

# ANNA JENSEN

## Encyclopedia of In — Betweenness

encyclopedia

/ɛnˌsaɪklə(ʊ)ˈpiːdiə,ɪnˌsaɪklə(ʊ)ˈpiːdiə/

*noun*

1. a book or set of books giving information on many subjects or on many aspects of one subject and typically arranged alphabetically.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this case, the encyclopedia is also a work of art and a deconstruction project. The alphabetical order is subordinate to the whole, meaning that the order has in some chapters been adapted.

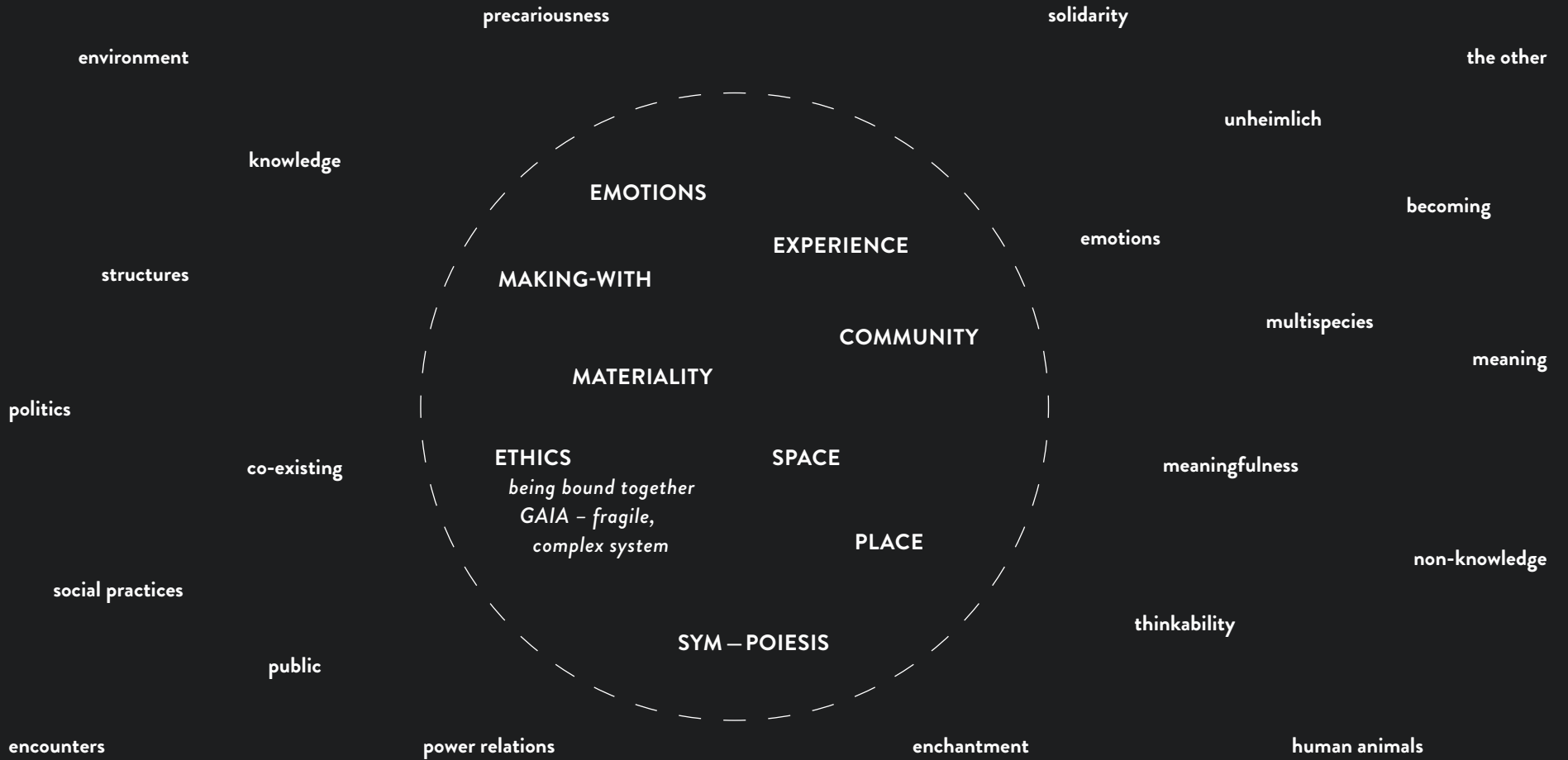
AN EXPLORATION OF A COLLECTIVE ARTISTIC RESEARCH PRACTICE.

**RESPONSIBILITIES**

*a place for communities  
what makes communities*

**POSSIBILITIES**

*a place for eploring the unknown in our being-in-the-world,  
disorientation, uncanny experiences that do not have a form*



**ANNA JENSEN**

Encyclopedia of In —

# Betweenness

**ANNA JENSEN**  
**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF IN-BETWEENNESS**  
**AN EXPLORATION OF A COLLECTIVE ARTISTIC**  
**RESEARCH PRACTICE**

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Aalto University publication series  
DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS  
108/2023

Aalto University School of Arts,  
Design and Architecture  
Department of Art and Media

Aalto ARTS Books  
Espoo, Finland  
shop.aalto.fi

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Graphic design:  
Johannes Rantapuska

**Materials:**

Popset 320g,  
Scandia white 100g,  
Scandia Ivory 90g

ISBN 978-952-64-1347-1  
ISBN 978-952-64-1348-8 (pdf)  
ISSN 1799-4934  
ISSN 1799-4942 (electronic)

Supported by  
Kone Foundation

Printed by  
Origos  
Espoo, Finland, 2023

# ABSTRACT

**ANNA JENSEN**

## **ENCYCLOPEDIA OF IN-BETWEENNESS**

**An Exploration of a Collective Artistic Research Practice**

The dissertation *Encyclopedia of In-Betweenness. An Exploration of a Collective Artistic Research Practice* presents art as a socially prominent phenomenon that is always in a state of becoming. It suggests that art is on the front line perceiving new emerging ideas and ideologies while it also impacts and creates them. This means that art is obliged to seek what we, in fact, cannot yet know.

The thesis has two main research questions. It explores how art can be a way to approach the unknown, and how it can be a tool for societal research and change. By creating art, we create societies. This is an immense task, and this dissertation explores the possibilities and responsibilities of it. Working towards the new always means working with the unknown, being in process and in an in-between state of becoming. To present in-betweenness, processes and becoming - things that are not known to us - new forms and methodologies are needed. Mapping the entanglements of the contemporary art world the thesis provides new perspectives on the relational nature of our being and ends up documenting a turn in the contemporary art world: how collective practices, site-specific and process-led approaches have emerged from the margins to the mainstream. The thesis documents how collective art projects can function as research platforms providing new knowledge and places for encounters.

This study, positioned in the field of artistic research, uses exhibition making and curating as methods. By creating a network of varied knowledge, from the analysis of past projects to the diversification of theoretical and philosophical references, this dissertation intends to present how everything is in process and everything is symbiotic. The form of the dissertation - an encyclopaedia with taxonomic colour-coding - is part of the methodology. It adds one layer to the domino effect of projects playing with known forms and questions of the unknown. Because artistic

research operates with forms and experiences, these methods are part of the mediation: the in-betweenness and process-oriented approach defines the form and reading. The form follows the logic of the over 20 collaborative projects realized by the author during the past ten years presented and analyzed in the thesis. Deconstructing familiar concepts from “biennial” to “world expo” and “encyclopaedia” helps to explore the unfamiliar and makes hidden structures visible.

The thematically colour-coded entries map the current discourses, but they also point out the hierarchical conception of knowledge itself and the absurdity of taxonomic processes. It leads to the question of control, and the fact that eventually one can never control how something is encountered, experienced, and interpreted.

## FI

*Encyclopedia of In-Betweenness. An Exploration of a Collective Artistic Research Practice* väitöskirja käsittelee taidetta sosiaalisesti merkittävänä ilmiönä, jonka olemus perustuu jatkuvalle muutokselle ja sille, mikä on vasta tuloillaan. Teos ehdottaa, että taide on aina etulinjassa aistimassa uusia aatteita, ideoita ja ilmiöitä, samalla luoden niitä ja vaikuttaen niiden syntyyn. Tämä tarkoittaa, että taide väistämättä etsii sitä, mitä itseasiassa emme edes voi vielä tietää.

Tutkimus lähtee liikkeelle kahdesta tutkimuskysymyksestä: miten taide voi lähestyä tuntematonta, ja miten se voi tuottaa ja tutkia sosiaalisia tilanteita ja muutoksia. Luomalla taidetta luomme yhteiskuntia. Tämä on haaste, johon väitöskirja vastaa käsittelemällä taiteen mahdollisuuksia ja velvollisuuksia. Uutta kohti toimiminen tarkoittaa aina tuntemattoman kanssa työskentelyä, prosessissa ja välitilassa olemista. Tällaisten tuloillaan olevien ja välissä olevien asioiden, jotka eivät vielä ole tiedossamme, tunnettuja tai meille tuttuja, esittäminen vaatii uudenlaisia tutkimuksen menetelmiä ja muotoja. Kartoittaessaan tällaisia nykyaikaisen taiteen kentän ilmiöitä tutkimus tarjoaa uusia näkökulmia olemassaolomme suhteellisuuteen – miten se aina tapahtuu suhteessa toisiin – päätyen samalla dokumentoimaan kuinka kollektiiviset, paikkasidonnaiset, ja prosessilähtöiset tekemisen tavat ovat nousseet marginaalista keskiöön. Tutkimus dokumentoi sitä, miten kollektiiviset taideprojektit voivat toimia tutkimuslustoina, tuottaa uutta tietoa, ja mahdollisuuksia kohtaamisille.

Taiteellisen tutkimuksen alueelle sijoittuva väitös käyttää kuratointia ja näyttelyiden tekemistä tutkimusmenetelmienään. Se luo erilaisten tietämisen tapojen ja teorioiden verkoston yhdistämällä taiteellisen työskentelyn kautta hankittua tietoa



teoreettiseen ja filosofiseen aineistoon, osoittaen, kuinka kaikki on prosessissa ja symbioottista. Väitöskirjan muoto, värikoodattua taksonomiaa hyödyntävä ensyklopedia, lisää uuden kerroksen projektien dominoefektiin, jossa yksi kysymys synnyttää seuraavan ja jännite syntyy tunnetun ja tuntemattoman välissä toimimisesta. Taiteellinen tutkimus toimii muodon ja kokemuksen alueella, joten nämä metodit ovat osa sitä, miten tutkimus tulee välitetyksi. Muutos ja prosessilähtöisyys vaikuttavat lukemiseen ja muotoon, joka noudattaa tutkimuksessa esitettyjen ja analysoitujen projektien logiikkaa. Tuttuja käsitteitä ja konsepteja, kuten ”biennaali”, ”maailmannäyttely” tai ”ensyklopedia” dekonstruoimalla hankkeet ovat mahdollistaneet tuntemattoman lähestymisen ja piilotettujen rakenteiden näkyväsitekemisen. Viimeisen kymmenen vuoden aikana kollektiivisesti toteutetut yli kaksikymmentä kokeellista ja tutkimuksellista projektia muodostavat jatkumon, jonka kautta taiteellisen tutkimuksen mahdollisuuksia tarkastellaan niiden tekijäpositiosta käsin.

Temaattisesti värikoodatut luvut tallentavat ajankohtaisia keskusteluja, mutta samalla osoittavat tiedon hierarkkisen luonteen ja luokittelun absurdiuden. Tätä kautta tutkimus päätyy käsittelemään myös kontrollin ja hallinnan kysymyksiä ja sitä, miten lopulta emme kuitenkaan voi ennaltamäärätä miten joku asia tulee koetuksi, kohdatuksi ja tulkituksi.

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## Projects

*Space Invaders* (2013),

Gallery 3H+K, Pori

Keywords: collaboration, temporal use of space, interdisciplinary

*Space Invaders II – Revolution* (2014),

Autotalo, Pori

Keywords: revolution, demolition, performance, farewell

*Space Invaders III – Taking over Otaniemi/Aesthetically Tolerable*

(2015), Otaniemi Mall, Espoo

Keywords: urbanism, city space, ownership, accessibility, ugly, capitalism, live role play

*Space Invaders IV – Heterotopia*

(2016), Matinkylä, Espoo

Keywords: suburb, ownership, accessibility, participation, community, place

*Space Invaders V – Tolerance* (2017),

Hiedanranta, Tampere

Keywords: collaboration, activism, research, exploitation, environment, abuse, school camp

*Space Invaders VI – Living Together*

(2018), Uusix Kyläsaari, Helsinki

Keywords: precariousness, co-existence, habitation, work, trash, materiality, event

*Space Invaders VII – The Gift* (2019),

Cholula, Mexico

Keywords: collaboration, giving, receiving, present, sharing, new

*Sponsor* (2013),

Pori, different locations

Keywords: summer exhibition, temporality, funding, sponsorship, city space, private, public, home, grant

*Pori Biennale – Utopia, Dystopia and Urban Space* (2014), Pori

Keywords: utopia, dystopia, research, interdisciplinary, locations, tours, sustainability, interpretations, narratives

*Pori World Expo* (2015),

Keskusaukio, Pori

Keywords: visual art, performance, dialogue, impossibility, immateriality, appearing, becoming world, encounter



***Pori Biennale II – Saatanan kesänäyttely / The Bloody Summer Exhibition*** (2016), Genraattori, Pori  
Keywords: collectivity, gesamtkunstverk, conventions, summer, ideals, dreams, reality

***The Truth About Finland*** (2017), Kallio Kunsthalle, Helsinki. Pori. Publication. Keywords: nationalism, national identity, deconstruction, working group, form, inclusivity, multiple voices, truth,

***Pori Biennale III – Centennial*** (2018), Pori  
Keywords: public, questionnaire, most wanted art, reacting, future, time span, accessibility, location

***Sandstorm*** (2019), Yyteri dunes, Pori  
Keywords: environment, ecology, sustainability, artistic practice, public, body, movement, senses, sand

***Pori Biennale 2020 – Not to Sing Like a City Bird Sings*** (2020), online + catalog  
Keywords: site-specificity, locality, artistic research, rural, landscape, continuity

***Evergreen Inner Jungle*** (2021)  
Kaisaniemi Botanic Garden, Helsinki  
Keywords: natural sciences, taxonomy, plants, ecology, colonialism, tropicalism, treasures

***Pori Biennale 2022 – Visitors*** (2022)  
Meri-Rastila, Rastila camping, Kallahti peak. Keywords: architecture, urban planning, sustainability, ecology, landscape, memory,

***Ideoita kaupunki Pori / Ideas City Pori*** (2016), Gallery 3H + K, Pori  
Keywords: exhibition as a platform, urban planning, lectures, site-specific works, monuments of a city

***Resilient species / I think more than I am capable of (XXX)*** Keywords: resilience, abject, beauty, wellbeing, hedonism, animal philosophy, the other

***How to Life*** (2016-)  
Keywords: uncanny, infraordinary, authority, space, place, food, avocado, memes, life, precariousness, presentation, in-between, artistic research

***Experimental Event*** (2013-)  
Keywords: artistic research, experiment, event, form, teaching

## Collectives

### *Porin kulttuurisäätiö*

2013 Anna Jensen,  
Anni Venäläinen,  
Eetu Henttonen,  
Eliisa Suvanto,  
Niilo Rinne

2014–2019 Anna Jensen,  
Anni Venäläinen,  
Eliisa Suvanto

2020– Anna Jensen,  
Andrea Coyotzi Borja,  
Eliisa Suvanto,  
Sanna Ritvanen

### *Space Invaders*

Anna Jensen  
Eliisa Suvanto

### *How to Life*

Anna Jensen  
Andrea Coyotzi Borja

## Residencies

*Stiwdio Maelor* Corris, Wales  
*Maltfabrikken* Ebeltoft, Denmark  
*TUO TUO* Joutsa, Finland

