the landscape of different media forms confer new tasks, new roles on how art institutions work? This change of perspective also unlocks a different set of spatial metaphors. In the institutional critique model the spatial metaphor is the container, the white cube,

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whereas in the interface model the spatial metaphor would be let's say the field, or the zone, or something like this. And that in turn entails other ways of thinking of spectatorship.

Anders

There is something interesting with the idea of an interface as operating simultaneously as a connector and a separator. It's this threshold that both separates and connects, like a membrane. Which is also a basic condition for institutional critique, you need this threshold to frame and distinguish something in order to say "this is art and not reality".

Thomas

The separation between the social political world beyond the institution, of course can be very problematic, locking it down, and solidifying things without maintaining or mediating or activating it. At the same time a lot of what we try to do in studio nav's work is trying to understand what needs to be introduced into a context to create a separation, but a productive form of separation; to make something visible that is not a continuation of the normative socio-political reality.

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Maryam

If I may pick up on the spatial metaphors it made me think of a text written by artist and performer Sarah Vanhee. I think is called *Fantastic Institutions*. She starts by stating that politicians are not pleased by movements, they are pleased by buildings, and departing from that she explores this kind of inverted suggestion that cultural venues should be not buildings but holes. I think her exploration of holes is quite intriguing and interesting, because it suggests so many different things. She

talks about the cave, the fire place, the hole as a hiding place, a protective shelter and so forth. But also that we have to become moles, and moles don't see, they have to activate other senses.)

I think that's an interesting and very practical way to suggest a way of being together, that I also read together with writings of, for example, Silvia Federici on the commons. Federici has been writing a lot about co-opted commons, and commodity producing commons, basically the risk of commons being co-opted by a capitalist system, and she has also been trying to define what an anti-capitalist common is. She usually departs from studies on lobster fishing and cow meadows in Switzerland and these kind of structures that I think are very relevant for cultural activities, venues and art practices. A central point is that she prefers talking about commoning as a verb instead of just common as a noun, locating the quality to practice and commitment, that commoning must involve a commitment in contrast to a wealth or a resource.

Anders

That's interesting in a lot of different ways. The alternative to the building of the institution often tends to be something that is highly flexible and nomadic, that can appear anywhere in any form at any time. As I see it, an important aspect of the institution is its gravity, the over time accumulative gravity of something that provides the stickiness and sedimentation of the institution. And it is problematic that the only alternative to the institution as "prison" is the completely free fluid circulation and acceleration of things. In that perspective, this idea of the cave or the hole as an alternative point of gravity is very in-

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teresting. And also the tactile quality of the thought, there is a parallelity to the exclusively visual focus of the white cube.

Maryam, you recently did a commission for the art museum in Västerås that I find quite interesting. Could you tell us a bit about that?

Maryam

In 2019 the art museum of Västerås were presenting an exhibition on Guerrilla Girls, the American collective of anonymous artists who are working with posters to talk about gender and race etc. in the art world and of course also in politics beyond the art world. In relation to this exhibition they asked me and another designer/artist to respond to Guerrilla Girls by making posters that somehow go in dialogue with, or tribute, their work. One of the museums missions is to work with public art, and to present art commissions in public space. So since the show was circulating around posters they came up with the idea to book the advertisement boards that you can see in any bigger town or city, and show the commissioned posters on these boards.

Some of the billboards have one front side and one back side, the front side being what you see when you are driving a car, and the back side is the side that you only see as a pedestrian. And these back sides are the ones the municipality is allowed to use.

Anders

So Clear Channel provides not only the billboards and posters, but also the actual bus shelter?

Maryam

Exactly. And this is one of the main arguments that is central to their busi-

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ness, that they provide cities with outdoor furniture. So for the city it's cheaper, they don't need to provide furniture because Clear Channel would do that, and also change the glasses when they break and so on. They also pay the city a certain amount every year, in Västerås it is about one million Swedish crowns, which really is not much for the amount of advertisement boards that they have and the profit that they make. This is their business model.

Usually these spots are used to announce municipal events or information. The idea was that the museum could book them for a short period of time, so basically that was basis for the commission. I had been interested for a long time in advertisement in public space and companies like Clear Channel and JCDecaux who own these boards on a global level. So when I took on this commission, where I could produce posters that would be shown in public spaces on Clear Channel owned billboards, I decided that I wanted to use the boards to talk about the space and the conditions for it. The poster series that I produced talk about the contract between the city of Västerås and the company Clear Channel, I am using the voice of the company, where they are talking about the contract—in this case what they were announcing on their website—saying “This contract means that we are going to totally dominate Västerås”, and other quotes and bits of information about the company and what the contract means. There's a lot to say about these kind of contracts, that are completely normalized and placed in so many cities around the world, and surprisingly it is very seldom contested. I think it is because it's not part of the democratic model to allow situations

for negotiating these kind of contracts. It's just something that happens, without citizens even knowing.

I would say I'm sceptical to what kind of conversation you can bring up with the interface of these billboards. Obviously, they are programmed to function as this authoritative one way communication, so that's not where I locate the contribution of this piece. Rather this became the starting point to have a conversation about the role of Clear Channel in relation to the city of Västerås. For example, the local newspaper published three articles about this issue. We also arranged a public talk at the museum, and even if the museum doesn't have an established format for public talks, this event with invited researchers attracted a lot of people, all the seats were full. Partly because the local paper had been writing about it, but I think also because it somehow talked about ownership of public space

Now we are working on a book that puts Västerås in a larger context, and talks about Clear Channel and similar companies more in depth. Again, I'm not convinced by the advertisement board as a location for emancipatory communication. In general I never work in this large scale. I work and believe in much smaller scales. Or, it's not a question of scale, more of access obviously. For me it was more an investigation of what I could possibly do now that I was allowed access to this space for communication, because otherwise it would have costed thousands of crowns to access the advertisement boards.

Kim

You seem a little bit pessimistic about the outcome of this. I think it ap-

appears to have been remarkably successful, in the sense that you were able to generate opinion and public debate regarding the business model of Clear Channel and their monopolisation of a certain part of public space. It seems to confirm the validity of a rather classical model of the public sphere, no? You use these widely available interfaces to raise general opinion, and then there is a discussion that is picked up by the institutions of the public sphere, the museum and newspapers and so on. It's a fairly classical model that seems to have worked, to some extent at least. I am pretty impressed.