## Other

### *Pori School*

A title given, partly as a joke, to a “low-threshold” way of making and exhibiting art and artistic research that was practiced in the Master of Arts programme in Visual Culture at Aalto University’s Pori department: a site-specific, experimental, and research-oriented practice that has later influenced and developed into different practices in different places. The low-threshold method took us out of the studios and galleries to public spaces where the possibility for making and experiencing art would be available for diverse groups of people. In the *Intervention to Urban Space* publication *The Pori School* was presented as a platform for experiments, that were possible because of multiple reasons: Firstly, the felt distance from the presumed centres of art in Finland. Secondly, because Pori was a place where many artists and researchers interested in experimental and confrontational working methods came together, and thirdly, because of concrete and material reasons like possibilities of wasteland, urban space and vacated buildings, that were in the book named as cheap testing platforms for experimental projects and would interest new kinds of audiences. In addition, alternative artist communities in Pori, such as T.E.H.D.A.S. association, which is particularly oriented towards performance art, were named as pioneers that had created favorable conditions for experimental practices. (Jensen, Rajanti and Ziegler, 2018, p. 25)

# INTRODUCTION

Why write a dissertation about art's possibilities and responsibilities, about the unknown and in-betweenness in the form of an encyclopedia? Artistic research often means navigating what is not yet known. This not-knowing becomes a mercurial part of the practice. Curator Lucy Cotter considers artistic research as a form of aesthetic resistance, emphasizing art's unique material and conceptual epistemologies, its ways of knowing and not knowing. She writes;

Artistic research raises important questions about where to situate art in our minds and in our society. It raises questions about the relative autonomy of art and its institutions from the neoliberalism of the art market and the educational sectors alike. It points to the emergence of new destinations and new forms of agency for contemporary art, as well as to its fragility vis-à-vis wider socio-economic agendas. At its best, the paradigm of artistic research opens space to expand the parameters through which we view art, supporting its organic interconnectivity with other fields of enquiry and its agency beyond the narrow confines of art world. Artistic research foregrounds the artist as a thinker, while redefining the very nature of what it means to think. (Cotter, 2019, p. 21)

Art, artistic research, and even popular culture, provide possibilities for approaching the unknown, while considering what it means to think. This means that there are always more questions than answers. It means that things – thinking, making, experiencing, events, exhibitions, artworks, stories we tell – are in-process, taking shape, becoming: in-between the proposed question and the answer. Through artistic practice and research, we can imagine and respond to the fundamental questions of life we cannot analytically capture and things we don't know. Art is a way of imagining together, a way of approaching the uncanny and unknown, the disturbing, confusing, irrational, transient side of our being. At the beginning of this research there was a hypothesis: a belief that “living” and “dead” are the only absolute and stable concepts – concepts that do not change depending on time and culture, and

therefore entities resisting these absolute conceptions would be the utmost uncanny or unknown. It turned out that this is not the case. Living and dead are far from clear and unchanged ideas. Against the earliest belief there are many things that are in-between dead and alive. Eventually everything is always in process, always moving and changing. This is not an original idea. It was presented by Heraclitus, the ancient Greek philosopher, who saw the world as in a state of constant flux: as impermanence and circular change between opposites. These ongoing processes are mixed with other processes and entangled in their nature.

That the original hypothesis proved wrong did strengthen the research question: that art is a way of approaching the unknown and therefore a way of exploring ways of knowing and not knowing. When art approaches the novel and unknown, new methodologies, methods and conceptions are required. To create these and to share the work happening on the verge of the unknown, known forms and concepts can be put to use. This dissertation presents art as a socially prominent phenomenon that is always in a state of becoming. It suggests that art is at the front line of perceiving emerging ideas and ideologies, while also impacting and creating them. This means that art is obliged to seek what we, in fact, cannot yet know. The thesis has two main research questions: how art can be a means to approach the unknown and how it can be a tool for societal research and change. Art is always political, but politics are not simple and political art doesn't mean simplifying. What may seem like moralistic reactions or lecturing is a reaction to the discussions of this time and to the fact that art cannot escape ethical questions. The reactions are based on a maybe even naïve attempt to create solutions instead of just pointing out mistakes.

This dissertation is positioned in the field of artistic research, and it uses exhibition making and curating as methods. It presents and analyses over 20 projects realized during the past ten years. When exhibition making is used as a method for approaching the new and the unknown, it often takes familiar forms, such as an exhibition, allowing new and not yet known things and forms to occur within this framework. The exhibition becomes a laboratory where occurrences happen and can be observed, while the exhibitions themselves create a chain of projects. In this dissertation the domino effect turns into texts. One chapter leads into the next, allowing the question to create new ones.

By creating a network of diversified knowledge, from the analysis of past projects to the diversification of theoretical and philosophical references, this dissertation presents that which is processual and symbiotic. The research presents projects

titled with well-known names, such as “biennial” or “world expo”, where the title is used as a vessel to explore alternative ways of working. The dissertation itself takes the form of an encyclopedia. Instead of presenting distinct and comprehensive entries, it focuses on the interconnectivity and in-betweenness of things. It shows how art, like most things, is always in the state of becoming, happening in-between questions and answers, those making it and experiencing it, between materiality, spatiality, and conceptuality. The color-coded taxonomy of the dissertation provides possibilities for alternative ways of experiencing the text. Constructed as an exhibition with multiple layers, the reader/visitor can approach the text as a whole or read it according to color. Not dissimilar to experiencing an exhibition or event, the experience consists of different elements.

In this dissertation the taxonomy deploys five colors. Green is used for the projects that have been the research platforms. It documents and analyses them. Orange handles practicalities, processes and concrete work-related issues. Blue refers to the philosophical and theoretical interests behind the projects, not always visible to the public. Purple is where the theoretical and practical meet, the exhibition texts, or text from catalogs. They combine the different components of the show and research: theoretical and thematical starting points, spatial questions and political issues related to this, collective discussion and approaches, collaborative outcomes and the exhibitions with artworks. And then there are “gaps” that function like artworks in the exhibition: these explore the theme at hand, but, crucially, they do this on their own terms, not merely illustrating the theme, but rather providing new perspectives. Together these components produce an organic network of interconnected knowledges and processes that are changing in time, unfolding differently with each encounter. While mapping the entanglements of the contemporary art world, the thesis offers new perspectives on the relational nature of our being. Ultimately, it documents a turn in the contemporary art world: how collective practices, site-specific and process-led approaches have emerged from the margins into the mainstream, and maps concepts related to this turn and its discourses.

Instead of universal or unique truths the thesis uncovers art as an entity that is collective, in motion, always relational, always site- and time-specific. This means that process-led artistic research is a way of exploring things that are in the state of becoming. Art explores and creates representations. Therefore, it carries both power and possibility. This power comes with responsibility: it creates knowledges that do not yet exist, new ways of seeing, and eventually, new ways of being. Taking

the fundamental state of becoming and in-betweenness seriously, this thesis focuses on possibilities and what is to come. While the practice of artistic research might be metaphorized as swimming in ineffable darkness (as Cotter suggests), it is also swimming in brightness, in a sea of hopefulness that supports and motivates.

Tracking the developing process is like giving form to that which is still formless. To comprehend that which we do not know is, necessarily, an impossible task. One possible means of doing this is to move around the unknown, in a territory that is relational, an entangled sea of concepts, ideas, theories and artworks. The concept of entanglement was originally theorized in the context of posthumanism, before being deployed in the field of contemporary art. Curator Lisa Rosendahl explains her understanding of entanglement:

...decision to work with notions of inseparability and entanglement was made in acknowledgement of a wider epistemological turn being undertaken by artists, philosophers, researchers, and activists who are today examining critically modernity's division of the world into binary oppositions between, for example, male and female, culture and nature, individual and collective, or past and present. The concept of entanglement is used to describe the world in ways other than the unlinear, growth-oriented model that has become normative in the era of industrialized capitalism. (Rosendahl, Lisa, 2022, p. 415)

Rosendahl refers to feminist and posthumanist philosophers, such as Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, who have used quantum physics and its findings to describe how all life is relational and based on different forms of influence and dependence. In turn, this research explores these relations, and the possibilities and responsibilities of art in the contemporary world. It maps the relational field and gives it a form, just as art has always done to the subjects it studies, and documents what happens in the process and in the in-between place that hosts artistic research.

When processual art is mapped, as is the case in this dissertation, there will inevitably be gaps, gaps being part of the entangled nature of the artistic process itself. In *October 2019. osloBIENNALEN first edition 2019-2024* research librarian and literary critic Marius Wulfsberg writes how "Historically, maps have been an expression of our need to find our bearings in the terrain. With his work *Geography*, the Greek cartographer Ptolemy (Claudius Ptolemaeus) is said to have been the first

to develop a method for reproducing the round globe on a flat surface. This does not mean that the map always matches the terrain. Often it is rather the terrain that has to be adapted to the map.”(2019, p. 246) . Wulfberg’s example refers to the inevitable gap between the world and its representation: “what a map is but a way of emphasizing some things and making other things invisible”, like Jeff Vandermeer writes in *Annihilation* (2014, p. 66). How “reality” is experienced does not match how it is considered, mediated, and represented. There remains an uncanny crack. When this uncanny crack reveals the expected rational wholeness covering the world around us (or inside us) and what is revealed is new and unknown. This uncanny, theorized by Freud as “the unheimlich”, reveals the strangeness that exists in our homelike surroundings – what we thought we knew turns out to be unknown.

How to approach this uncanny gap and the unknown? In histories of science and philosophy, the idea of omnipotence and consistency has been prevalent - that if we study, think, and write carefully and rationally, we will be able to explain the ineffable. However it is also true that throughout history, there has been ongoing negotiation with this demand and with the limits of knowing. Still, even if there isn’t an all-encompassing logic at work, we remain curious about this limit as well as different methods employed to try to account for the ineffability of the unknown. This dissertation explores these possibilities, and as they are always connected, the responsibilities of art. Tanja Tiekso, whose dissertation explores the idea of experimentality in avant-garde music manifestos, explains how an avant-garde concert including experimental and noise music created a feeling of being on the verge of the uncanny together. (Tiekso, 2013, p. 36) The feeling of belonging is important in this interpretation: that art provides places where the uncanniness of our being can be experienced together. Art can bring people and ideas together, and give forms to that which remains illegible, nameless, things that lie beyond everyday understanding or rational, scientific explanations.

This unknowability is a challenge for artistic research, or practice-led research, where intuitive processes and unnameable experiences are combined with conceptual language within an academic framework. This means admitting that the work is always in process, in-between, but this in-betweenness has expansive potential within it, especially when it is understood as a dynamic space for intersecting disciplines: “In-betweenness” can be understood as a liminal space or state that implies dynamics of continuity, separation, transition, overlapping, and mobility. It involves issues related to territories, practices and representations. It can be studied in a range of

fields.” (Giardinelli, 2019) According to Cotter, this is precisely the strength of artistic research and art: “The artwork never closes down this dynamic, even when it is ‘finished’. Its radical potential lies precisely in this destabilization of reality, insisting on this essential incompleteness, a non-closure or non-totalising of form.” (Cotter, 2019, p. 12) How, then, to apply this incompleteness to academic research? Lecturer and practice-based researcher Sophie Hope emphasizes the importance of intuition, of acknowledging subjective, embodied knowledges but also the requirement of reflexive interrogation. She writes about how, in the context of practice-led research, theory and analysis arise at different points and are interlaced, entangled. Experience and long-term practice turn into intuition and improvisation that the researcher-practitioner is then able to turn into knowledge. (Hope, 2016, p. 4)

While this dissertation positions itself within the tradition of artistic research, the reflexive element of practice-led research is still present. This research employs an interdisciplinary approach. Through analysis and practice, it combines knowledge created in research-oriented artistic projects within the fields of philosophy, anthropology, architecture, queer and gender studies, and cultural studies and psychoanalytic aesthetics. Turning practice, its experiences and outcomes, into knowledge comes about through analysis and reflection, but also within the practice itself: the following project is always a place for analysing the previous one. The curatorial research method is put into action in the analysis. This practice-analysis impacts how the theme and form are chosen and articulated, where the event happens, how the artists are being chosen, how the project is realized and mediated for the audience, and finally, how it is documented and conceptualized afterwards. What are the stories we tell and how is the event narrated?

The dissertation presents a domino effect of projects and maps the possibilities of making and mediating art. It asks how art can create places for belonging and for exploring the unknown. It presents and reflects on research-oriented and practice-led projects, where curating is used as a method for creating new knowledges while combining this knowledge with art theory and philosophy. In this research, exhibition-making is deployed as a tool for creating new forms of thinking. Through the research, the practice is presented alongside a curated collection of other thinkers, writers, artists, exhibition, academics, and artworks from the past and present. This mapping project does not aim to reveal a singular truth about the contemporary art world, but rather to express its entangled, relational and fragmented nature. Instead of the traditional understanding of art as an object produced by an individual author,



the dissertation approaches art as collective practice, as a way of being-with on a “symbiotic planet” (Margulis, 1998). It is a taxonomic project that also demonstrates the impossibility of taxonomical approaches to a world that escapes classification and is necessarily in a state of becoming. The knowledges presented here, and those that are created through art, are yet to come, and reside in an in-between state: in-between the maker and the public, the author and the reader, the world and the object, the object and the subject. This kind of knowledge has elements that are not representable only in words and therefore the research also approaches the question of knowledge itself. What passes as knowledge and could there be other ways of understanding and mediating it?

In the context of this research, curating<sup>2</sup> is understood as a methodology and the curator as someone who operates within various paradigms and at specific times and spaces, to create new knowledges, practices, and ways of mediating them. This in-betweenness of curatorial practice provides opportunities for openness. Curating as research methodology creates a bridge between theory and practice: practice turns into theory and theory turns into practice. The open-endedness of this type of curatorial practice implies an intuition for that which is yet to come, an ability to mediate issues with others through the materiality and spatiality of art. In-betweenness also implies constant negotiation, subjecting possible new hypotheses to public conversation and criticism. This conception of curatorial practice follows the one presented in *Curating in Feminist Thought* (2016):

...the curator as an agency within which the art world locates its work of recognizing, celebrating, validating, and rejecting, and one that is susceptible to a feminist analysis. It is important to see the curatorial function as part of a developing discursive formation, with its specific inclusions, exclusions in respect of race, class, and gender.  
(Krasny, Perry and Richter, p.2, 2016)

Artistic research functions in the same way as art: it explores the new and tries to find novel ways of thinking and doing that correspond to the current time, but crucially, in a way that is familiar and legible enough to be concretized. In this sense,

<sup>2</sup> Understood as exhibition- and event-making, writing, researching, creating possibilities for conversations, participating in public discourses.: “curating” is not so much through the end product – the exhibition or the collection – but as practice of exploring, organizing, making and mediating.

the thesis follows the many philosophers, such as Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida, and Hélène Cixous, who have claimed that there are always elements in the world that lie beyond language, or that language cannot account for the full range of our experience of the world.

The framework of this research is process-led research, or practice-research, as Hope calls it, referring to Frayling's conceptualization of research for art, being the "most enigmatic, resulting in an end product as an artwork where 'thinking is embodied in the artifact (Frayling 1994).'" (Hope, 2016, p.3) Artistic research and practice-research are still in the process of taking their positions in the academic context. This can make them seem superficial or incomprehensible, as in humanities the idea of research necessitates that it occurs in conversation with its tradition and canon, validating itself in this dialogue. Artistic research can communicate both with the tradition of theory and philosophy, but also with art history. As a discipline, it is also still searching, being established, experimenting with boundaries. One advantage is that it is more flexible and reactive to contemporary demands. This is also a challenge for those practicing artistic research in addition to the reader and the evaluator: without an established schema the results and form are still subjected to negotiation, and find themselves too in a state of becoming.

The dissertation at hand perceives art and artistic research as occurring at the front line, not as inactive witness or documentation, but as active and responsible agencies. Art not only provides passive representations, it actively reflects and interprets current situations and impacts the world around it. Art grapples with that which is legible, but also with that which is illegible and yet to take form. It represents what is, but also suggests new, alternative ways of thinking, being, creating. Art can produce and mediate knowledge. This can be knowledge that already exists but also knowledge that is in a state of becoming. This is the basis for the possibilities and responsibilities of art: that it can be a vessel of change and new understanding, but it also needs to respond with respect and be aware of the changes around it, and also, of this expectation. The canon is predicated on repetition: when a particular form is repeated often enough in a context that suggests its quality, a valued art institution for example, it becomes familiar and understandable, "good". For the enlightened audience it may become boring but the familiarity makes it untouchable. When certain plays, operas, and statues are criticized because of their offensive, violent, or discriminative content, it raises a storm and the "quality", "freedom" and "tradition" of art are aggressively defended. Art is never just art, it is a question of class, tradi-

tions, cultures, inclusion and exclusion, and education. The canon<sup>3</sup> is not a neutral archive of works and artists, but a result of colonial and patriarchal structures, that today are being reconstructed in theory and practice. A poignant example is The 2022 Venice Biennial *The Milk of Dreams*, curated by Cecilia Alemani, which worked beyond just exhibiting and listing artists outside of the traditional canon but presented them because of their subversive power. (Alemani, 2022)

While this dissertation explores the possibilities and responsibilities of art, and how art is a meaningful and meaning-making phenomenon which creates communities and studies them, it also considers the often-avoided question of *what is art*: art that may not be immediately understandable, or art that does not have an immediate application or that seems unproductive in a traditional sense, but can still be fruitful. Art can enchant, it can imagine, it can create hope. Relevance is not equal to being immediately “productive” or applicable. In our contemporary moment, this often seems to be the expectation. For example, universities and colleges combining art with economy or technical studies to create new innovations or when politicians and decision makers want immediate and visible effects, whether it is a question of art or research, and the understanding of art and its possible impact is shallow. I argue that the magical essence of art is also what makes it significant and subversive, as well as its relational and communal power.

Performance artist and professor Tero Nauha writes about artists and their role in the society:

Artists today struggle with their intellectual property and requests for knowledge production in research and content... (artists) at least intuitively, they understand the value of future contracts based on trait, attributes, notions, and affects... But, today and in the past, artists, actors, musicians, writers, or performers have been regarded oddballs, weirdos, dandies, punks, or poseurs. Rarely have they been taken seriously, but only as beautifiers of society in one-to-one contracts. Generally, artists are not seen as efficient servants of the greater good, at least compared with bank tellers, or neurosurgeons. Yet, especially today, there is something tremendously powerful in the social surplus value amongst artists, which is needed in social structures, but is not aesthetic. Artistic practice

<sup>3</sup>This has been further explored in chapter *Canon*.

may structurally transform social relations, space, and economic zones in ways that have seldom been seen. (Nauha, 2021, p. 19)

Like art that is always in the state of becoming, and the artwork being only a starting point of new interpretations, new narrations, and new meanings, this encyclopedia is a work in progress. I call this *becoming-meaning*, an ongoing exchange between problems and solutions instead of problem and solution<sup>4</sup>. This “becoming” as a philosophical concept has, since Heraclitus, taken impermanence and constant change as the fundamental state of the world and of our being. Later this idea was developed by nineteenth century philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and in the twentieth century by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In art theory, the idea of becoming has affected how art is seen and understood today. From the notion of “the death of the author” to collective, process-based and participatory practices, the idea of art as an eternal and closed object has shifted toward an always changing and porous entity. This is also the aim of this dissertation which unfolds differently in every reading and in every encounter. Like a meandering river carving its forms into the land, this text carves out meanings: instead of presenting clear, hermetic results it moves through projects, places, times, and discourses. Instead of the author claiming an authoritative position, as in euro-patriarchal knowledge systems, this process is dialectic. Every reader and every reading generates different outcomes, different stories. Art is about telling stories and about believing that these stories can change our worlds. It also matters how and where these stories are told, and who tells them.

As an encyclopedia the dissertation presents complexities, experiences, and experiments, while being an experiment itself: instead of considering the world as a problem to be solved, this dissertation approaches the world in a state of becoming: a cycle of questions and answers, endlessly following each other. It maps a process of discovering uncertainty, collecting projects, artworks, theories, texts, and by reprocessing these elements the dissertation refigures the distinction between “theory” and “practice”, “known” and the “unknown.” Rather than presupposing the inevitability of these distinctions, the research meanders back and forth between different elements, using space and embodied, sensory experience as anchors. Using the encyclopaedia as an experimental project and form of research is not a novel approach. This thesis positions itself in a long lineage of works appropriating and re-appro-

<sup>4</sup> This has been further developed in entry *Process-based practice*.

prying the form of the encyclopaedia, from historical examples to contemporary approaches such as *Codex Seraphinianus* (1981), written about an imaginary world in an unknown language. Other examples include Jens Hoffman's (Curating) *From A to Z* (2015), *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (2014) and the *Posthuman Glossary* (2018). In a similar manner to these examples, this thesis uses the form of an encyclopedia as a starting point and follows the logic of the exhibitions presented. These exhibitions deconstruct well-known concepts, from biennial to world expo. Therefore, the research relates to the manifesto tradition. According to Tiekso, the avant-garde manifestos in art are "sensitive to the world around them, aware of the problems and attempting to solve them." (Tiekso, 2013, p. 63) Avant-gardist and experimental art practices have legitimized themselves by narrating social transformations and art's role in the process. In avant-garde manifestos, the writer exposes themselves, manifesting their perceptions and ideas based on their personal points of view. (Tiekso, 2013, pp. 63–64) In addition to artist manifestos, an important example for this dissertation is Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985). In this case, the form of a manifesto is a means for creating and mediating theory that is visibly both personal and political. This manner and form of producing research creates opportunities to include stories that have often been excluded.

Encyclopedias and manifestos share ideological motives. They are written for a particular reason: for something to change and things to progress. This mutual aim is apparent in most manifestos, the name already referring to clearness of intention. However, encyclopedias have the tendency to hide these intentions below the surface of objective knowledge. One early exception is the *Speculum majus* ("The Great Mirror", completed 1244) by French scholar Vincent of Beauvais, which aimed to show the world, not only as it is, but also as *what it should become*. (Collison, 2022) Manifestos can present understandings, like embodied and sensuous or affective knowledges, and position themselves against colonial, patriarchal methodologies. Using these strategies as starting points, this dissertation organizes knowledge and non-knowledge, as well as art and theory in the state of becoming, in an accessible order that does not attempt to hide the relational, rhizomatic, and fragmented nature of the issues at hand. It combines theoretical, and often obscure, starting points to practical and concrete methods and findings without a hierarchical setting, highlighting the diversity of powers that intersect in the process of art- and exhibition-making. Instead of merely presenting processes and transcriptions of how the projects or exhibitions were expected to take shape, the dissertation takes a deeper

look at why they were done, what happened in-between, what was the result, and how are they perceived today: what happens to the project when it is revisited and mediated in an alternative context? In an entangled world, how are the projects interpreted when they are presented in relation to other projects, concepts, theories, and ideas? What are further meanings are created?

At the core of this dissertation is the proposition that art has great potentiality, that it can provide a sacred sense of meaning and purpose considered lacking in our contemporary, neo-liberal world. Our time is defined by burn-out culture, biodiversity loss, ecological collapse, all shadowed by the disenchantment<sup>5</sup> of the modern world. We are therefore burdened with the search for meaning and hope. This subversive potential means that against the traditional understanding of art as an autonomous sphere, art has not only autonomy but freedom and possibilities. It also has responsibilities: art is never “free” but a product of a time, place, and context. It occurs in a continuum of the tradition of arts. It reflects the times and cultures that produce it but, instead of passively representing them, it actively participates in the process of producing ideas, ideologies, and understandings, as well as structures, norms, and expectations. Art is not autonomous, but still, its autonomy is a question constantly posed and then negotiated. Autonomous art, art that is divided from social structures and functions, is a utopia fostered by those who benefit from it most.

At the same time, a certain degree of autonomy is essential. Art should be independent of financiers and decision makers and remain at a distance, both considering the critical power art may possess, and the experiences it can provide. The aesthetic experience can be seen as fundamentally conflicting with the utility of art. This does not mean that art is not political, quite the opposite:

In fact art, for Rancière, is always intrinsically political – not because it ‘represents’ political issues or makes reference to the current state of affairs, or because it ‘represents’ particular groups or social collectives, but because of ‘the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples this space<sup>6</sup>...The apparent ‘separation’ from other fields of practice is in reality a form of questioning them, of questioning the very social division of labor into ‘fields’

<sup>5</sup> See Bennett (2001)

<sup>6</sup> (Rancière 2009, a:23) from the original text

in modern society, the reduction of practice to labor. Aesthetics, after Schiller, does not simply constitute a separate field of practice based on the 'autonomy' of art. It is not that art is 'autonomous', but the mode of experience that aesthetics is proposing... (Sansi, 2015, 77)

Alongside the question of knowledge and non-knowledge, and what can be conceptualized, this dissertation studies contemporary issues related to practice it presents, including inclusivity, accessibility, activism, and post-colonialism. However, it should be noted that it is written from a position of a white, able-bodied Finn, and this also defines many of the projects presented. While the projects are meant to be low-threshold events, they still often take place in spaces that are not accessible for all. This incompatibility also means that mistakes have been made during the projects discussed and many structural and internalized biases and prejudices have gone unnoticed. The constant negotiation is present not only in writing and thinking but in practice: what places to use, who to invite, how to articulate our aims. This explains the emphasized importance of place, space, or site in the research itself: it is solid ground when everything else is moving, an already shared element, a common space, a point of tethering towards the unknown.

The encyclopaedic form of the dissertation, structures the complexity of issues at hand in a way that respects complexity and provides readers different points of entry and perspectives. The encyclopaedia, however, also implies the hierarchical nature of knowledge: its form shows what is included but also makes obvious what is excluded. As a form, the encyclopaedia already studies the nature of knowledge, how we understand it, and how we mediate it. The dissertation-encyclopaedia is also a continuation of the deconstruction project that is present in the exhibitions and events the dissertation handles: for example *Pori Biennale*, *Pori World Expo*, *Space Invaders* and *How to Life* all deal with the question of existing structures and expectations and reappropriating them.

In the *Manifesto of Artistic Research*, the connection between an encyclopedia and praxis is presented in the context of the history of the concept an encyclopedia and the aim of controlling reality, again resembling an idea of a manifesto as a call of action that will, eventually, make the world a better place:

The notion of practice, as connected to the arts and trades, increased in standing with the publication of the *Encyclopédie* (1751) by Denis Did-

erot and Jean-Baptiste d’Alembert. Today, wherever the term appears, it is bound up with a promise. As nearness to concrete action, to work, or to the actually happening, this promise relates to utility and a solution-orientation, to practicality, usability, usefulness. ‘Praxis’ suggests not only an implicit factuality but also at the same time the ability to control the real, an intervention in its relations, a power to act which enables change, whether in politics, education, the social sphere, or the sciences—or in research at art schools. (Henke *et al.*, 2020, 23)

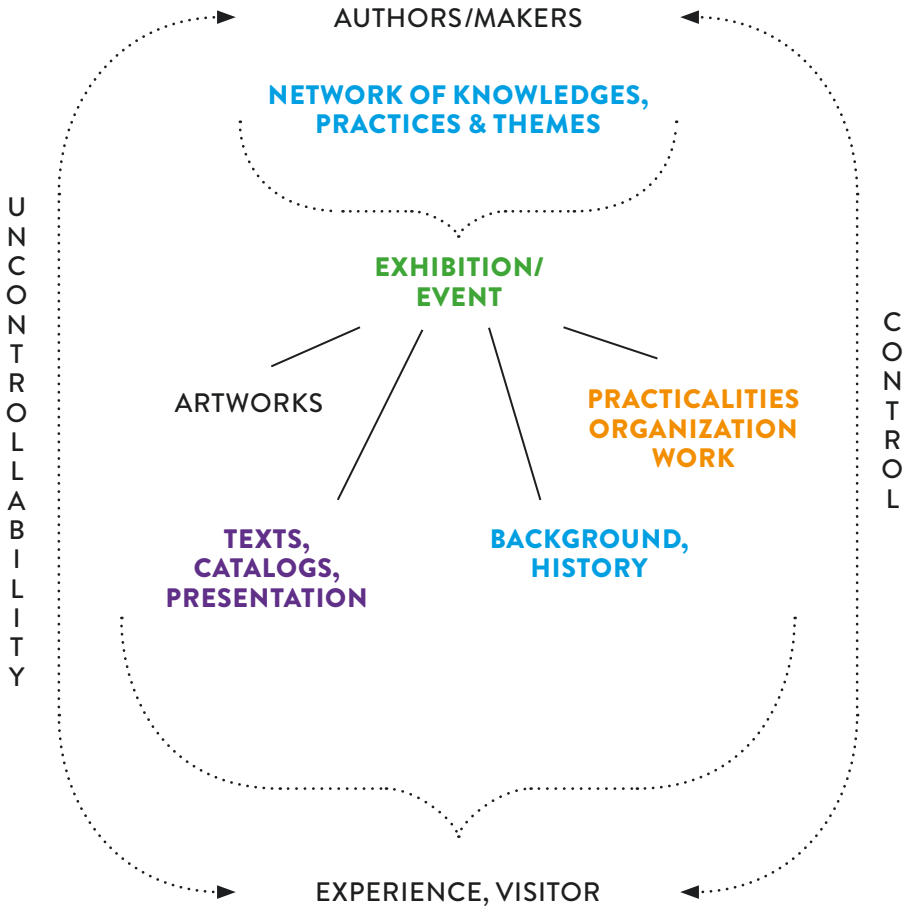
This practice-led dissertation takes this idea of usefulness seriously, approachable for diverse groups of readers: students, artists, decisions makers, curators, urban planners, and theorists alike, all the while deconstructing ideas of usefulness and controlled reality.

## READING INSTRUCTIONS/MANUAL

This encyclopedia is divided into 91 entries presenting concepts. In turn, these entries are divided into two approaches: verbal and visual. This is a rough division, as the verbal, conceptual, and textual entries might have, or at least may create, images, and the visual entries also include text. The visual part is called “gaps”, referring to the fact that they are not meant to visualize the concept, but to create another perspective, while they also consider the notion of documentation and presentation itself. The image and the text surround the gap created in-between them, the gap being an important part of the work, especially when approaching non-knowledge. Artist and researcher Andrea Coyotzi Borja, in her study of the unknown, explains the gap as “the words (the shared and the known) circle around the unknown, until the form of the unknown carves out”. (Coyotzi Borja and Jensen, 2021) The gap, and the non-knowledge, communicate with the concepts *unheimlich*, the uncanny, and the Lacanian Real, all these concepts approach what cannot be fully revealed or formulated. These concepts, not unlike the eerie, the weird, and Julia Kristeva’s *semiotic*, express that which is beyond our understanding but nonetheless still present. This almost at reach can be marked with gaps, rather than rationalized.

The gap is often where meanings are created, where becoming takes place, where the non-verbalizable exists. However, you cannot present the gap, neither can the reader jump straight into it. You need to establish what circles it. Other than





The thesis can be approached as an exhibition, with different colors referring to different areas. The study explores the multiplicity of influences that take shape and weave together in an exhibition.

that, the reader can move around the work as they wish: examine the concept they are interested in, read it as a whole story from the beginning to end, or only look at the pictures. The encyclopedia-dissertation can also be perceived following the logic of an exhibition, where the various elements can be approached individually or as a whole set in entirety. Entering an exhibition, the visitor can either experience the show as a spatial and embodied effect, or begin by acquainting themselves with the supplementary texts, the participating artists, curators, and themes, before following the exhibition map and encountering one work at a time. In this dissertation the blue parts are the philosophical and theoretical starting points that generate the projects, research questions and impact their forms, even if they are not obviously visible in the outcome.