Maryam

I agree. I am not pessimistic about the outcome of the project, maybe I am even overly optimistic (*laughs*), and I really hope that people will challenge these companies and this business model. I'm also thinking about these scooter companies that have popped up for a while, there's a relation between all these companies that make profit in the public sphere. But one question that arises when you are using public space in this way, is that you locate outcome to the interaction between the by-passer and the billboard. And I don't think that's necessarily where insight takes place. I think that as by-passers we know how to relate to these billboards, and that how you look at an interface is a rather difficult thing to re-negotiate. I don't necessarily expect or hope that the bypasser would be able to register this as art, if you see what I mean.

Anders

If the posters produced any sort of disruption in how they were perceived?

Maryam

No, exactly. But I can clearly see

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that in other locations that discussion continues. So in that sense, it does mean something to communicate in public space. And that's also why it is a problem that we have billboards that only certain economies can access.

Anders

Thomas, you mentioned that studio n v has been working with memorials as a public negotiation of collective memory.

Thomas

Yes. As I said briefly in the beginning, we did a work departing from a competition for a regional memorial in Trondheim over the Breivik shootings. Trondheim is 500 km north of Oslo, so it is quite far away from the actual site where the event took place. There had also been a previous memorial commission which was bound to the Government Quarter in Oslo, where one of the attacks happened. When this competition came up we were interested in a couple of facts: there had passed some years since the event, so the memorial was separated from the event both in time and space, which was an interesting condition because we had the opportunity of following how the public discourse surrounding the event had evolved.

We also found the site of an open place next to the church interesting; a formal building that we wanted to be separated from and at the same time in a permeable way. So we created this really thin metal wall that suggested a form of fragile boundary or frame, not something meant to dominate, but rather to create a shelter from the city. As we often do, we also invited an artist to collaborate with us, in this case Lina Selander. We were sceptical and cautious of the idea of the memorial as a

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permanent intervention, so we asked Lina if she could introduce something that would suggest a temporal aspect. She proposed a sound-work that would be announced once a year, at the day of event, with a duration of the 3 hours and 9 minutes which was the time frame of the massacre.

Beyond this moment of exception the space would be left alone and everything that would normally happen there could happen. We didn't script it, we just wanted a space that somehow made a negotiation of the public realm visible. We imagined that the sound work would somewhat fail over time, so it would have its own life, and after ten years we would reassess what this space should be filled with. It was still such a short time after the event itself, the actual conversation was not over, and we wanted to keep the conversation of what had actually happened alive. I think this is maybe one of the biggest problems with most forms of artistic work, it is often reduced in a way that once the work is produced it's over and is not maintained. We wanted to make this aspect of maintenance or negotiation ongoing by saying that in ten years this space would need to be re-thought. We were in a competition with three other participants, and unfortunately the council was not interested in the proposal. The final piece ended up being a work with inscriptions of the thoughts of politicians and children about what happened and they will be forever inscribed.

Goro

Should I continue?

Anders

Yes, please.

Goro

I will talk about a three-part

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project called *Staged Institutions*, where I've been using architectural installation as a mode to negotiate what the surrounding context is doing with an art work. The first part was done at *Gallery 0047* in an old dairy factory in Grønland in Oslo, a neighbourhood mainly populated by non-ethnic Norwegians, located next to the newly constructed Barcode area and Opera house at the waterfront. At the time of the project this area had not yet been gentrified.

The gallery had got their funding for being a space that negotiated the relationship between art and architecture. The recent years before I did this work they had solved this task by simply programming either architecture or art exhibitions. They built gallery walls in the factory space, with a reception and a white cube, and the rest was rented out as studios to architects, so they didn't really negotiate anything. They were also complaining a lot about that their rent was going to get tripled and how they would get thrown out as gentrification evolved. So, I basically made a project around this whole context. I tore down the gallery wall, installed a shower and made a white cube into a loft architecture to show what would come in the future. By being a visual artist doing architecture, my own practice would also do this negotiation in-between the fields. I called the project *The Residency*, which was referring to residential parameters being used in the visual arts contexts, in which the artist during the residency gets the opportunity to formulate something new in their own work. The project also operated like this in that I invited artists who, in various ways, work a lot with context.

During the different events we

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changed this space into a number of supposed institutions. We had 18 residencies, and 27 different closed and public events, and at most of the events we changed the props in the installations and worked with total changes of the lighting. We filmed a music video, which was a fake, we did parties, sleep overs, there was a broadcast, it acted as a yoga studio, a screening room, lecture hall, and apartment, and in the end when we arranged a club people thought that this club had existed for years. For every event I changed the lighting, and the way the event was formulated in invitations and so on, so that people would have a totally different understanding of what the space actually was. I wanted to play with the illusion so that the audience would get confused, and only in the aftermath realise the series of different events and see the staged script.

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At the last event we revealed that the whole project was funded by me renting out my apartment in Berlin over Airbnb. So we were in fact doing this circle economy where rich hipsters in Berlin were essentially paying for the flight-tickets and food for the residents, in a valid economy of gentrification that was pushing up the value of rent in the area that the gallery was located in, and this way making gentrification happen even faster with this project.

The second staged institution was in an old post building in West Berlin. It was interesting to be inside of the factory architecture, since so many factories today are being used as art institutions. Also, this building being the actual former post building - the most important symbol of information and carrier of democracy before internet - now closed and out of use, gave

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the building a context that influenced the project.

My installation was inside this very beautiful functionalist architecture, with circles and angles that made the architecture choreograph the way that you would walk. This is also something I work with in developing my architectural installations, in order to make the spectator have its point of view from the inside of the art piece. The project was up for 1,5 years, with both me and other people living there for periods, causing the whole place to be perceived as a loft apartment. I thought about the questions that you proposed, Anders, about how we negotiate private and public in our art pieces. For me, it's very important that I also sleep in my art installations, waking up in the piece makes you relate to the space as your body, when you're waking up it's a domestic body, so you're reacting different to the space in that sense.

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I was also interested in these back rooms for art storage, which is a big part of the economy of commercial galleries. The actual shopping is happening behind the scenes, so the parties on the back side is usually a really big part of how the economy is staged. So I wanted to make this whole institution that would fit both for having a place to stay for artists who didn't have an economy for that, and for the funders to use it for different means. For the end of the project I invited 20 skaters and made this half pipe ramp, so they could use the whole installation as a large skate hall. Again this was an event where I tried to work with complete illusion, in both the way that I invite and the way that I host, so that the institution exists because I say it exists. It really was a skate

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hall during that day, and for the skaters it was totally abstract that I said “No, it’s an art piece,” yesterday it was a gallery.”

In the third work I wanted to do a project about the art educational institutions. I applied for a Masters in theatre at the Art Academy in Oslo in order to get access to the institution architecturally and structurally, and to make a project about it from within. During this time I was playing the director student, sometimes convincingly and sometimes maybe not, because I can’t be in character all the time. I developed a dogma film project, where I asked the acting students to play alter egos of themselves. During a whole year they had a parallel fictional character that also was going to the art academy, and that was working together with the manipulative directing student Goro, who likes to play with the borders of reality. Another part of the project was two performances that made the audience move around inside the building as a way of walking them through a parallel reading of the institution.

The staging of the institution also happened through a website which was a mock-up of the real KHiO site. You come to the site if you write *Oslo International Factory of the Arts*, with *Factory* instead of *Academy*. KHiO’s website is presenting the things that happen there as colour coded categories of theatre plays, dance performances, exhibitions, or achievements of staff and students. So my mock-up website was about exposing how the institution is forcing the art production to be in a sort of object matter. Also spatially the institution in its basic format is not at all opening up a negotiation of the art work or the institution itself. So the project was all very much

trying to expose the limitations of how the institution is making the art praxis into a certain way. At the same time I was trying to put the audience on the inside of it in order to see a different space parallel to the existing one. It’s like what I mentioned earlier, how my projects are at their best when the curating is bad. I think this was similar, I couldn’t have done this work at a place that didn’t have so many “institutional fails” as KHiO.

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Anders

Goro's description of her work at the art academy in Oslo got me thinking about the emerging field of artistic research. What happens with the increase of this mode of work, where artists used to working in galleries start doing PhD's at art schools, dealing with the public institution of an art education as a private gallery? For me this is really two different contexts. The gallery is a private space, whereas if you for example do a dissertation at an educational institution, that is a public procedure. The result of a dissertation belongs to the public, it doesn't exclusively belong to the artist in the same way as an art piece produced at a gallery does. I think that there is a confusion about this difference, also in the art educations themselves. Also, many of us are trying to replace the non-functioning institutions with private based practices, which I think is confusing things even more.

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Maryam

I think the dichotomy between private and public is complex and interesting to think about. But the dichotomization often doesn't serve you very well. Many projects I've

been involved with have been centred around ownership of housing, or public space, and in that context it is clear that the division between private and public is very seldom

that distinct. We have so many different varieties of private/public partnerships, and public owners operating just as private owners, or vice versa. I don't see the concept of the commons as a solution in any

sense, but I do think it's a helpful concept to add to that dichotomy because it suggests a third position, or a parallel logic of owning.

Anders

I agree. And I don't think that the dialectics of private/public necessarily has to do with dogmatically trying to position yourself in relationship to one thing or the other, everything will always oscillate and intersect between the positions. But as concepts they are two different things and not to be confused with each other, even if every actual practice will always intersect between them. Shopping malls are administered and organised as if they are private, but they are part of an infrastructure that in fact is public, but they are actually privately owned. I think your work with Västerås and Clear Channel is a very interesting example of how private ownership controls public infrastructure.

Kim, do you want to continue?

Kim

Yes. I thought I'd pick up on something that we mentioned earlier, the notion of the institution as interface. As we discussed earlier, when you speak about art institutions in the visual arts field, you automatically associate yourself with the tradition of institutional critique, which

comes with certain assumptions of the nature of the gallery space as a space of containment and isolation, and so on. So the critical task of the institutional critical artist becomes to transgress or transcend the institution, or to criticize it in order to subvert it. For me, this field of containment and flight or transcendence doesn't seem like a productive mode of understanding critically either contemporary institutional organisation, or contemporary artistic practices with respect to institutions. Instead I am interested in seeing what happens if you approach institutions as interfaces, or as a certain kind of media apparatuses.

To make a conceptual shift like this, to see exhibitions as media and institutions as apparatuses, poses a different set of problems. How do art exhibitions as media stand apart from other parts of media? What kind of experiences, what kind of social and aesthetic forms do they facilitate, that other media do not? On the other hand, how do exhibitions relate to other media apparatuses, and how do they integrate in other media networks? I got the basic idea of making such a shift from a certain tradition within architectural theory, where architectural historians and theorists try to discuss buildings and the built environment as media. Now, if we can look at a skyscraper or an office building as media, then we should be able to look at an art exhibition as media. What does a shift like that entail?

This was a problem that I wanted to approach in my dissertation. How can we devise another set of concepts in order to map out another kind of critical possibility, rather than this institutional critical containment/transgression framework? So,

I was actively looking for examples of institutional projects, art projects and so on which could be relevant to this problem.

At one point I read a discussion from the early seventies between a group of curators and museum directors published in the magazine *Museum*, published by Unesco's museological arm. Among the all male list of participants were some of the patriarchs of a certain kind of experimental European artworld: Harald Szeemann, Pontus Hultén, Eduard de Wilde, Michael Kustow, and several others. In that discussion someone—who I later learnt was Hultén—proposed a new kind of model for an art institution, a model where the museum was mapped onto a very rudimentary idea of what a computer looks like. The museum as an *Information Center*, it was called.

In an interview with Hultén in a French magazine from 1971, the same model is described and illustrated with a simple diagram showing four concentric circles. After some digging I learnt that that diagram was originally prepared for an internal Moderna Museet meeting in 1970, where it served as a sort of blueprint for the future activities of the institution. According to this model and this diagram, the museum is understood as a sort of media apparatus, or computer even, an information processor.

The first layer, the outer circle, is primary information. This would be a reception layer, an open space where flows of information and people would enter into the institution. Concretely you would have media stations, open large reception areas, libraries and that kind of facilities. The second layer would be a workshop or processing layer, where there would be instruments and tools to process the infor-

mation that was fed into the system. These would be publically available and accessible for processing any kind of information that streamed into the first layer. So essentially, the idea of open workshops inside the institution, that could be used by visitors, museum people and artists alike.

The third layer would be an interface layer, where selections of processed material from the first two layers were filtered up and organised into exhibitions. This would be the closest thing to a normal exhibition space. In the diagram it says "processed information": art exhibitions, films, music, dance, theatre. So, this is an extremely multidisciplinary conception of the exhibition and the institutional space. Finally, the fourth layer is the hard drive of the computer, where another processing would take place and some of the material displayed in the interface layer would be filtered once again, up into a core that would be the database. This is the museum's collection, a sort of memory for the whole system.