The orange parts document processes, focusing on their concrete and material sides, marking different elements, actions, agencies, and steps taken. Green parts are exhibitions and projects, documenting their results and pieces in the domino effect, taking thinking further. The purple sections combine theoretical thinking with praxis, functioning as exhibition texts and catalogs to mediate the processes behind what is exhibited and made into artworks. They are the intersections between expectations and end results, between theory and praxis, abstract and concrete. Gaps have no color, they are the artworks: they have come about in the context of a cognitive process with an answer to a proposed question, which is the research question behind the exhibition that is being explored together with the working group. However, they also have alternative interpretations, and therefore, there is always a gap between the concept and the form. Gaps are wormholes, where one's mind can roam freely and create alternative stories next to the concept, for example in *chapter Abject*, in which the gap opens out towards immortal jellyfishes and Greek mythology. Gaps present intuitive connections. At times, they may seem arbitrary and pointless, but they can also create new intersections and become landmarks that drive the story further. The entire dissertation and the projects presented in it, are based on a method of thinking-with. This thinking-with, as well as the meandering approach used, is in no way clean or straightforward, but reflects the paradoxical nature of the themes it studies: "thinking "with" includes the acknowledgement of opposition(s), of resistance, of paradox". (Klaver, 2018, 49)

While the "exhibition" of the dissertation is a space created with words, one more layer of the work is the material and embodied one. Encyclopedia is a book, an object, an artwork itself. It can be touched, visited, and revisited. It presents actual

places and events as well as narrates feelings, emotions, and sensuous experiences. Words contain sweat, exhaustion, joy, pleasure, sand, sun, wind, mold, moss, smells, sounds. Like the events presented in the dissertation, from the biennial to world expo, it both represents and studies the phenomena used as a title, but also is what it claims to be. Encyclopedia is also a space, a construction. In *I was living in a strange place*, a stage piece about home and the history (Himma and working group, 2022), the time and architecture of shared and private spaces, an idea of building a home in a book, was presented: the home would be carefully constructed by words and sentences. The piece itself happened in a space, but also used other spaces as starting points. It created spaces with words and gestures. This research is also a space: a construction site where an environment of working is being built, constructed and deconstructed.

The dissertation can be used as a (incomplete) map of current art discourse: it is a mapping project of issues, themes, and concepts concerning contemporary art practice. However, it does not replicate a traditional cartographic process aiming to conquer and control: instead of conquering, revealing, taking over, naming, owning and drawing straight lines from one place to another, this is a meandering project and text: a non-linear, flowing, non-deterministic, and sometimes even messy process that necessarily takes time. It can be described in the same way as Rosi Braidotti explains the posthuman, “embedded and embodied but also a figuration...a theoretically-powered cartographic tool that aims at achieving adequate understanding of on-going processes of dealing with the human in our fast-changing times.” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 12) This also means approaching the unknown, the non-knowledge and the uncanny. This leads to observe knowledge production itself, and how epistemology can be questioned. We name, we categorize, conceptualize, but still, the foundation of our existence occurs on a slippery slope: language betrays us, concepts change and reformulate. We search for a point of origin as the homelike turns un-homely and pure truth becomes political construction: “no one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society”, as postcolonial theorist Edward Said has written (Said, 1979, p. 10) The inner experience and the forms and names given to it do not always meet. This might happen for at least two different reasons: the experience is a result of the unknown and the uncanny, something we do not have words for, or it happens outside the recognized, legible, and struc-

tured part of society – the one that is represented and acknowledged, the grievable part of it, as Judith Butler might name it. This gap between known and unknown is where art can create places for encountering what escapes the organized and the verbalized and places for sharing these uncanny inner experiences with others. When it comes to academic theory of hegemonic knowledge and power, literary theorist and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, referring to Said, calls for “critic’s institutional responsibility” (Spivak, 1993, p. 75). This responsibility can also be demanded from art, that because of its many mediums and practices, contains the possibility of exploring different knowledges from experiential to material to theoretical and spatial, simultaneously, while collecting, organizing, producing, and mediating them. When this responsibility and respect is taken seriously, art can be a powerful tool, like curator Joanna Warsza writes: “I believe art is a powerful agent in memory culture and can operate in historical consciousness, but only when treated with care, fragility, integrity, and kindness.” (Rosendahl and Warsza, 2022, p. 88)

## CONCEPTS: MAPPING AND MEANDERING RELATIONS AND ENTANGLEMENTS

The dissertation maps a constantly changing field that is shared with others, and it aims to be transparent about the shared nature of being and thinking. This includes quoting (works and texts) as part of the process: this encyclopedia is a research project but also a curated collection itself, an archive of projects, places, ideas, thoughts, thinkers, and texts. Reading is a continuation of this mapping project, a process of locating oneself in theoretical geography. As writer and activist Lucy R. Lippard points out in *Mapping the Terrain* (1995): “On one hand, mapping the turf can be seen as abetting surveys, fences, boundaries, zoning, and other instruments of possession. On the other hand, maps tell us where we are and show us.” (1995, p. 118). This research presents a field where entanglement is a key feature. Even if the concepts are presented as separate, they should be observed as a network, functioning in a similar manner as particles are observed in *quantum entanglement*, a group that is generated, interact, and share spatial proximity and where the particles cannot be described independently. The entangled nature of the field makes it sometimes difficult to map, but it also explains why mapping is much needed.

Mapping is not only a theoretical project but also a concrete survey of areas and locations. The dissertation presents art projects that are pioneering the tempo-

rary use of space<sup>7</sup> in the Finnish context, and where the aim was to take interdisciplinary art and events to different neighborhoods and environments. In the beginning, this practice was full of hope, promises, possibilities, new questions, and fresh answers. The suburbs felt like an eternal unknown land waiting for things to take place. These hopes were proven naïve and brought up a number of questions around who was benefiting from these gentrifying practices. What are the benefits of these independent, low-threshold projects? Who are the independent curators and artists working for? And what does this “independence” mean? When depleted areas are used for contemporary art projects and the supposed aim is to increase the residents’ ownership of the neighborhood, it is often the case that these neighborhoods are colonized and appropriated. Can the work done in these suburbs be approached with curiosity, research, or are they used because it is cheaper and exciting, triggering the fetish relationship art has to the new? Are the ethical issues taken into consideration, or is this exactly why these projects, like *Space Invaders* and Porin kulttuurisäätiön exhibitions, need and needed to be done, to learn: to consider locality, localness, privileges and the other? Other humans, other environments, other non-human animals?

This research explores the possibilities of producing and mediating knowledge through art, the relationship with “knowledge” being ambiguous. This means exploring the idea of knowledge itself and considering techniques of knowing, and not-knowing: “My existence, like any other, of course, moves from unknown to known (relating the unknown to the known). No difficulty; I believe I am able, as much as anyone I know, to surrender to the operations of knowledge.”(Bataille, 2014, 112)

Knowledge is a form of capital, “cognitive capital“ being a form of capitalism that considers knowledge as a resource that can be traded, but only certain kinds of knowledge. Knowledge can be disturbing and difficult, a new finding, an unwanted gift. Knowledge is hierarchical: to have expertise is to have control. At times, this gets forgotten in the field of art, even when it is critical of public or participatory projects. These projects are not democratic inherently, but democracy needs to be created. The responsible parties should be aware of the power structures, expectations, and aims.

<sup>7</sup> “Temporary use of empty spaces is a practice in urabism aiming to revitalize empty spaces in urban areas, especially abandoned and decaying buildings.” (“Temporary use”, 2022)

Responsibility is not only a theoretical concept, but consists of concrete acts and deeds, and is related to questions of profit: who benefits, whose knowledge is used, and for what? When socially engaged art projects are executed in areas that are considered to need developing, is knowledge being brought somewhere or to someone top-down, and if so, why? Is culture and knowledge transported to new environments considered somehow better, maybe unconsciously, than the original knowledge and culture? Or is the possibly unconscious aim to exploit the existing knowledge, to extract and not give anything in return in this disproportionate exchange? Sara Ahmed points out how anthropology has self-reflectively considered the possibility that rather than describing the Other the discipline constructs it. In *Strange Encounters* (2000) her question is “how can we understand the relationship between identity and strangeness in lived embodiment without creating a new ‘community of strangers?’” (Ahmed, 2000, 6) A similar pattern can be observed within the field of arts. The question is, how then could better practices and ways of recognizing harmful policies be invented, without creating new oppressive structures? In this dissertation, ways of exploring the democratic handling of knowledge and how it is produced are presented. In addition, the dissertation highlights the more obscure sides of knowledge production: embodied, experiential knowledge, understanding that is connected to emotions, and surroundings.

The dissertation itself, as well as the projects presented in it, explores possibilities for studying, revealing, and changing power structures and existing patterns. As the world finds itself in an acute state of crisis, new global public spheres and discourses are much needed. Editors of the *De-Colonizing Art Institutions* (2017) Dorothee Richter and Ronald Kolb write about how the uncanny background of post-democratic societies and alternative truth scenarios demand new global public spheres and international solidarities beyond race, class, gender, and social and political differences. According to Richter and Kolb this means different things in different places, and not necessarily any clear solutions:

De-colonizing is thought to be a horizon, in the way Derrida spoke about a democracy to come. De-colonizing Art Institutions can only be a shared project, with different tasks in each geopolitical and social context. It will mean something different in Switzerland or Germany than in India, China, or South Africa. It will mean something else if we speak about art academies, art museums, or “Off” spaces. And, of course, we cannot

provide any clear solutions. What we want to achieve is to form bonds of shared interests, to develop a platform for exchange, and there is a certain urgency behind this. (Kolb and Richter, 2017 p.5)

This urgency means that a necessity exists, to react and revisit methods and practices, but it also means that in contemporary conditions, there are no clear guidelines. As a mapping project, this dissertation creates new paths and makes visible different routes, documenting the processes that occur at the threshold of the new: “when an artist acts, they create new ways of knowing and forms of knowledge”, like artist Teemu Lehmusrusu describes the work of an artist. (Jensen, 2020) Tracing these new ways of knowing and new forms of knowledge necessitates that this text wanders in the wild, sometimes getting lost. But even getting lost means getting somewhere. Sometimes the routes are straight and well-marked, sometimes the text flows like a river:

The tension is between ‘same’ and ‘other.’ The river stays the same, it stays a river, precisely because the waters become other, that is, the water flows. If there were no flow, the river would be a lake or a wetland. And because the waters flow, they are always different, that is, other; in that sense one cannot step twice into the same river. When one puts one’s feet into the river again, one encounters different waters, different sediments, twigs, fish, insects... However, one could put one’s feet at the same Cartesian cartographic coordinates again and again. (Klaver, 2018, 46)

The method of meandering could be considered as a *non-method*, as Barthes would (following Nietzsche) call it, separating *paideia*, culture, and method. It is not a straightforward route, but an eccentric path:

Method: ‘the good will of the thinker’, a ‘premediated decision’, a direct means, deliberately chosen to obtain the desired result. Method: to fetishize the goal as privileged place, to detriment of other possible places ≠ *Paideia*: eccentric path of possibilities, stumbling among blocks of knowledge.” Barthes presents method as a “phallic mindset of attack and defense” while the non-method is “mindset of the journey, of extreme

mutability (flitting, gleaning). We're not following a path; we're presenting our findings as we go along. (Barthes, 2013, 133)

The selection of concepts used in this dissertation has changed throughout the process of writing. Some have become more important than others, some are already starting to lose their importance: they seem outdated, and maybe the problems presented have already been solved or at least discussed further. The act of selecting has been partly intuitive – intuition here referring to knowledge that is not analytic reasoning but is based on experience and combines multiple knowledges<sup>8</sup> – and partly a result of the projects and research process. This is also related to the nature of the chosen concepts that have been divided into different categories: on the one hand, there are concepts that refer to very practical questions and teachings encountered in the practice of event and exhibition making in addition to terms that have been actively used in art discourse during this research project. On the other hand, there are concepts that are related to the uncontrolled nature of our being, the uncanny, and that which lies beyond our everyday knowledge. These concepts are not meant to solve the uncanniness or conquer the uncontrollable, but rather, to carefully draw circles around them and map the areas that cannot be mapped. Most of the concepts occur somewhere in the middle, in-between: they are concrete, material and often active doing and performing, and, simultaneously, abstract, and theoretical issues with philosophical frameworks.

In an interview, Lehmusrusu states that “the artist and the curator must be allowed to work in that way and test the concepts that they find attractive.” (Jensen, 2020) This proposed configuration, where the artists, curator or researcher is not an authority declaring absolute truths but rather someone who explores, interprets, and sometimes fails. This exploratory disposition is taken up by this dissertation. An open-endedness that trusts in the process is also present in the various practices presented. When art leaves its traditional settings, that is white cubes, institutions and museums, new challenges are encountered. In new everyday settings, old truths may prove to be off the mark. The expertise of authors is questioned in a new way,

8 In her dissertation Asta Raami describes how “Intuition may originate from various sources. The process of intuiting may be based on the various forms of knowing mentioned above, and combine different sources of information, whether the information comes from the mind, body, thinking, memory, environment, feelings, embodied cognition, senses or extended senses. Often it includes expert-based knowledge” (Raami, 2015, p. 43)



and again in every project. Admitting that it is a learning process does not mean avoiding responsibilities, nor the concepts one is drawn to because they turn out to be difficult. It simply means a lot of work. Working outside galleries and museums renders questions of control and accessibility concrete. When the situation or the public is not predetermined, the work of the artist and curator is exposed to unpredictable encounters and circumstances and this generates new research questions in addition to new answers. On the one hand, the encyclopedia as a form helps to formulate and organize new questions and findings. On the other hand, the encyclopedia is always an impossible attempt, and therefore is apt for the task of formulating formlessness.

## IN-BETWEEN: THE UNCANNY SOUL OF A PLACE AND A BEING

In Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) the protagonist, Estraven, considers themselves a slow thinker who therefore needs to base their actions on intuition. (Le Guin, 1976) Taking care and being curious are rational actions – as social animals it is necessary to think of others – but these ways of being are based on intuition and empathy, perhaps more than on rational knowledge and precise planning. Intuition is, however, hard to put into words and mediate, especially into a form of coherent knowledge. Nonetheless, intuition and slow thinking can provide opportunities, highlight new openings and offer alternative perceptions; it allows one to begin to comprehend and combine diversity of knowledges and complex issues, before the heavy analytical process can follow.

With complex theories practicality is crucial. When the work to be done is about producing and mediating knowledge that, rather than coherent science, is an act of collectively palpating and tentative nonknowledge, and creating spaces, moments, and possibilities for approaching the new and the unknown. Hegel's encyclopedia was written as a guide to help his audience follow his philosophical lectures. An encyclopedia can, therefore, be an entry for participation. Encyclopedia entails chopping things up into smaller bits that can then be easier to mediate, to share and to approach.

Another way of approaching the unknown is to use concrete material and spatial platforms; to use places that are shared and physically palpable for creating and sharing experiential and embodied knowledge. At the same time these places of

experiences and events become something else in the process. When considering the possibilities and responsibilities art may have, is its capacity to approach the unknown, the non-conceptualizable one of them: to confront what not yet has a name or a form. This establishes the responsibility to approach it with respect – practice that is constant balancing with control and contingency. Working on the border of known and unknown makes art, as well as artistic research, endlessly impossible in a way. By facing the unknown, the participants in these projects are positioned in an in-between place. They are forced to search for that which does not yet have a name or form, to talk about that which does not have language, in-between tradition and newness, in-between practice and space. That in-between place is impossibility, but also full of potential.

In *Pori World Expo*<sup>9</sup> this impossibility was the starting point of the exhibition: the works presented could not be exhibited in a traditional exhibition format. While the event studied how these impossible visual artworks translated into telephone conversations between the artist and the audience, it took this becoming as its theme. That is, the becoming of an artwork via words, conception, and imagination. Becoming world: how worlds can be created, how they come into being, how material elements, like the pavilion of the expo, combined with the immaterial ones, the stories artists were telling, created worlds, and changed how the world around was perceived. The possibilities and responsibilities became visible in the site where the exhibition took place: a square in a central location that is easily unseen, unrecognized and uncanny. A place in the middle of everything, but always oddly distant, decorated with valuable public art, left unused and hardly maintained. A place that seems to be hiding in front of everyone's eyes while the emptiness of the square remains full of tension. This uncanniness was hidden, until the pavilion and the exhibition were installed in place. After this, it turned out to be a form that made it possible for others to formulate their experience of the place before the pavilion and after it. All this sounds terribly serious, even if, as often with the projects by Porin kulttuurisäätö collective, the research question examined is also perceived from perspectives that provide absurd and even comical viewpoints.