So, a gradual filtering of sorts would take place, in which information and material were processed, organised and presented, and then collected and inscribed into the memory core. This movement could also work in the other way, so that there would be feedback, the flow would be both centrifugal and centripetal: material stored into the memory layer could be taken down and reintegrated into exhibitions and so on in the interface layer.

This was the outline of a very general model that Pontus Hultén, Pär Stolpe, Öyvind Fahlström, Carlo Derkert, Peter Celsing and a wide network of people were devising with the aim of transforming

Moderna Museet into a new kind of cultural institution in the late 60s early 70s. The project dates back to the idea of transferring Moderna Museet to Sergels Torg, and move it into the not yet built Kulturhuset, which was originally conceived for housing an updated version of Moderna Museet. The Kulturhuset project fell apart for various reasons, and the subsequent project of radically transforming Moderna Museet at Skeppsholmen into an "information center" eventually also fell through because of lacking funding and various conflicts that broke out in the early 70s.

Today it sounds absurd, but they were actually really planning to do this, this was the working document for how they were modelling the re-organisation of the institution. And during a period of three-four years, from late 1969 to 1973, there was a

sort of laboratory situation at the museum, where they were experimenting with different kinds of public programming, new models of exhibition, new ideas of spectatorship, new relationships to artistic production etc, in anticipation of the realization of the new institution.

One key event that took place during this period was the establishment of an experimental annex to the institution called *Filialen*, which was directed by Pär Stolpe, a young poet and left-wing activist figure who began collaborating with Hultén and the Moderna Museet in the late 1960s. At *Filialen* they tried to re-conceive what an exhibition could be and how the function of an institution should be understood, in relationship to a new kind of information society. They sought to adapt the form of exhibition to the new modes of visual pro-

duction, the new media structures and the new social movements that were emerging. The idea was to devise an exhibition format adapted to new and more democratic means of cultural production.

The exhibitions that they organised were based on this spatial montage form, where there was a minimal concern with the art object as traditionally conceived; the artwork as a unique creation characterized by internal aesthetic complexity, and so on. Instead they were interested in understanding the exhibition as a framework for setting up critical examinations of new visual cultures. So rather than a presentation of art works, they set up this model for exhibition making as a sort of critical pattern-seeing, using new simplified means of visual production, such as the Xerox machine and more simple ways of developing film and photography. You did not go to an exhibition like this in order to immerse yourself in the experience of a complex aesthetic object, such as a sculpture or a painting, where the internal qualities are what you are trying to decipher and read. You go there to compare images, seen as semantic units in critical relations to other semantic units.

Throughout their programming during these years, exhibitions were also approached as a sort of broadcast media. *Filialen* was up for about two and a half years and during that period something like 40 or 50 exhibitions were produced on an extremely limited budget. So, a period of intense activity. And almost without exclusion all of these exhibitions were traveling exhibitions, made for being able to be mounted, dismantled, stuffed into the back of a van, driven off and set up at a li-

brary or a social centre or a cultural institution in another part of Sweden or Scandinavia. And essentially, since there was no interest in the art work as a unique entity, in principle you could reproduce these exhibitions. In principle, you could have had the opening of five copies of the same exhibition at the same time in five different places, although I'm not sure if something such ever took place.

One of the main critical projects was the idea of decentralisation, to counter certain kind of corrosive urbanisation and a centralisation of Swedish culture to the capital of Stockholm. So a decentralisation in a basic political sense, but also as a media strategy, as opposed to a centralised media landscape, where state media and a limited number of commercial forces controlled the main outlets of mass media. Instead of this you would have decentralised media, where anyone could become a transmitter, and where the media structure itself would be democratized.

This was something that the group *Bildaktivisterna*, that were close collaborators with Pär Stolpe at *Fililalen*, were experimenting with. They were a group of photographers and media people who set up a collective for thinking of new modes of organising exhibitions. *Fickutställningar* worked as an activist group, and participated in the many social movements of this period: demonstrations, protests, strikes etcetera. They would have a whole network of photographers working with them, and a group of people with mopeds. As soon as a roll of film was exposed someone would jump on a moped, drive off to their lab in a garage in Vasastan and immediately develop the images. And then the same evening

after the protest or demonstration they would mount a micro exhibition in order to provide a kind of counter-information feed about the social events that were taking place, since the mass media representations of the social movements they were engaged in did not correspond to their own experience of them.

So they created this exhibition format they called *Fickutställningar*, pocket exhibitions, as a counter information feed, a radically lightweight, quick, easy produced, responsive and also collaborative mode of exhibition making. The exhibitions would serve as counter measures against what they perceived as a completely ossified and irrelevant institutional field, with classical museums and so on, but also as a critical corrective to mass media output. Similar lightweight models for decentralisation was also the core of the early experiments of *Riksutställningar*, the Swedish traveling exhibition agency, which was conceived precisely as a program for decentralisation. So this is a deep Swedish history, which has to do with a certain moment of welfare state experimentalism, and a faith in the possibilities of what a progressive cultural policy could achieve.

Back then the question was how to counter a centralised media structure, and a certain authority or control over the means of production. That is no longer the case today, of course. The back drop now is no longer centralised or even decentralised media, or the lack of access and outlets, but a fully distributed media structure. And the problem today is that distributed media have been harnessed as tools of control and exploitation under post-digital conditions. A wildly different situation. So how do we

relate back to this tradition of experimentation today, within a completely different media environment?

One thing that still might be interesting to think with from this period is this idea of conceiving of the institutional apparatus as an integrated media system, where you would take control over all of the different links in the system, which is what *Bildaktivisterna* and *Filialen* did. They set up a very simple means of production, display, distribution and reception, and attempted to assert control over all of the different parts of the system. This is a concern that we must face today: if we do not assert control over the media through which we produce and disseminate cultural forms, then we will be subjects to the forces that control media today. And these are more intense and monopolised today than at any other point in history, I would say.