When art and artistic research are emplaced in public places, absurdity, comedy and tragedy collide making for messy encounters and interactions that cannot be avoided. This dissertation presents theories and projects concerning public and

9 See chapter *Gaia, Globe, the shared world*

semi-public spaces, and examines the hierarchies and structures that are maintained and produced in these spaces while also focusing on the possibilities these locations, or art and artistic interventions in this context, may afford. The conception of public space can be traced to the Agora, a forum and a central public space in ancient Greek city-states. The agora was a gathering place and important function of social, political, and artistic life of the city. The agora was considered a democratic, shared space. However, public space has historically been controlled and monitored, and is more available to some than to others. This right to public space depends on who is considered a “free man” which itself has a long and complex history. As these societal norms have, probably from the beginning human societies and permanent settlements been contested, public space has always been a place of conflict and friction. While the Stoics used the agora to deliver speeches for smaller audiences, the Cynics questioned this elitist exclusion and spoke in theaters, feasts and other large events. When eating in the agora was accepted as the fulfillment of bodily needs, Diogenes the Cynic questioned these standards and masturbated in the agora. (Foucault, 2001, pp. 120–122) Today, art tests the norms of public place and helps to protect public space in a time of aggressive privatization: many of the core institutions of public life, from libraries to hospitals, are privatized and owned by large global companies.

In the book *Intervention to Urban Space* (Jensen, Rajanti and Ziegler, 2018), public space is approached as a site for societal debate. Art and artistic interventions are seen as tools for creating and studying conflicts. The book suggests that art is a productive way of asking questions around what public space is and who it’s for:

Public space, in particular, is a place of continuous demarcation and debate. What is the ‘public’ nature of a space, or what should it be? What spaces are public and why? These are questions that need to be addressed repeatedly in discussions. Art can participate in the debate, and intervention art has taken on the role of an active participant by pointing to and even arousing conflicts. (Jensen, Rajanti and Ziegler, 2018, 21)

To be able to participate in the debate about public place, art does not need to be massive or self-evident. Small gestures that point out the absurdities of everyday life and environment can be just as forceful. In opposition to art exhibited in more traditional settings, such as in a gallery or a museum, art in public space can surprise

and challenge its audience and can make its surroundings appear quite different. When entering the gallery, the expectation is to encounter art. By contrast, in public space it might be more challenging to immediately name or recognize what is being encountered, which itself brings the experience to the threshold of the unknown. We believe we know and are able to control our everyday environments and experiences but suddenly something we don't know or can't name disturbs this feeling:

In the context of art, intervention means a site and time-specific act or artwork that breaks from the traditional framework of displaying art. At the same time, it addresses existing space or situation and possibly some other existing work of art. An intervention thus simultaneously poses questions concerning the making of art and its authorship and the space or situation at which the intervention itself is aimed. While interacting with architecture, activism and urbanism, intervention also has an active and challenging relationship with the history of art and its different genres such as performance and conceptual art. Artistic intervention also challenges spectators by injecting something new and surprising into the familiar and existing. Intervention is a challenge to confront the unknown. (Jensen, Rajanti and Ziegler, 2018, 11)

Working in public places is often a messy process that forces one to face responsibilities and crucially, the question of what art is, as well as is changing, how precisely the setting around it is changing. This dissertation is an encyclopedia of the impossible: the pursuit of verbalizing the non-verbalizable, collecting concepts of the non-conceptualizable, and attempt to organize chaos. Simultaneously, it is a practical handbook on current discussions in the field of contemporary art. It presents various projects, practices, and theories, but also meanders through what cannot be presented, that is “irregularity, complexity, ambiguity, and instability,” like Irene J. Klaver writes. Klaver explains how “meandering as a method, as a mental strategy, privileges exploration; it is a messy process, learning from mistakes, and following contingent relations.” (2018, 52) This dissertation operates within the messiness of meandering while borrowing from the discipline of mapping. Rather than favoring one method over the other, it trusts and encourages the reader to create their own stories from the ingredients offered.

# ART

When someone asks me “what is art?” the first thing that happens is that an adaptation of the old Haddaway song *Baby Don't Hurt Me* “what is art? Baby don't hurt me, don't hurt me, no more” starts playing in my head. Secondly, I rely on the automatic reply we tend to give in this situation: “what is art is not that interesting a question.”

But why is it not interesting or worthwhile? Should it not be about, given that we have chosen this profession that is, in most cases, more about passion than profit? Should we not be able to answer the most basic question about our practice, profession and passion? The problem is that the umbrella concept “art” covers so many aspects that are often contradictory: it is completely different working with an object than working with a context. Presenting work in a museum, in a public place, with commercial galleries or as artistic research are also very different. To paint as a hobby, to take one's child to dance classes, to devote one's life to lone studio work, to spend a lifetime trying to master a technique, or imagining new, alternative dreaming and forms it can take. Art means different things to different people, and how it is considered relates not only personal preferences but to social structures, such as education, culture, class, and other constructs that impact how we perceive world and are perceived.

This thesis offers almost a hundred concepts through which to examine what art is, where it comes from and what it can do. Art is knowledge production. Art is a decoration. Art is a profession Art is a hobby. Art is what makes us human. Art is what gives meaning to our being. Art can make things visible. Art can change the world. Art can change your life.

Because of all these complexities, art has not only potentiality but also responsibilities and obligations. Therefore, there is a tendency that the question “what is art” is answered with a notion that *what art is?* is not as interesting question as *what art can do*. Contrary to the *l'art pour l'art ideology*, art is never *just art*. The idea of art that exists purely for art's own sake became common in the 19th century and still shadows the discussion concerning art. The value

of it as “true art” depends on its separation from other worldly or societal functions and realms, such as the political or commercial. This idea was criticized by Friedrich Nietzsche, who stated that “Once you exclude the purposes of sermonizing and improving people from art, it does not follow even remotely that art is totally purposeless, aimless, senseless, in short, l'art pour l'art - a worm swallowing its own tail.” (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 204) And, indeed, the art that has no other purpose and is in no relation to anything around it becomes like a worm swallowing its own tail – endlessly circulating the same point, influenced by nothing and influencing nothing. Since Nietzsche’s statement, the idea of art existing merely for its own sake has been questioned repeatedly, from critical theory to relational aesthetics. Art is not a distinct, independent sphere, but neither can or should it be fully reduced to other societal functions, like activism, commodity, or entertainment. Still, it can be all of this and more. It is material and immaterial, conventional and revolutionary, object and an idea. Art reflects and it produces.

Art always is a product of social structures and power relations at particular historical junctures and geographical contexts. Art is always political. It does not need to take a stance, but it needs to be aware of this relational aspect of its essence. The idea of art being autonomous and self-sufficient has turned it into an impotent object of capitalism, as artist and art theorist Suzi Gablik presents in *Mapping the Terrain*: “Autonomy, we now see, has condemned art to social impotence by turning it into just another class of objects for marketing and consumption.” (Gablik, 1995, 74) Today, art is not so much seen as automatically autonomous practice, but relational practice that comes with responsibilities. Artist, archeologist, performer Suvi Tuominen comprehends this change as a process of separation from the modernist artist identity and progresses towards a new idea of an artist who is not only responsible for themselves but also for others: “being an artist is not only about me as an individual, but about me making space and possibilities for other subjects, creating new openings, and being responsible for the privileges I have.” (Jensen, 2021, 28)

Especially as a curator, a figure making decisions and choices, one needs to be aware of this: our decisions make practices, norms, expectations and structures visible, as well as hide them. We hold much sway in what is seen and what is not, who is heard and who remains silent. Still, art is never just about politics. Its power lies within its nature of being something more, something

more than mere rationalizable practice. However, the autonomy of art is not a straightforward question. Rather it is a question in need of negotiation, often to the degree of being paradoxical. Sansi presents this paradox considering Jacques Rancière's work, which claims that art is both political and a separated, resistant form. At this point Rancière's argument becomes paradoxical. The persistent tension between the 'politics of becoming-life in art' and the 'politics of the resistant form', or heteronomy and autonomy, is constitutive of the politics of aesthetics, or what he calls aesthetic regime. (Sansi, 2015, 81)

In this thesis, I observe this paradox. Art is understood as complex phenomena that has a.) responsibilities and b.) possibilities. As a societal practice, it occurs in-between people, places, ideologies, ideas, politics and historical eras. Art is a place, a site for encounters, experiences, and for exploration, a place for communities to both come together (physically and mentally) and a place for new communities to be created. Art creates a space for encounters, for new ideas, forms, ethics, ecologies and ideologies that are in the state of becoming. Art is a place where something is about to happen, or is happening, or has happened. And these happenings actuate communities. This paradox can be extended to the paradox of art functioning simultaneously in the field of the known and the unknown, material and immaterial, and analytical and emotional. As an entity resisting dichotomies and simplified taxonomies, and, art is a useful tool for exploring and questioning them.

We have, since rationalism and the Enlightenment, been educated to believe in reason, science and knowledge. But at an experiential level, our being and existence, our communities and the world more generally, are not fully comprehensible, structured and rationalizable. We exist within this world and as unruly beings we sometimes escape the structuring and rationalizing impetus of society. This uncanniness of our being, which is difficult to explore within the methods of traditional science and research, can be approached through art, that as an experiential phenomenon provides access even to the non-verbal. Georges Bataille approached this question of formless knowledge with the concept of non-knowledge, Lacan with the Real, and John Latham with the term "antiknow":

Antiknow involves the issue of form – form as subjectivity, infrastructure, network, and post-Fordist regime. Rather than interpret-

ing conviviality in the loose, faux-liberal way pursued by relational aesthetics, Jakobsen decided to use the model of the open seminar discussion and subsequent exhibition, repurposing them as theater. He addressed the inevitably spectacular character of knowledge in knowledge capitalism and set up an epistemological project that enabled the participant of Antiknow to claim historically informed, if temporary, autonomy with regard to the dominating forms and formalities of knowledge's political economy. (Holert, 2020, 118-119)

In Lucy Cotter's dialogue with professor of Visual Art and Knowledge Systems Sarat Maharaj, non-knowledge is called, as Cotter states referring to Georges Bataille, "an incomplete system", surpassing a limit, an intellectual journey, "a kind of swimming through the darkness to find something". Importantly, the notion of unwanted knowledge is mentioned: "What about the production of knowledge that nobody wants to think about"? (Cotter, 2019, 193-205). When we reach the limits of expected knowledge and accept the possibilities of failure and non-knowledge, we also admit the possible messiness of our being. This kind of art, or artistic research, is not immediately productive or useful, quite the opposite, and this is exactly where its potential lies.

According to German philosopher Theodor Adorno, art becomes social through its opposition to society. It occupies this position only as autonomous art: what is social in art is its immanent movement against society, not its manifest opinions. (Adorno, 1997, pp. 296-297) I do not completely agree with Adorno's skepticism when it comes to socially engaged art, even if the concept as such did not exist when he was writing *Aesthetic Theory* (written between 1956 and 1969, published posthumously in 1970.) and understanding the hopelessness of the times that elicit these thoughts. Neither, as an artist and curator, is it easy to value the overly critical attitude which I see as a way of promoting one's superiority as a theorist, lifting oneself above those making art, maintaining the idea that the world of ideas is more valuable than the material world of praxis. Still, Adorno is an attentive thinker whose thoughts are still relevant, especially when it comes to art politics and funding art: art should not qualify itself as something "socially useful" (Adorno's quotation marks) but art keeps itself alive through its social force of resistance. (Adorno, 1997, 269) Adorno's thinking can help us to consider how we understand socially engaged



art, meaning art that has articulated social connotations or political formations, what it can be, do and not do: socially engaged art does not necessarily mean projects aimed at curing or highlighting some specific societal problem, but is art that understands its position, possibilities, and responsibilities. Adorno's critique evolved during the Second World War when the world had proven to be a much crueler place than anyone had believed it could be in the so-called modern, "rational" time. Today artists are trying to find meaning in practices that happen within the framework of the climate crisis, on the threshold of the end of the world, or at least civilization. We are simultaneously trying to find ways to tackle the colonialist and exclusive past of art and to create hope in a situation that often seems hopeless. It is not a surprise that some, often the white male mostly in threat to lose their privileged position, create coping mechanisms like cynicism and irony: if you admit that your project is doomed it cannot fail.

Whatever one thinks of the relationship art has to societies and social structures, this relationship does exist. Even when art is considered as existing only for the sake of itself, it inevitably occurs in relation to its surroundings and therefore, reflects its particular time and milieu. The idea of an individual genius creating art alone has recently been questioned. It has also been noted that this naturalized and normalized phenomenon is constructed by those who benefit from it most: the canon does not evolve naturally but is a result of an active process of production. Even the deepest feelings of ownership one's practice might evoke should not stop one from seeing the influences of the world around: the artwork comes into existence through the artist but this mercurial relation between artist and artwork is also a materialization of a *zeitgeist*, in the spirit of the particular time, ideas and ideologies. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that art is, in fact, a communal practice: even when an artwork is produced by a singular artist, the work itself is also a product of the time and place in which it is produced. An artwork and the thinking that produces and forms it does not occur in a vacuum.

When F.W.J. Schelling was contemplating the concept of mythology in his Berlin lectures delivered between 1841–1854, he presented mythology as not merely stories, but knowledge production that occurs between philosophy and poetry with close ties to scientific thinking. Schelling questioned the notion of an author when it comes to mythology: "but mythology is not a matter of just

one people, but rather of many people” and “mythology is not invented by individuals; it has proceeded from the people itself. The mythology of a people is bound up with its life and essence in such a way that it could only proceed from out of the people.” (Schelling, 2007, 44–46) Not only does Schelling come close to contemporary conception of art, that is manifesting social relations during a particular time but he also observes how humans work more effectively as groups, just like some animals that live and work in social colonies: Besides, everything instinctual works more effectively in the masses than in individuals, and just like in certain families of the animal kingdom a communal drive of ingenuity connects individuals independent of each other for the producing of a collective project, so a spiritual connection produces itself between various individuals belonging to the same people, and this of itself and through inner necessity – a spiritual connection that must manifest itself through a communal product like mythology.” (Schelling, 2007, 44–46)

In the article *20 Years of Laps: a journey from compassion to conflict, co-existing, and listening* I interviewed performance artists, professors and students. In an interview with the current professor Tero Nauha, he defined art as needing constant re-evaluation. This is also why we need to be able to say what an artwork, or art in general, is: “Artwork is a process in active relationship with the world around it; it is important to understand its place in historical continuation and discontinuation,” as Nauha says, “meaning history as a non-linear and genealogical entity.” An artwork is not a product of an autonomous singular subject, an object this subject cares about, neither does the programme guide students into becoming this artist merely aiming at producing masterpieces. Everyone needs to define their own practices, discourses, and the forms they take, and this cannot be done alone but it always happens in the context of society, history, traditions, and fellow actors.” (Jensen, 2021, 28–29) This relational nature of the work may mean that, in opposition to the traditional conception of art as ageless and eternal, over time the work becomes irrelevant, as Nauha states. This does not mean that we should not consider what art or artwork is: we must consider what it is so that at some point this can be reconsidered.