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Anders

I wasn't aware of this history before I read about your work. It is stunning to realise to what extent these examples have been formative for projects that I have been working with for the last ten years, where a main objective has been to negotiate the economy activated within a theatre production. In 2010 I did a curatorial theatre production called *Temporary National Theatre* at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen together with architect Tor Lindstrand, where we worked in a similar kind of logic. Instead of thinking of scenography, costume and light as a design, with a supposed transcendent capacity to express a certain interpretation of a given narrative, we devised a really flexible tool box for a collaborative negotiation of what a national art institution could be. And that tool box was

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down to the concrete images extremely similar to a lot of the examples from *Filialen*; how we worked with flexible set walls to be able to reshape the space in half an hour between the afternoon and evening program, the pattern-based idea of composition, the whole set of ideas is really closely related.

Kim

When you start looking at these concepts you quickly realise how this framework that I started out talking about, the institution as a container or limit, very rapidly recedes from view, as something quite irrelevant for critically thinking different possibilities and problems. Instead you wind up with another set of problems. I think that one needs to be very careful and have the proper space and time to unfold what could be a contemporary mode of returning to these models today. We mentioned earlier the relation between the art object and the commodity form. This is also something that belongs to the same kind of critical conceptual art tradition, where you state that the nature of the art work is betrayed by its commodity status. So the critical work of the artist must be to escape the commodity status of the art work. The concept of dematerialisation in conceptual art works in this way, for example: in order to liberate the art object and artistic practices from their inscription and co-optation within capitalist economy, you need to devise forms that somehow escape commodity status. And since the commodity is a thing, we create dematerialised, non-thing artworks. And then the economy becomes immaterial, so this dematerialisation ceases to function critically, and then we need to invent something else in order to escape the commodity status. I find that this

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is not always a productive way of posing the problem.

Anders

As I understand it, this also relates to this figure of thought that I keep coming back to, the relationship of art practice and art object. Which is not an either/or relation, or good and bad, it's more of an oscillation between two correlated poles, and the important thing is to not diffuse them. It's more like ebb and flow, it is a relation of interdependency. I think what increasingly happens today is that the art practice is what generates the economy in the generic value of creative labor. What is generating economy is artists doing things, and as long as this labor is communicated, value is produced. This logic also has a risk of leading to exhaustion. **Partly because it is my mental work that is the value, which is never separated from myself.** But there is also something about the gravity of the object that is important. As long as everything remains just discourse it's very difficult for anything to sediment.

Kim

That raises the question of how you use the word practice. We could have a strong understanding of it, and discuss it perhaps as praxis, as something that is inherently political, in the sense that it's opposed to the labor form. And if we don't then it's an abstract concept, with different uses. It depends on how we understand practice. Is it a qualified concept that describes a certain kind of human, creative activity, or is it a general concept?

Anders

That is partly my point. I think we tend to use the notion practice in a general way, we tend to say "in my artis-

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tic practice, I am busy with this and that", rather than saying "I'm making performances". With or without being conscious of it, we are dealing with the concepts, but in a diffused way, without knowing exactly what precise definition we imply. And without paying attention to the difference between, for example, practice and labor as two different concepts. This generic way of talking about artistic practice risks turning the practice into labor. We talk about performances as productions, but very often they're in effect transformed into the opposite of production, a continuous labor that gets less and less capable of actually producing something.

Maryam, you mentioned that in the work in Västerås you didn't have a strong faith in the emancipatory potential of the actual billboards as medium, and that you believed more in the discursive part of that work. What would that work have been without the billboards? If you would have done just the discursive parts?

Maryam

I think one central thing about that project is to occupy space that is the property of Clear Channel. In other projects, I guess in a way, I have been doing just the discursive part. Some years ago I was running a study circle with a colleague of mine on the same topic, that didn't include the artistic or spatial aspect, it was only reading and discussions. But the very central part of this project was to make use of that space, and try to understand how it can be negotiated.

Thomas

I guess it has to do with an audience as well. **In your study circles you would be fellow practitioners or others who want**

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to gain a certain understanding, whereas in the case of the posters it's a distribution of this knowledge in a public sphere. This goes back to the distribution question that Kim was speaking about, there is a form of counter story in some way. The framework of the Clear Channel apparatus, or the interface, legitimizes what's inside of it, as opposed to if you're guerrilla posting on top of the surface, which would make it lose legitimacy to certain audiences.

Maryam

Yes, that's the whole thing. The content that is being distributed is a contract that is public, it's a public document that doesn't become public very often.

This was also the main argument as to why Clear Channel was not able to stop the poster series. Their contract with the city gives them the right to decide what is appropriate and not to put up on the billboards, so that whole discussion was something that I wanted to bring up by the act of proposing to put the content of this public contract on display in the public. This also raises questions within the municipal organs, that have different or even colliding interests in this kind of action, because obviously the municipality has signed this contract with Clear Channel and therefore some part of the municipal organisation is very loyal to the company, whereas other parts, for example the museum, are more interested in a critical discussion. So for me, the discursive part of the project operates on many levels, not only the public event at the museum, but also the public discussion throughout the whole production of the project.

Anders

I think there is also something here that relates to the notion of disruption.

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tion. Since for me the negotiation of what we share is a central function of the institution as an apparatus, then in order for it to be a negotiation there has to be a disruption. Or else the logic is rather an administration of the present. So what renders this disruption possible? The way I understand it, this is a central way of thinking of it. On another note, the specific location of the billboards also address a question of the relationship between place and space. I think we tend to talk about public space and forget the place. There is a big difference between a square and the internet. In the context of the globalisation discourse, what is the actual place of public space? I think this is a very important question that also plays out in a very large range of scales.

Thomas

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The public space being about a certain accessibility, whereas the place more about visibility?

Anders

Yes, but it also has to do with choice. Public space is not only something that I choose, it is also something that I am exposed to, whether I want it or not. So I get exposed to things that I have to negotiate, whereas the virtual space is always a choice. Except for spam, but that's another topic.

Kim

I was going to pitch in on Maryam's project. I think it's a very good work, and I get curious about how you think of the efficiency of the project. That has to be a main concern, no? There is a very clear problem in the project, it deals with a certain monopolisation of public sphere by specific interests, and also the politics of information around this.

PIM

If I may be allowed to speculate, then normally there would be a whole democratic process by which a city like Västerås decides to buy a service like this from a corporation like Clear Channel, and consequently sell off public space. On the other hand my impression is that processes like these are rarely truly public, and therefore not really democratic, **decisions are made without the public ever really understanding that a decision** was being made, or what was at stake in the decision, and so on. So there is a very clear and evident point in simply stating: "This is what you sold, this is the contract you signed, were you aware of this?". It is to **open a space of antagonism**. I think your term of **disruption** is in the same field. How does that become effective?

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There is a crucial difference between, let's say, what kinds of social forms are implied by, on the one hand, the urban public space and on the other hand the semi-public space which is internet, which is today monopolised by a very small number of major corporations. Precisely as you say, **the public space remains a space of contingency; you're exposed to possible antagonism, you have to mediate it, you have to negotiate it, you have to find a way of dealing with it. Whereas the major model for the social form of the internet space today is a kind of community.** There are all sorts of concepts of talking about this, like filter bubbles and so on. You only enter into relationship with other people or actors, which you are already in some kind of agreement with. So the place of antagonism is precluded, and this is a major, major, major civic problem.

Anders

I was thinking a bit of what is the actual difference between the commons and what we call public? This is for me an interesting question, because it seems like a lot of us are using the idea of the commons as a possible strategy to deal with the public, so to speak. But what are the mechanisms addressed by the two different notions. I think maybe there is something about the difference between "being" and "doing". As I've understood it, the "we" of the public, whether we talk about it in an ancient Greek tradition or in the context of the French revolution, has to do with citizenship. So the rights connected to public space are somehow connected to citizenship, whereas the rights connected to the commons are defined by work. It is the people that are working this space that defines the use of, regardless of ownership.

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Kim

Is that the definition of the commons?

Anders

I would understand it like that. I have rights to the Swedish public space because of my Swedish citizenship, that an Algerian citizen wouldn't have. But Algerian citizens have the right to pick blueberries here to feed themselves in the same way as I do. Allemansrätten is not connected to citizenship. There's something about this that actualizes different categories, where both have their possibilities and limitations.

There is an e-flux text by Celine Condorelli called *Life Always Escapes*, that discusses the transformation of British Commons, from being an area of work to a site for leisure and recreation. And also the parallelity between this transformation

and the development of exhibition modes, where museums and department stores start to put things on display in similar ways during the same period of time, and how this is mirrored in the imagery of the commons as recreational space.

Maryam

I guess that just as private and public aren't completely separable, as we today see collaborations in-between the private/public a lot, in the same sense we could maybe think of public/common as a combined concept, as way to think of shared resources.

Anders

What would that imply?

Maryam

That a publicly owned resource, like a public library, can also invite for shared practices in various ways. But I also see many risks with commons as a concept. In this sense I think Silvia Federici's writings on the risks of the commons are quite useful to think about co-opted commons, that suggests voluntary work for free and those categories of structures that are not so useful in terms of redistribution of resources.

Anders Paulin

Maryam Fanni

Thomas Paltiel

Goro Tronsmo

Kim West

Rainbow Wrasse

The

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Francis McKee is an Irish writer and curator working in Glasgow. He is Director since 2006 of the CCA, Glasgow, and a lecturer and research fellow at Glasgow School of Art. Since 2011 he has been working as lead researcher on an AHRC research project – *The Glasgow Miracle: Materials Towards Alternative Histories*. He curated the Scottish participation at the Venice Biennale with Kay Pallister in 2003. From 2005 to 2008 he was also curator of Glasgow International Festival of Contemporary Visual Art. He has written and co-published extensively on the work of artists linked to Glasgow, and has recently published two books—*How to Know What's Really Happening* (Mophradat/Sternberg, 2016) and *Even the Dead Rise Up* (Book Works, 2017).

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Francis

McKee

Dear Leila

We arrived last night in a rainstorm. Winding our way through muddy trenches and cuttings for hours before we surfaced at the back of a vast building. The horses were taken away and stabled while we were led through dim corridors to our quarters. I fell asleep instantly without exploring my room and had that odd feeling of waking and not knowing where I was in the world. And yes, there is internet!!! My machine tells me I've got a three-hour ration per week. I'll write offline and send you more in bursts...

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*(I miss you)**Leila—me again!*

Ok—I'm writing quickly here. Just been walking around the building. It's breakfast time and everyone is gathered in an upstairs balcony—I think it may have been a 'food court' once (the building itself is the old Glasgow Airport terminal). There's a rota of course, and everyone cooks at some point during the week and cleans—either the kitchens or the other areas of the building. I'm on the rota from tomorrow.

From the big windows you can look across a vast plain towards a distant horizon. They dug up the main runways and now they're full of crops—I can see people bending along the furrows as I'm writing this... I'm down for that too, I don't mind but the rain...! The sky is sludge and the rain just keeps falling—forty days and nights of rain. The landscape is brown—tilled earth everywhere, waiting for the greenness the crops will bring.

I remember being in an airport when I was a child. It was a forest of human legs and me holding on to my father's hand for dear life. He took me to the big windows and we watched the airplanes turn on the runways in slow motion as they lined up and then roared off into the sky. Now it's hard to believe everyone used them, going somewhere just for a few days—impossible! It took me three weeks to get here and I'm staying for two months. I hope those vegetables they're picking are tasty...

X Uschii

Habibi...

So. Those first two messages were indulgent. This is a logbook for the week. I'll use the rest of my ratio for searches. First: my disappointments. There are no dogs—I'd hoped some might have survived up here but everyone says not. There are bees though—hardy and productive—but does that mean there are plenty of flowers??

Now the good things:

I met my curator this morning—Agnes Lozac'h—an amazing person. She's subtle, quick and intelligent. Within a few minutes my head was spinning as she described the origins of the museum. After the great floods and the 2042 hurricanes the airport was decommissioned, though in truth it had barely been used for many years. At first it was repurposed as a sanatorium—the region was badly hit with disease as the water laid waste to everything. But gradually the beds emptied and, same as everywhere, the great transition began. Solar power, waste not, work brigades, the new medieval, refugees from the burnt out zones...

Amid all the replanting of the runways, the airport apron was left empty and the terminal building evolved as a public forum, a meeting place for the inhabitants of the new shelters and caravans that were springing up in its hinterland. It was the only space big enough for large-scale convocations, or the weekly market or religious festivals.

The iconoclastic revolt in 2045 determined the fate of the building. The director at the time, Adam Kirk, was an

apostate. He knew many of the great collections had been decimated over the previous decades from the disastrous subsidence of the British Museum and the Tates, undermined by floods and revolt. As the same thing happened in Scotland he assembled a team of agents to rescue what they could, hoping that, one day, people would distinguish between commodities and art. Not so much survived it seems—one or two magical things, but the waters went high here and much of the rest got buried in the collapses. Agnes said she'll keep the remainders a surprise for the moment because there is a presentation next week. In the meantime (and I guess for all my time here) I'll be working alongside her in the physic garden—that is one of her curatorial specialisms—'one of the founding elements of museums in the first place' she said.