## A. ARTIST

In 1969 artist Agnes Denes wrote a manifesto that presents her perceptions of artist's work:

working with a paradox  
defining the elusive  
visualizing the invisible  
communicating the incommunicable  
not accepting the limitations society has accepted  
seeing in new ways  
(...)  
questioning, reasoning, analyzing, dissecting, and re-examining  
understanding that everything has further meaning,  
that order has been created out of chaos,  
but order, when it reaches a certain totality  
must be shattered by new disorder  
(Denes, 2008, p. 1)

In this manifesto, Denes touches upon many dimensions of artists' work and shows the importance but also the impossibility of the profession. An artist is expected to be a mysterious medium in society, seeing what has not yet been seen and making this visible in a legible form. However, these high hopes and great expectations do not manifest in the appreciation of the artist's profession, quite the opposite. While being the medium of each time and zeitgeist, the creator and collector of public memories, the artist also needs to justify their work (and being) and act as a spokesperson for the whole occupation. Artistic work is sometimes framed as "self-expression" but, in reality, the artist is expected to express what we are all feeling. Being an artist is seen as a vocation, meaning the artist is often working without payment and yet still the work of an artist is everyone's business, open for criticism and comments. Artist Mike Kelly describes this complex position;

The artist's social position may be one of irresponsibility, but that doesn't mean he actually is irresponsible. That's one of the complex-

ities of art production. The surface meaning is often not its deep meaning. You can say art is useless, but then you have to ask, “What’s the use of the useless person in society?” There is use for him. So then what does “irresponsible” mean? As an artist, you actually live in a very public environment. That’s your job. That’s why the myth of the artist as somebody who lives alone in some garret is absolutely ridiculous. Artists are some of the most public people there are. (Stiles and Selz, 2012, p. 372)

With the publicity of the profession comes politics. As a trained artist, who later became a theorist and artist-curator, or exhibition maker, activist, and politician, I have acquired a great deal of knowledge about being an arts professional. Still the profession remains a blind spot – to the degree that I almost forgot to include it to the encyclopaedia. This is perhaps a result of the profession being almost like a trauma: even as a practicing artist it may be impossible to really know what the work is about. Simultaneously there is the constant demand to justify the practice, to make sure everyone sees that you are working, just like the rest of the profitable sections of society, that you do not get off light because your “hobby is your profession”. And that is exactly what it is – your hobby is your profession, you need to keep playing, experimenting, creating stories, practicing an idealism that others abandoned – and this makes you feel guilty, even if you also know that being an artist is not a hobby at all but a most serious pursuit. The joy of making art is inseparable of the seriousness and the demands of the profession and the diverse knowledges one constantly needs to operate with. This complexity makes it impossible to formulate coherent statements about how you spend your days, about how the work comes to be. Being a curator is not any easier, because the work is even more abstract. The outcome is an event or an exhibition, but when visitors ask which of the artworks exhibited is yours, you are forced to admit that none of them were produced by you. Rather, you produced the “concept” and producing a “concept” doesn’t really sound like a real work, does it?



A proposal for hanging, 2019

In the picture, taken from my mother's boyfriend's summer home, three framed paintings hang on a wall behind a bunk bed, so that one can only see partial views of them. I love it. I love how it shows the versatility of art. We want to be surrounded by art but sometimes it is enough to know it is there. I think this shows how even the art objects are eventually conceptual, or, that art is always both. That it is as such but also as we imagine it to be. I love art and I believe in it because of this potential it always incorporates. I believe in the subversive power it has, and I believe it does us good in multiple ways. There is beauty in absurdity. Still, I do not believe that it is always something larger than life, something we need to respect and handle with care. Art is life. It is part of our lives. In a symbiotic relations, we live with it and it lives with us, we form it and it forms us.

# ACTIVISM

Considering art as efficacious, something that can be used gives it agency. With this agency, it can be active as opposed to passive, capable and responsible for taking a stand, admitting to and using its power. Art and activism are thus not completely different spheres; both are dealing with contemporary issues and have the capacity to address imbalances in power and oppose hegemonic understandings of society. They therefore can be seen as partners. "Artists, like scientists, are pioneers when it comes to creating new forms of connectivity between worlds that seem to have nothing in common." (Holert, 2020, p. 188) This connection produces new knowledges and understandings. It is a useful ally in activism; art can bring to light injustices but it can also suggest alternatives. Art, like activism, can catalyze change – Lucy R. Lippard proposes an idea of Trojan Horse as possibly the "first activist artwork." (Lippard, 1984)

The word *artivism* is sometimes used to refer to activist-oriented art, but I understand art and activism as somewhat different. Art and activism rely on different methods, simplified art being about the form and activism about the content. This is also why art depends on its forms and can't be only about interventions, collective practices, roundtable discussions, events and happenings – we might not need more material objects in this world, but we do need different means of mediating things, for exploring, researching and making things visible.

Activism and art come from different traditions and have different mediums. If art is conflated with activism its value and meaning are reduced to pure instrumentality, and the other way round – interpreting activist acts as art – there is a risk of aestheticization of political demands and even life-threatening situations. When professor, art historian and cultural critic T.J. Demos held a lecture in Kiasma, he presented pictures of demonstrations where orange construction site markers were used as signs and tools during the demonstration in Hong Kong, stating that, although they were used by activists for sharing information and resisting the police force, they could also be considered "in-

stallations.” (Demos, 2019) I agree that they can be considered as such, but it is unclear why they should be considered installation rather than activist tools which they were meant to be? These constellations were built for to survive and there is possibility that these activist interventions are appropriated and misinterpreted by well-meaning art professionals. Taking them out of their context and conceptualizing them as aesthetic objects underestimates the nature of political and social struggle. This misinterpreting also colonizes the acts and means of activists, even if the aim probably was to create novel and positive perspectives.

However, I do not resist the idea of an activist-artist position, but I agree with Professor Estelle Conwill Májozo’s way of approaching these two roles, the role of artists and of activists in *Mapping the Terrain* (1995): “The often-asked question as to how one moves from being artist to activist I find interesting, because I do not make separation in my own mind. For me, the two roles exist as a single entity: the artist is the activist.” (Conwill Májozo, 1995, p. 89) The idea of putting away one’s activist identity while making art and vice versa seems absurd, like a demand for having two different brains, histories, and mindsets, one for art and one for activism. Art is inseparable from life, art making and theory does not occur in its own alienated sphere. Rather, it is necessarily influenced by the external ideas, thoughts and practices.

In her book *Curatorial Activism* (2018), Maura Reilly names her leading question in the book in the following way; “how can we get people in the art world to think about gender, race, and sexuality, to understand that these are persistent concerns to require action?; how can we all contribute to ensuring that the art world becomes more inclusive?” (Reilly, 2018, p. 21) In addition to this, it seems important to recognize how difficult it is to not only reckon with one’s own privileges, but to understand the structures one is accustomed to. These systems seem natural because they have been naturalized. I would also like to propose that we develop the idea of inclusivity even further, to challenge us to recognize that which remains invisible, to try to surpass the fences language creates, to seek new geological areas (urban and rural) and new groups without prior expectations, to create open platforms even when faced with the possibility of failing. Is it enough to state that the invitation is for all? What could be done to extend this invitation? I posit that one of the central challenges for a curator is to understand the limitations of thought patterns based on

normalizing structures. In addition, I strongly identify with how Reilly sees her role as a curator and scholar:

My aim as a scholar and curator is precisely to ferret out – to tally, to count, and to throw inequities into high relief, laying bare the powerful ideological mechanisms that ensure some artists are celebrated while others are marginalized. I have dedicated the past twenty-five years of my career to attempting to ensure that the under- or un-represented, the silenced, and the ‘doubly colonized’ – those subjected by both empire and patriarchy, for example – are no longer ignored. I take as my operative assumption the fact that the art ‘system’ - its history, institutions, market, press, and so on – is hegemonic, that it privileges white male creativity to the exclusion of all Others. My driving force as a curator is therefore wholly activist; my aim is to be consistently counter-hegemonic. (Reilly, 2018, p. 21)

Including activism in one’s practice does not necessarily imply that activism is the primary goal. Activism can be an equal part of the process, a small sideline, or it can work from the inside and concerns art itself. In other words, it can be the practice itself, making art or doing exhibitions differently, paying attention to good practices, to choosing topics that require attention. In the case of Porin kulttuurisäätiö collective, our method has been to create projects that are accessible, that do not highlight, explain or shout. Instead of proposing one singular truth, our collective work aims to create layers that unfold over time. There is the process, the event or exhibition, the texts, and the documentation and then there is always the experience and the stories that are told. Perhaps, this is where the role of artist and activist part; art questions and is necessarily an unfinished process, whereas activism typically offers answers. As Rabih Mroué says:

An artist can, of course, also be an activist, yet when this artist produces work, the role of activism becomes problematic. For me, art rises questions, creates doubts and new ideas. They are still in progress, still in process. Crucially, they require the other – whoever that other might be – to share and to debate and to develop these ideas. In this



sense, any activist role for the artwork breaks with the basic concept of art itself and becomes rather a kind of tool to serve a particular purpose. For me, art always means betraying one's self, going against one's own beliefs. It is the place where one can ask 'what if?' (Cotter, 2019, p. 291)

Art can arise from activist purposes, and it can be used as a tool in activism, but art itself usually happens outside the sphere of activism as it is about asking, not answering. This is evident in the projects we have created. Though there might be activist aspirations behind the themes and ideas, when the working group collectively researches the theme expectations and motivations need to be able to give space for conversations and new kinds of understandings and perceptions.

Nonetheless, the outcomes may produce knowledge that can then be used for activist purposes, as a tool for change. For example, working in public places directs attention to the democracy of space – who rules these places, who makes decisions, and how transparent are the processes. “Art does not only raise issues of public space, it also has the power to perform it.”, as curator Magdalena Malm writes in *Curating Context*, stressing the variety of formats and settings, but also the different experiences and roles for the audience. (Malm, 2017, p. 9) These processes teach us how public space is controlled and contemplated. Through the art and its accompanying events we can perform and share these outcomes. During events, encounters between art and audiences take place on site. They are embedded in everyday landscapes and have the ability to form and shape both the beholder and the artwork.

In the curatorial context, the process of selecting artists and artworks is activist and catalyzes questions such as; who do you want to give space to? Who are you making visible? Who is being heard? How does this process of selection facilitate a more nuanced understanding of one's own position and privileges? In addition, how we work and how we talk about work goes hand-in-hand with activism. Work is political, talking about refusing work is radical. Suggesting that there should be places and spaces for being that are not work-related is a radical act. By increasing transparency what comes to funding and processes, we have aimed to better the working conditions in the field. The transparency expands from work to other structures, like cities and their poli-

cies. The practices of Porin kulttuurisäätö collective and Space Invaders project have produced knowledge about how cities function and the possibilities for art in different cities, and we have aimed through public discussion make this knowledge available for larger groups. In Space Invaders 2018 we invited The Union of Work Refusers<sup>10</sup> to give a talk about their practice<sup>11</sup>, even if not working is a complex issue in the precarious field of art. In their talk they emphasized the communal dimension of refusing to work, that it is something we do in favor of each other. The Union of Work Refusers ask what work means and how labor is seen, presenting work not only as a verb but also as ideology and social construction. In addition, they expressed a need for spaces that are free from the constant demand for productivity, where “people can change the logic of acting together.” (The Union of Work Refusers 2018)

Making art available to larger audiences and in its many forms is an activist act. It involves increasing the democracy of cultural capital. Under the age of consumer capitalism, to offer art for free is a radical act, as well as questioning the mode of working where “right kind of culture” is brought to areas that are considered to “lack culture”, like suburbs. Or, when exhibitions are done in fragile environments, like *Sandstorm* in Yyteri dunes (2018) or *Evergreen Inner Jungle* in Kaisaniemi Botanic Garden (2021) how visitors use the space, move in it, or perceive it, can be guided by the exhibition.

10 “The Union of Work Refusers is a social movement founded in early 2018, which aims to eradicate all the work done in the command of others. The union is a free-form collective, whose work consists of critical writing about wage labour in various media, including its own publishing on Kumu.info, various political actions combining different modes of performance and demonstration, to deconstruct the loneliness and weakness of a precarious worker in relation to the demands of capitalist production. The idea behind The Union of Work Refusers is to call into question today’s prevailing approach, where wage labour is a measure of human dignity, and livelihood is tied to how well one survives in the unreasonable and increasingly intensified circumstances of working life.” The Union of Work Refusers, 6.6.2018, Space Invaders, Kyläsaari <https://tk-liitto.tumblr.com>

11 The full presentation <https://www.facebook.com/tkliitto/videos/199850684070668>



The leader of the Finnish Feminist Party Katju Aro giving a speech in front of the Parliament House 4.4.2019

In the image above, the head of the Feminist Party in Finland, Katju Aro, delivers a speech in front of Parliament House. This image demonstrates how art, activism and politics are different sides of the same coin. They all concern handling different issues; taking them, concrete, material or abstract, into our hands, considering them, thinking about their possible and impossible forms. All three involve proposing alternative worlds. The more I think about these as concepts or activities the more I understand them through friendships – world(s) cannot be changed alone. One needs friends to be able to be brave. Radical friendships, hospitality and sharing, thinking together and reaming together can lead to solving things together.

The above image documents a demonstration, a gesture of protest in public space. Chairs were used as symbols of power. The aim was to claim a place in the institution, in the chambers of authority where decisions are made and decisive power is exercised. It referred to the lack of certain kinds of bodies and subjectivities in public decision making processes. The megaphone was used for practical reasons but it also had a symbolic role - those who are silenced could now speak out, loud and clear.

# ABJECT

## NEITHER SUBJECT NOR OBJECT

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful—a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 1)

Philosopher, literary critic, semiotician, psychoanalyst and feminist Julia Kristeva describes the abject as radically excluded, separate, loathsome, and yet desirable. In *Powers of Horror* she writes that abject is not recognizable as a thing, yet a safeguard: “a primer in my culture”. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3) Abject is experienced as revolting and disturbing, but important as cultural norms are established. The abject is similar to taboos, guiding us through uncanny cultural expectations. Through the feeling evoked by abjection, we know when food turns into filth and that we should not desire our relatives. As the myth of Oedipus shows, art is a way of exploring norms, expectations, borders and abjection. Both art and activism operate in a heterogeneous realm and can be understood in the context of surplus: something in excess of the expected and the organized.

As both a concept and a feeling, the abject is close to the uncanny or *unheimlich*:

A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A “something” that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture.  
(Kristeva, 1982, p. 2)

Kristeva presents the importance of the abject as a liminal concept and experience, it draws borders between self and other, between understandable and unknown, between structured and unstructured. In addition, it draws attention to “the border of one’s condition as a living being”. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3). The abject forces us to confront what we try to avoid, but it also presents a possibility for exploring this liminal space. The abject is about ambiguity. It is often presented in the context of repulsion. The artworks that draw on abject understand the at once curious and fascinating prospect of that which we do not quite recognize, the not quite object nor subject.

Therefore abject is widely used both as a theme and as a method in art making. *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* (1989), a film directed by Peter Greenaway, aptly demonstrates the use of the abject: a continuum from structured and homogenous towards the unstructured, excessive and abject is presented through the spatial setting, from the organized dining hall through the intensity of the kitchen space to the chaos of the backyard. The restaurant hall, where well-dressed people are enjoying their beautifully served servings, is orderly and decent while in the kitchen everything is more chaotic. The disorder culminates outside the kitchen where all that threatens homogenous order is cast aside: waste, dirt, filth, chaos. Abject is like this backyard, embracing all that is rejected and excluded from the ordered and functional space of the restaurant. Later, however, this establishment is shattered when an abject and uncanny body is brought into the dining hall.

One of the noteworthy aspects of abject is its relation to the sublime and the holy, but also to filth and decomposition, and the transition between these. One example Kristeva provides is the painting *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1520–22) by the German artist and printmaker Hans Holbein the Younger. Instead of following the tradition of portraying the dead Christ as the holy and sublime symbol of freedom and purification acquired in death, the painting presents Christ in flesh and blood, rotting and ruined in suffering. Holbein's Christ is not the familiar resplendent messiah stepping toward the heavens, but the actual dead body of a mortal human. There is no promise of an eternal afterlife, but a presentation of loneliness and pain. Holbein's dead Christ is the opposite of God's territory. It is the soulless corpse-body Kristeva describes in *Semiotics of Biblical Abomination* (1982); "A decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred between the inanimate and the inorganic, a transitional swarming, inseparable lining of a human nature whose life undistinguishable from the symbolic – the corpse represents fundamental pollution. A body without a soul, a non-body, disquieting matter, it is to be excluded from God's territory as it is from his speech." (Kristeva, 1982, p. 109) According to Kristeva, the mortal, recognizable body results in identification with Holbein's Christ and differentiates it from the politely and beautifully suffering Jesus, with whom we sympathize, but do not identify with.