X Uschii

Dearest Uschii

You know I'm reading your emails. I love the formality and tradition of the form. I'm glad, in a way, that we can't afford the immediacy of chat because I can hear you thinking in these letters.

I don't have much time to reply these days though. Work is non-stop as we feel we're near a breakthrough. We're working on a newly found mutation of the *ideonella sakainesis* — my god it's a real beast (for a microbe!). It's hungry for plastic, ravenous even. The problem is the plastics are slowing its cell division, killing it really, no stamina.

Your description of the museum reminded me of Charles de Gaulle. There, of course, the planes still land for presidents and generals. But in the vast abandoned areas a true monastery evolved: austere, spiritual, a total renunciation of the object and the spectacle. If your journey continues then you should make it a real pilgrimage and head there, however long it might take. Which reminds me... have you seen any rainbow wrasse? I've heard they rule supreme in the east Atlantic, tell me it's true!

Love, Leila x

Leila

It was so good to hear from you—I wanted to reply immediately but I kept discipline and recorded life for you when I could. Your beastie (as they say here) sounds impressive and tragic. My gardening is beginning to rival your pursuits though: Agnes has introduced me to the research constituents, locals from the surrounding caravans. They visit in the morning and work closely with a fungal colony that extends far beyond the garden. There are roughly twenty researchers: they microdose and then link to the mycelium threads through a fine web of cuts on their forearms. I'd heard of this in Preston but only as a rumour. Here, it's a daily reality. It's all based on the Dorsett theory of junk genetics: activating latent codes, reanimating fossil DNA, merging with the colony. For the first few weeks Agnes led the researchers but now they guide her work, logging their discoveries and mapping the next steps—she calls it 'curatorial transference'.

The rain eased off finally on Wednesday morning and suddenly the terminal was illuminated with sharp, precise light. Bennet and Maha, Agnes' co-curators, quickly announced just after breakfast that there would be a presentation in half an hour. We were directed towards one of the largest bays on the first floor, though most people had already headed to their tasks. There was a small painting on the back wall, a picture of an old woman feeding a dog. A man looked on from a doorway and above the lintel there was a large pot holding a flower. Near the painting, Bennet

had written 'Gabriël Metsu, c. 1654-1657' on the wall. The light poured in as the curators retreated, leaving a few of us standing in some disarray unsure how to deal with this thing. I know you've told me about seeing great paintings before but still, I was totally unprepared for the shock. The quality alone was difficult to absorb—how did they make this? The richness of the colours—so many browns, seemed right for this landscape but gradually the blue of the old woman's apron, the luminous white of her bonnet began to glow among all those dun colours. The real shock though, and I think the others were experiencing this too, was the question of how to look. I didn't know how to pay attention to this either as an object or as an image. I couldn't bring myself to move away from it. There was a later moment of vertigo when I began to see how closely cropped the image was within its frame and suddenly I sensed how this was simply a fragment of a larger reality. And a reality that is gone forever. The dog, of course, brought me close to tears. Extinction and all that.

I couldn't leave and I couldn't look continuously. I knew that I needed time. I sat down on the floor and tried to think. Slowly other elements of the thing became more apparent: there was some water damage in the top corner, the frame had taken a battering, the man at the doorway was probably the old woman's husband, there was a light source inside the house behind him that made no sense logically, there was a whetstone in the corner of the painting...

I was aware of Agnes sitting down beside me.

'What do you think then?'

she asked.

'I think I'm angry and I don't understand how that can be...' I replied.

'What is making you angry?'

'I'm not sure. It's something to do with paying attention. This painting demands more attention than I can give it. I can't respond in a few minutes... instinctively I knew when I saw it that it's wrong to show it here like this.'

'What do you mean...?'

'Its demands are greater than we are giving it. Something like this demands a decade or several of them, a lifetime.'

Agnes looked hard at me, her lips pursed in a silent reprimand. Eventually she explained how the painting would have to be shared by everyone and could only be seen on certain days. 'Perhaps', she said, 'we will all have to learn to have that experience together.'

I like Agnes and I think she may be right but I also know that she is wrong. At this rate, I would not survive in Charles de Gaulle.

Yours forever, Uschii.

Dear Leila

So much to tell you since my last. I know I sounded angry at the end and I was—the Metsu got to me in ways I never expected and raised all sorts of questions. Now that feels so far away. Something momentous happened last Saturday morning.

I woke to find the whole area covered in fog. The usual market, and all the noise that comes with it, was not to be heard. Everywhere was unusually empty. Heading down to the terminal apron I could hear voices arguing, and reaching ground level I could finally see that a large group of people had arrived. They didn't look like refugees from the south. Rather, they looked like a small regiment or brigade: alert, poised, and capable. Agnes, Maha and a taller person stood to one side of the group, in deep conversation with a stocky couple, who seemed to be the group leaders. The tall figure was Weever, the sub-director, and it was the first time I'd seen them. They looked at me as if they knew me already.

Agnes came over and explained that the roamers were looking to settle in the terminal and demanded rooms. This would entail removing the artefacts and public spaces so Weever was now confronting their demands and explaining the wider need for the space. The roamers' leaders, Rainborough and Fatou, were claiming that such ideas were against the common need—in this new world a level distribution of the land was the most important thing. Empty sheltered spaces such as the terminal were too precious to be kept as a luxury. Weever

appeared calm and unruffled by this development. Agnes though looked worried—perhaps torn between devotion to her artefacts and the demands for common space.

The meeting ended quickly and Weever announced there would be a public debate at the start of next week. In the meantime the roamers were to be hosted generously, allowing them to settle and prepare their arguments.

Now I know how subtly Weever was thinking. The terminal was to remain unoccupied while the local population found temporary space among their own huts and caravans to host the roamers. Sunday was spent in minor festival mode. Bonfires and barbeques punctuated the afternoon, and as everyone here is vegan the bees didn't lose their honey. The roamers blended in quite easily and told stories of their travels. Some just made the journey from the south beyond Preston but others had come from as far away as Spain, Morocco, Southern France, and Mali. Somewhere through the evening they visibly relaxed (the terminal-brewed beer did help) and the talk veered more to crops, the weather, the gleanings of cities and what was left of the nearby ruins. They asked so many of the same questions I had asked Agnes when I first got here: did the submarine fleet really exist; was it true the fleet lay at the bottom of the river and all the bombs too; had the city subsidence really left a vast crater; did the gleaners there really find a Viking hoard?