A large jellyfish on a Danish beach, 2020

The above image depicts my feet beside a large jellyfish. I have been thinking about abject elements in my art and research for years and yet, it was surprisingly hard to choose a visual element to represent it. However, a jellyfish is a good example. I am drawn to them. They attract my curiosity. I think they are beautiful. I am also a little afraid of them, I have been stung by them. I find them at once strange, uncanny and fascinating. *Medusozoa* have a complex life cycle and their existence is somewhat formless. Jellyfish seem to resist the normative orders and cycles of life. The fact that the particular species *Turritopsis dohrnii* are considered immortal, as they can revert to larvae state in response to physical damage, could undermine the fundamental thesis in my research. That is, that life and death as the only stable and trustworthy concepts. In Greek mythology, Medusa was a female monster with venomous snakes for hair and the capacity to turn people into stone with a single look. Medusa, raped by the sea god Neptune and beheaded by Perseus, has become a symbol of female rage. The winged horse, Pegasus, is born of Medusa. Typically, the story of Medusa is not told by Medusa nor does it take her experiences into account. Instead, even if it seems impossible, this story of rape and murder is also a story bolstering the myth of a male hero, Perseus.

# ALIENATION AND ANXIETY

The loneliness represented in Holbein's dead Christ is, according to Kristeva, the cause of anxiety: the promise of eternal life and glory is lost and what is left is the decaying flesh and emptiness. (Kristeva, 1999, p. 133). Human life is temporal and humanity is often considered to be based on the knowledge of the temporal nature of our being. Being-towards-death is constructing our subjectivity and moments that remind us about the liminal nature of our being occur when subjectivity emerges in loneliness.

In 1980 Group Material collective organized an exhibition titled *Alienation* (November 22-December 21, 1980). "This was the third exhibition to take place at their space at 244 East 13th Street. Following a Marxist line of thought, it was introduced by the group as "An exhibition that describes and explains the modern break-up of reality – our separations from society, production and nature." The exhibition included an evening of "10 short (non-boring) performance pieces on the experience of alienation," which included a recital of 'The Star-Spangled Banner' and the Lord's Prayer by group member Mundy McLaughlin. The flyer for the exhibition mimicked advertising for the 1979 film *Alien*, and on the opening night only black coffee was served while guests were asked to wear convention badges: 'Hi, my name is...'" (Larsen, 2010) The modern, post-industrial era has been described as an epoch of disenchantment, of *alienation and anxiety*. Historically this is related to the development of capitalist economy:

Marx, too, sees the alienation from the body as a distinguishing trait of capitalist work-relation. By transforming labor into a commodity, capitalism causes workers to submit their activity to an external order over which they have no control and which they cannot identify. This, the labor process becomes a ground of self-estrangement. (Federici, 2004, p. 142)



Symptoms of this era include precarious working conditions, the constant demand for self-care and productivity and an overall lack of empathy. Numerous critical voices have spoken out. Judith Butler has explored precariousness through the concept of *grievable lives* (2016) in her recent writings; Mark Fisher has written about capitalism and alienation for example in *Capitalist Realism* (2009). The disenchantment of modern life has been thoroughly explicated by Jane Bennet in the *Enchantment of Modern Life* (2001), where she concludes that enchantment has not come to an end, but can be found even in modern times, for example, in art.

From brain research to psychological papers and interdisciplinary approaches studies have proven that art can improve wellbeing and a sense of inclusion, which has led to a situation in which art is sometimes utilized and instrumentalized in municipal strategies. It has become a comparatively cheap tool aimed to decrease alienation and anxiety in society. It is believed that participating in an art project can increase the sense of participation in society. Participatory practices and community art are seen as easy solutions to alienation that create measured and documented results. While “solving problems” these art projects purportedly elevate the character of the environment, making it more desirable to outsiders. At times, artists are invited to help with problems that the police and social service cannot solve. This occurred in one of the suburbs in Pori when the atmosphere in an apartment block became increasingly agitated. Sometimes the municipalities try to reduce costs by cutting funding to social workers and providing funding for short-lived art projects, like painting bus stops with locals. It is crucial to recognize that social workers are not replaceable by artists.<sup>12</sup> Artists can do social good, but it is different in type and in kind to the services provided by trained social workers. They do not usually have the requisite training to solve complex social problems. Often the imperative to do good occurs at the expense of artists’ well-being. In addition, the activities

<sup>12</sup> This partly hidden expectation is visible in multiple encounters with municipal representatives and is also articulated in Pascal Gielen’s text *Mapping Community Art* (2013): “Community art becomes a cheaper form of social work, especially as it is usually offered on a project basis, whereas social services, including local schools and hospitals, call for more serious, structural investment. It is very doubtful whether one can effectively tackle serious issues, such as social deprivation and disintegration, with temporary projects and similarly temporary responsibilities. Who will take responsibility when the artist – who lives in the neighbourhood for anything from a couple of months to a year to set up a nice piece of art – leaves the neighbourhood?” (Gielen, 2013, p. 30)

and services offered by the artist does not reach the audiences they were intended for, or they are misinterpreted by audiences. The artist collective Group Material, who explored themes of alienation in the exhibition *ALIENATION* (1980) but also practically by way of their working methods and strategies;

The theme of alienation can also be addressed in and through Group Material's work in relation to the processes of self-representation and bureaucratic mimicry that self-organised artistic work entails; in this case, the group's discussions of what strategies to employ in order to be taken seriously by the cultural establishment and government funding bodies, for example by carefully developing a 'corporate' profile. In the same way the group abandoned its space in 1981 and continued its projects in institutions or public spaces, concluding that even a non-profit space is too compromised by the commercial gallery format to represent a real alternative. (Larsen, 2010)

In *Locating the Producers – Durational Approaches to Public Art*, (2011) place-based, "locally relevant but also internationally significant" responsible art projects are considered from multiple perspectives and with reference to a number of case-studies. It is often their local relevance that results in their initiation before they are later presented in an international context, instead of the residents and local environment. The durational aspect of public artworks is stressed, as well as the commitment to locality site-specific practices. However, commissions and funding are also considered. It has been noted by Paul O'Neill and Claire Doherty that "Projects are translated and extended into the future, whether that is through artists' work or through residual resident initiatives that endure beyond the project lifetime or as something which is discussed in subsequent art discourses." (O'Neill and Doherty, 2011, p. 10). Emphasizing too much open-endedness tends to limit the narratives around the projects at the level of description – oftentimes the residents remain bystanders to the projects that, ultimately, come from and are for the art world. This can also be observed in the tradition of writing and talking about public art projects and how they are most often presented to a professional audience, or may even be the result of outcomes that do not meet expectations. Whatever the reason, the presentation and mediation of projects often lack reflectivity and self-critical-

ity, both crucial properties when working with delicate issues often present in participatory projects such as belonging, identity, otherness, fragility, visibility and community.

The problem of naval-gazing is recurrent. It is often the case that socially engaged participatory art practices reach those who are already participating and active in the art world. Projects intent on effecting social change may find it hard to reach those who do not usually participating in art events. The more obscure projects can, on the contrary, create a sense of curiosity and may be easier to approach. According to my experience, the easiest way to reach a manifold group of people is to be present. A visible change in the scenery helps to open up conversations, but in general, many human individuals need a listener. Intervention in a public place is often a sign of opportunity. This has been the case with many of projects with Porin kulttuurisäättö and Space Invaders. These projects have typically featured site-specific and research-based contemporary art but as they have been realized in public places, they have created a channel for all kinds of encounter and discussion. In addition, the projects have, more or less accidentally, become a way of encouraging a diversity of voices. In an ironic twist, the projects not aimed at a specific user group seem to have been able to reach audience who are historically have often been excluded.

Projects that are meant to reduce alienation and anxiety do not always reach those most suffering from these conditions. Sometimes participatory and community art projects produce familiar statements. They provide answers and results that were requested. When these are realized together with local neighborhood clubs or institutions, projects naturally move in certain directions and toward certain participants. A figure who interrupts the organization of an everyday environment is often perceived as someone who is available for conversation. An artist working with public space, whether they want to be characterized in this way or not, is public property, available for public and exposed to the public. When one uses public property, one becomes a public actor, regardless of whether it is about an art project, a demonstration or a public speech. All of these actions in public - activism, art and politics - provide opportunities to reach demographics that have been historically excluded or invisible. The possibility of fostering local perspectives and knowledge that otherwise would remain hidden, becomes a reality. Still, I do not consider Porin kulttuurisäättö's or Space Invaders' projects as participatory or community art.

One of the main reasons for this revolves around the question of control. In participatory or community art projects, the aim is to “activate locals”, to encourage them to participate and commit to a project, to control their experience. We do not expect this, but we do create possibilities for experiences and encounters. Neither do we want to control how these possibilities are used and actioned. As *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* proposes, alienation can be observed as a form and foundation:

XF seizes alienation as an impetus to generate new worlds. We are all alienated – but have we ever been otherwise? It is through, and not despite, our alienated condition that we can free ourselves from the muck of immediacy. Freedom is not a given—and it’s certainly not given by anything ‘natural’. The construction of freedom involves not less but more alienation; alienation is the labour of freedom’s construction. Nothing should be accepted as fixed, permanent, or ‘given’—neither material conditions nor social forms. XF mutates, navigates and probes every horizon. (Laboria Cuboniks, 2019)

Activist, political and artistic acts all have the capacity to be provocative. Working in public space has meant we’ve heard a billion stories about the particular location, the city, its history, people, personal histories, complaints about politics, notions of art and contemporary art more specifically, aggressive rants and acknowledgments. It has made us professionals in fields in which we have no formal training. The most crucial skill we’ve honed has been the ability to listen. I would argue that, through listening to those we’ve encountered during public art projects, we have developed a heightened sense of the diversity, variety and richness of modern life. Attracting the public’s attention has required that we make art that evokes curiosity in people, art that is weird enough to warrant comment and question, but also contains enough content to unfold into further discussion. In our experience, these discussions can increase understanding and lead to further projects and research. However, crucially, the discussions should not, and neither should art for that matter, be understood as a cure for a crippled system. I do hope, however, that the moments shared, along with new ideas and instances of meaningfulness, can emerge from the places and spaces art can create.

It is not only the possible audience that suffers from anxiety and alienation. Artists working in precarious conditions are a high risk group. Today, there is an increased amount of talk about care, support and friendship in the fields of art and culture. The proliferation of these discussions are already an improvement, as the system remains based on an austere and scarcity-based working culture. Working as an artist is often a lonely practice. Sharing a studio might help, but still, most of the time is spent alone with your work. Colleagues might understand you and the struggles you are facing best, but simultaneously the system of grants, exhibitions and residencies puts you in competition. When Space Invaders and Porin kulttuurisäätiö initiatives first started and there was little financial support, we realized that creating platforms for sharing, discussing and gathering were important. We want to create possibilities not only for exhibiting artworks but also for encounters with colleagues. Already when inviting artists to a project, we try to explain the collective nature of our work, as it is not what everyone needs or feels comfortable with. But during the years of practice, we have learned that for many, these moments of gathering are unique and highly important. These are moments when one's work and practice can be considered, in addition to the field in general and the project more specifically. This is all explored collectively and often results in affirming and mutually supportive friendships.

Curator Aleksandra Kiskonen wrote her thesis *Ystämö* (2020) about curating and friendship. She invited artist-curator or curator duos, who are also friends, to participate with written dialogues in forms of letters, or chat conversations, like the dialogue between Eliisa Suvanto and I was. The other writers Kiskonen included were Elina Suoyrjö & Essi Kausalainen, Venla Helenius & Teo Ala-Ruona, and Jenni (Ki) Nurmenniemi & Tuomas A. Laitinen. The thesis itself opens up new and relevant perspectives on curating. In addition, the sharing and writing of these dialogues was meaningful for the participants who were given an opportunity to revisit their relationship and practice together. There is often too little time to process one's own practice, and collaboration is usually a starting point, not something one has time to reflect and analyze. Friendship even less so, as it is culturally in a queer position being simultaneously a certainty (everybody is expected to have friends) and in margins, as it is usually not recognized as important as, for example, the family or a romantic relationship, and therefore not requiring the same kind of attention. The thesis

studies friendship as a curatorial method or approach and observes friendship as a mode of action, not so much as a relationship. (Kiskonen, 2020, p. 11) It presents the entangled nature of “work” and “life” in our profession; how some of the projects begin because of a friendship, and how some projects create friendships. There is a richness in this – not everyone gets to work with their friends. However, during the pandemic it became increasingly evident that working with friends can increase vulnerability. If everything you do and everyone you love is related to your practice, what happens when there is no practice?

The male flies in a zigzag pattern—often high up in search of females—and is active during the day or at night. Males occasionally come to light.<sup>[1]</sup> In New Brunswick, adult males are attracted to pheromone traps set in commercial forests for white-marked tussock moth (*D. leucodignea*).<sup>[2]</sup>

The female is flightless, spending its brief life attached to its cocoon. The female attracts other males via release of a pheromone, the males find the female via the concentration gradient of the released pheromone. The female mates and lays its grey yellow eggs in large numbers on its fine-meshed cocoon.

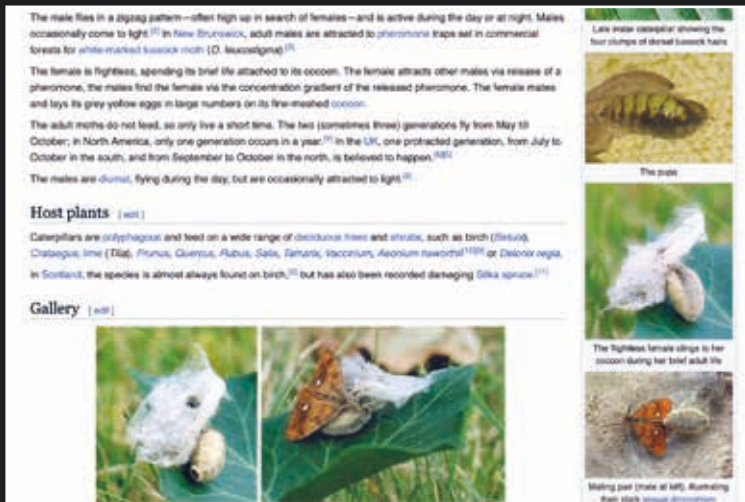
The adult moths do not feed, so only live a short time. The last (sometimes three) generations fly from May till October; in North America, only one generation occurs in a year.<sup>[3]</sup> In the UK, one protracted generation, from July to October in the south, and from September to October in the north, is believed to happen.<sup>[4][5]</sup>

The males are diurnal, flying during the day, but are occasionally attracted to light.<sup>[6]</sup>

**Host plants** [ edit ]

Caterpillars are polyphagous and feed on a wide range of deciduous trees and shrubs, such as birch (*Betula*), Chasteberry tree (*Tilia*), *Prunus*, *Quercus*, *Rubus*, *Salix*, *Tamarix*, *Vaccinium*, *Alceonium saxatilis*<sup>[1][7][8]</sup> or *Delonix regia*. In Scotland, the species is almost always found on birch,<sup>[9]</sup> but has also been recorded damaging *Salix aprina*.<sup>[10]</sup>

**Gallery** [ edit ]



The screenshot shows the Wikipedia page for *Orgyia Antiqua*. It includes a detailed description of the moth's behavior, its host plants, and its life cycle. There are several images: a male moth on a leaf, a female moth on a cocoon, a caterpillar on a leaf, and a mating pair. The text explains that the male is diurnal and attracted to light, while the female is flightless and spends her entire life on her cocoon. It also mentions that the caterpillars are polyphagous and feed on a wide range of deciduous trees and shrubs.