On Monday, the roamers sent petitioners to the curators apparently asking for the apron to be arranged in a particular configuration. Weever, Agnes, Maha and Bennet listened carefully and then went

into a huddle, emerging quickly and agreeing to the demands. Afterwards I had my daily meeting with Agnes but she wouldn't tell me anything about their plans or what was going to happen on Wednesday. She looked calmer than before, determined maybe, but refusing to crack under my sly interrogation. She did, though, work out a personal project for me that would extend over the rest of my time here. She had noticed my interest in the mycelium researchers and remembered that I'd wanted to know more about what they experienced when they were linked to the fungus. For my project, she wants me to interview each of them and record their visions. Then, using a theory from an old British philosopher, she wants me to investigate whether the dreams could actually be caused by future events—assuming that the interaction with the mycelium could mean the researchers are tapping into a backwards time flow. I don't have to produce any outcomes from this but, if I feel inclined, Agnes has made a space available for me (the same bay that held the Metsu), and one of the researchers is also a sign painter and has said he is willing to collaborate with me if I want to go in that direction...

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First thing on Tuesday I raided the strange library housed in the terminal—a beautiful space in what must have been the departures lounge. It's filled with light, lines of seats from its past life and a sea of odd mismatched shelves rescued from the fallen world outside. I tracked down the book Agnes mentioned—John Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*. It was published in 1927 and it's bonkers. I love it.

I just hope this amazing library and all the stored treasures survive the week. I still haven't seen more than one work...

Francis McKee

*All for now**xx Uschii xx*

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Art as practice

PIM

Dear Uschii

I'm in transit and only have this link for a few minutes... I've heard there is a hurricane heading your way and there are signs of it here already. Take care, please—I'm thinking of you

All my love

Leila

Art as object

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Oh Leila ...so much to tell you!

Weever, the curators, some of the researchers and a few fieldworkers sat cross-legged in horizontal lines across the terminal apron. Everyone else lined the space in a square and waited for the arrival of the roamers.

They came with noise: a small battery of kettledrums firing a sharp tattoo across the dead runways, forcing a breach in the crowd. Then the debaters entered, in dark red robes, drawn across their shoulders like a shawl. Once on the apron, they dispersed, each one standing in front of a seated opponent. The drums stopped and there was a tense silence with just the crows still squabbling on the roof of the terminal.

Fatou lifted a square of blue linen in the air and let it drop. When it hit the ground the roamers started. Each whirled in front of their opponent and thrust themselves forward to stare into their eyes. Each produced a string of beads that they coiled around their left arm and then let loose towards their opponent, pulling it back and starting all over again. All the time they flung a tirade of arguments into the air with only fragments reaching the surrounding audience—'elite...!', 'fetishizing things....!' and 'for who?'. Quickly, this rose to a torrent and began to synchronize across the lines of roamers as they repeated: "what does this have to do with our everyday? why is there a hierarchy? what is art—why do we need it?"

And then silence.

Only Weever replied and spoke quietly. I couldn't hear much, just fragments: 'a place for self-criticism and a place

to observe the world... contamination... things become alive when there is friction...' The wind carried their words away—your hurricane has almost arrived—and then I could hear again: 'where ideas can ferment in a cool, dark place... a forum... a life force... the friction between ideas and experience... we need communal space...'

It all ended quickly and inconclusively—more drumming and a procession of debaters leaving the arena. Agnes and Bennet were back quickly, though, to enlist my help to arrange a large screen in the main hall. They had a projector and one of the big, precious solar batteries already in place, with Maha working on the cabling. While the crowds outside set to organizing a makeshift kitchen we created a mobile field cinema in the terminal.

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As people drifted in, some still with plates of food or cups of tea, they found space on the floor or made their own cocoons. The film was relatively short—another of the terminal's rescued works called *Garden Conversation*. Agnes explained to the audience that it was made by a Moroccan artist called Bouchra Khalili. The Moroccans cheered, recognizing her name from the Mille Nuits Rouges in Paris during the 2020s. The film depicts a conversation between Che Guevara, Lynch and Abdelkrim El Khattabi—two old revolutionary heroes of the twentieth century. They conduct a secret meeting in Melilia in 1959 and discuss the nature of revolution, ghosts of the past and what the future could hold. It was a perfect choice. We still didn't know the outcome of our own squabbles but so many thoughts were running through our minds that we began talking to each other as soon as the film finished. Even on our way back

Francis McKee

to work (vegetables do not wait for art) we were still discussing it.

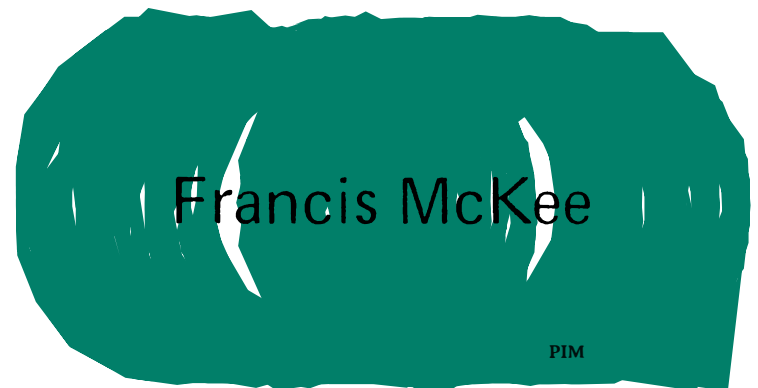
Towards the end of the afternoon Bennet came loping through the furrows and broadcast an update—we'll know the results of the debate tomorrow at noon. His face was impossible to read. And now the wifi is shaky. I'm pressing send and we will have to wait for the squalls....

Take care you, in love

Uschii

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As a proposal, *Para Institutional Models* poses questions around what the public is and what is included in the notion of the public sphere. What kind of work, performance, communication, thing, act, text or speech has the potential of publicly manifesting itself and thus offering itself to a public negotiation? These questions unfold a discussion around the relationality between art works and artistic process, between art as object and art as practice and their respective capacities for common negotiation and manifestation.

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