Screenshot from the Wikipedia page about *Orgyia Antiqua*

This is the *Orgyia antiqua* moth’s page in Wikipedia. The moth is native to Europe, living in trees and shrubs. What is interesting, is the dimorphism between males and females: the male moth flies around, both during day and night even, and has brown-red wings and antennae. The female moth is flightless and spends their entire life in a cocoon. It attracts males by releasing pheromone, the male moth mates it, it lays large numbers of eggs and dies. “The flightless female clings to her cocoon during her brief adult life”, as the Wikipedia page tells. Also the larvae live alone. In Finnish the moth is called *Täplätupsukas*, “spotted tasseled”, which sounds much more sympathetic than the life of the animal.

# AFFECT

*Affect* refers to having an *impact* or an effect on someone or something, or to *touching*, to feelings or emotions. In art theory, it often expresses bodily experiences and is widely used as a tool to touch and provoke emotional response. In films, these bodily effects can be used to create a sense of empathy and identification, even if the theme and topic is unfamiliar, bodily sensations are. For example, in the film *Requiem for a Dream* (Aronofsky, 2000), addiction might not be a familiar feeling for all viewers, but physical pain is. The film *Climax* (No , 2018) draws spectators into the madness of events with agitated dance scenes, and again, with depictions of pain and suffering. Pain and suffering are universal experiences, which all animals have in common. It is this ability to suffer that connects human-animals to animal-animals. However, there are also more empathetic alternatives to create a sense of shared understanding and compassion. Creating affect is also possible by depicting sensation, such as in *The Pillow Book* (Greenaway, 1996) where texts written on the skin play a central role in producing affect. Watching the film, one can feel the sensation of a brush moving on the back and the moisture of ink leaving marks on the skin.

Political theorist and new materialist Jane Bennett uses affect as a starting point in her reconsideration of materiality. She challenges the life-matter binary, the idea that matter is passive “stuff” to be acted upon. In *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (2001), she explores the ethical relevance of human affect, and in *Vibrant Matter* (2010) she encourages intelligent and sustainable engagements with vibrant matter and lively things. Her guiding argument is that (non-human) bodies are vital. Considering affective bodies, she refers to Spinoza, in addition to Deleuze and Guattari, “Spinoza’s conative bodies are also associative or (one could even say) social bodies, in the sense that each is, by its very nature as a body, continuously affecting and being affected by other bodies. Deleuze explicates this point: the power of a body to affect other bodies includes a ‘corresponding and inseparable’ capacity to be affected”. (Bennett,



2010, p. 21). Our body is never entirely our own, but is embedded in a network of relations with other human and non-human bodies, spaces, places, expectations, surprises, desires and fears.

How we affect and are affected is about orientation and is a result of previous embodied experiences, social structures, norms and crucially, our individual history. Orientation is also involved in the process of experiencing art. When entering an art space – an event, a museum, concert, gallery or performance space – a site typically associated with art, one is already prepared and expects to be affected. The effect is completely different when art surprises due to its placement in an unexpected setting, for example when it is accidentally confronted in everyday life. In these everyday contexts, the presence of art can be interpreted as a pleasant surprise or a disturbance. In an institutional context, the spectator is expected to see something out of the ordinary, expects to be surprised or moved in some way. As Jacques Rancière explores in his critique of the theater and spectatorship, spectatorship in this context is frequently interpreted as more passive and ignorant, even if viewing is understood as the opposite of knowing. In *The Emancipated Spectator* (2011) he writes:

We therefore need a different theater, a theater without spectators: not a theater played out in front of empty seats, but a theater where the passive optical relationship implied by the very term is subjected to a different relationship – that implied by another word, one which refers to what is produced on the stage: drama. Drama means action. Theater is the place where an action is taken to its conclusion by bodies in motion in front of living bodies that are to be mobilized. (Rancière, 2011, p. 3)

Even if this mobilizing of bodies means many different things, contemporaneously it has manifested in concrete form, evidenced by the increased number of immersive plays and performances, where bodies move around in the immersive space of performance. Play and audience become one, entwined and enfolded, as opposed to discrete entities. This strategy of immersion is thought to increase active participation on the part of the public, but, as Rancière points out, viewing and experiencing cannot be equated to passiveness. Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting. Listen-

ing and viewing are participating, bestowing meanings, interpretations, taking narratives further, combining stories. (Rancière, 2011, p. 13)

Often these immersive plays take place in staged and constructed environments which are, more or less, distinctly separate from the ordinariness of the everyday. However, the everyday is quite fascinating as a setting too, or nature, that Porin kulttuurisäätö has been exploring as an immersive stage for exhibition. In these exhibitions the collective has studied how affect changes when artworks are encountered while moving in different environments, and share what we have experienced in these places: smells of plants and air, how the ground feels under one's feet, unique soundscapes. What are the sounds related to art, what are the sounds originating from the environment? Are they separate when the art does not happen in a white cube? How does this influence the experience? Does it make us perceive our surroundings differently? Do they become more understandable, or even more uncanny, as we realize how small gestures influence the way things are seen and contextualized? How can the structure of things be shaken with minimum impact?

## A. DISTANCE

For French philosopher Jacques Rancière, distance is a key concept in the reformulation of the theater. Distance is used in various ways. For example, when the performance invites the spectator to empathize and identify with characters, the distance between the performance and the spectator is utilized. Distance between spectator and the play is also decreased by way of involving spectators in the play as scientific investigators for to combat the passiveness of the position. There is a turn in spectatorship from passive viewer to active participant and the calmly observing spectator is drawn into the "magic circle" of theatrical action: into the place of a passive spectator becomes an active body of a community. According to Rancière, "modern attempts to reform theater have constantly oscillated between these two poles of distanced investigation and vital participation, when not combining their principles and their effects." (Rancière, 2011, p. 4)

Distance, as a theatrical concept, has been meaningful to our practice with Porin kulttuurisäätö and Space Invaders. The distance from Helsinki to Pori is about 230 kilometers. Since I started studying in Pori, I have traveled this par-

ticular distance countless times. This distance, for me, signals longing: longing to arrive at my destination and longing for that which I left behind. A constant tension between absence and presence marks the projects – both being towards and being away from where I want to be. Thinking and traveling have become parallel actions. The distance between Pori and Helsinki is not only geographical but also mental. This distance has become part of our method as we have taken our practice elsewhere, to other cities and countries. Getting away from large metropolises, the concrete act of de-centering, signals freedom from certain conditions present in cultural centers.

Distance relates to how we experience places and how events and exhibitions in these places are encountered. How affect works depends on the distance. The distance can be emotional or physical, measuring how close we are to something, and how we are always already moving away from it: “Distance is here the expression of a certain loss, of the loss of grip over an object that is already within reach, which is ‘losable’ only insofar as it is within my horizon. Distance is lived as the ‘slipping away’ of the reachable, in other words, as the moment in which what is within reach threatens to become out of reach.” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 166) Ahmed’s notion links distance to nostalgia, and nostalgia connects to temporary art events. When the exhibition opens, the process is already nearing its end. The documentation records an event that has already disappeared.

Cultivating a practice based on distance has catalyzed questions of travel, meditation, and documentation. Travel forms an essential component of the contemporary global art world. This is not an ecologically sustainable way of practicing and so we spend endless hours trying to solve this problem, but simultaneously, we understand that even locally-oriented practices are never entirely local. As art historian Rosalyn Deutsche writes, “Individual cities cannot be defined apart from the spatial totality – the relations of spaces to one another within and between various geographic levels: global, regionals, urban.” (Deutsche, 2009, p. 133). Traveling, new perspectives, new contexts are much needed. Local practice is important, especially during the pandemic happening at the moment of writing this. At the same time, this time has proven me a hypocrite. My locally-oriented practice, which often considers ecological and ethical questions, is much more dependent on the global and international network than I ever would have previously understood or admitted.

Perhaps, one positive outcome of this time is that we pay more attention to the necessity of new perspectives and experiences, that we start appreciating affect as an elemental part of practice. In Porin kulttuurisäätiön practice, perceiving affect in the context of distance has been a method, even so that distance can be considered a research methodology. We have approached it as a condition that exists but can also be created and cultivated. As Bennett writes, “the more aware of wonder one is – and the more one learns to cultivate it – the more one might be able to respond gracefully and generously to the painful challenges posed by our condition as finite beings in a turbulent and unjust world.” (Bennett, 2001, p. 160)

## B. EVERGREEN INNER JUNGLE

*Evergreen Inner Jungle* is a one-week exhibition by Porin kulttuurisäätiö in the Botanic Garden in Kaisaniemi. It explores the phenomena of exhibiting foreign plants in a museum-like setting that has become a convention of its own. Instead of presenting the current situation of the distant environments the botanical gardens globally all resemble each other. They have become representations of Botanical Gardens, exotic and dreamlike atmospheric places with scientific purpose, while also carrying colonial weight, positioned at the intersection of research, environmentalism, and leisure. (Porin kulttuurisäätiö, 2021)

In 2019 Eliisa Suvanto and I started planning the project that would later become *Evergreen Inner Jungle*. However, due to the pandemic and problems negotiating with the city of Helsinki, it was only realized in 2021. The idea was originally a result of distances, traveling, and having time to experience and discuss things together. We travelled from Helsinki to Turku and from Turku to Pori for exhibition openings. While travelling we had time to ponder what we had experienced. Serendipitously, much of this resonated with our recent readings. These experiences and discussions evolved into a project that would be easy, fun, and soft, all the while considering the tradition of exhibiting exotic plants and the production of knowledge in the natural sciences. The original intention was to hold the exhibition in *Gardenia*<sup>13</sup>, a botanical garden owned by the city

and University of Helsinki in Viikki. The commercial garden site opened in 2001 and was closed in 2015 due to economic reasons. The plants, uprooted from distant lands and carefully cared for, were left to perish as they were deemed unprofitable. In 2020, the plants were still there, and the impressive building had turned into a plant mausoleum.

While the colonial past of museums have been widely discussed, especially in recent years, botanical gardens are often excluded from this conversation. Perhaps, because of their affective and atmospheric nature, they somehow evade critical appraisal. When *Gardenia* turned out to be impossible, we were able to take the project to Kaisaniemi Botanic Garden<sup>14</sup>, which turned out to be the perfect location for the exhibition. It was the ideal place to start working again, especially after the dry season of the pandemic. Collaboration with Helsinki University and LUOMUS was productive: we learned a great deal about their practice, about history and plants, and they were able to mediate their work differently and for new publics.

Most of all, the garden, the colors and smells and its experiential nature, made the project what we had hoped for. We were able to handle heavy and charged themes so that the experience remained – as the audience called it – lovely, amazing, and fascinating. Many of the works were small and gestural. Art and environment were woven together. We explored the fragmented nature of knowledge production and the violence produced by imposing power structures and colonial history, in addition to the tradition of the botanical garden as a space of display. Still, the most direct experience was based on affect, sensation, and emotion. The exhibition, with its tiny sculptures installed within moss or inside dead tree trunks, included melting sugar peaches, installations in ponds. The show created the impression of a treasure hunt stimulating all the senses. It was critical but instead of being overly conceptual or analytical, the experience was affective and multisensory.

<sup>13</sup> *Gardenia* was a garden attraction in Helsinki opened in 2001 and closed in 2015. ('*Gardenia-Helsinki*', 2021)

<sup>14</sup> "The University of Helsinki Botanical Garden at Kaisaniemi is one of Helsinki's most popular visitor attractions. The Garden is situated very close to the city centre, and its glasshouses and surrounding grounds offer nature lovers a unique experience all year round." (Luomus, 2022)



Helsinki bus station, 2019

The image above pictures my bike and three bags as I prepare to leave my hometown of Helsinki to Pori to make art. If places are essential to and what grounds and constitutes my practice, then distance, or rather distances, are the outcome and a method. That is, the distance to where things are happening, distances between people involved in the processes and projects, distances we travel to see, encounter, and experience. Distances can be inconvenient, but they make things possible: travelling creates new perspectives, new ideas, new understanding and new art projects. Studying in Pori made me understand this – all the travelling, all the distances exceeded and impacted our thinking and working and being – but it has become obvious that during the 2020 when the pandemic made our world shrink. Distance is an opposition to claustrophobia. Distance is freedom. Possibilities. Distance is not a measure but a feeling and an affect.

# ANTHROPOCENE

“Geologists have begun to call our time the Anthropocene, the epoch in which human disturbance outranks all geological forces. As I write, the term is still new – and still full of promising contradictions. Thus, although some interpreters see the name implying the triumph of humans, the opposite seems more accurate: without planning or intention, humans have made a mess of our planet. Furthermore, despite the prefix ‘anthropo-’, that is, human, the mess is not a result of our species biology. The most convincing Anthropocene timeline begins not with our species but rather with the advent of modern capitalism, which has directed long-distance destruction of landscapes and ecologies. This timeline, however, makes the ‘anthropo-’ even more of a problem. Imagining the human since the rise of capitalism entangles us with ideas of progress and with the spread of techniques of alienation that turn both humans and other beings into resources. Such techniques have segregated humans and policed identities, obscuring collaborative survival. The concept of Anthropocene both evokes this bundle of aspirations, which one might call the modern human conceit, and raises the hope that we might muddle beyond it. Can we live inside this regime of the human and still exceed it?” (Lowenhaupt Tsing, 2015, p. 19)

The term Anthropocene has been so widely debated and differentiated as to become nebulous. There have been propositions that the concept itself should be reformulated and substituted with something else, as Anthropocene has become increasingly vacuous and emptied out due to over usage. In 2019, I participated in an open studios event where one of the artists told me that during a single year, she was invited to 13 different shows with “Anthropocene” in the title. Why are we so maniacally exploring this concept that we have almost already destroyed? To leave a mark? Are the plastic sediments in soil not enough?

In his book *Facing Gaia* (2017), Bruno Latour links the Anthropocene to the destruction of the globe. “To live in the epoch of the Anthropocene is to force oneself to redefine the political task par excellence: what people are you forming, with what cosmology, and on what territory? One thing is certain: these actors who are making their stage debuts have never played roles in a plot as dense and as enigmatic as this one!” (Latour, 2017, pp. 143–144). Latour’s notions of the Anthropocene are dramatic, but they are not hopeless, especially if one thinks of the world and not only humankind. He states that we have “entered irreversibly into an epoch that is at once post-natural, post-human, and post-epistemological”, and, referring to the film *Melancholia* (von Trier, 2011) that it is not the earth but the globe that is destroyed. Still, it is possible that the lesson of this metaphor is quite different. It might not be the earth that is destroyed in a final, sublime, apocalyptic flash by a wandering planet; it might be our globe, the global itself, our ideal notion of the globe, that has been destroyed, so that the work of art, an aesthetic, can emerge. Latour’s conclusion is congruent with the ending of the film *The Girl with All the Gifts* (McCarthy and Carey, 2016). While the film concludes that the end of the world not belonging to humankind does not mean the end of the world in its entirety. Latour states that “Once the Globe has been destroyed, it has space and time enough so that history may start again.” (Latour, 2017, pp. 144–145)

It seems impossible to write about the art in the 21st century and not mention the Anthropocene, but as a topic its history is a lot longer than the recent interest of art professionals suggests. The notion of human life as a geological force shaping the earth is not a new one, and it hasn't always been as pessimistic. A soviet mineralogist Vladimir Vernadsky introduced a concept called noosphere in the early 1900-century. According to Vernadsky, Noosphere is the third stage of earth’s development, following the geosphere (inanimate matter) and biosphere (biological life). As opposed to the idea of Anthropocene, where the earth is irrevocably damaged by humans, in Noosphere humans would nurture the earth and the stage would be determined with intelligence, cognition, and technology. (Nikkanen, 2019)(‘Noosphere’, 2022) Perhaps, instead of getting stuck in dystopian notions of Anthropocene, we could work towards the noosphere?

For *Evergreen Inner Jungle* (2021) which I previously discussed, one of our starting points was the *Biosphere 2* experiment. The experiment brought sci-



entists and artists together to live in a closed, artificial ecosystem in Arizona. The *Biosphere 2* experiment was influenced by Vernadsky's theory. In *Biosphere 2* the experimental ecological facility was meant to produce information that could be used in space colonization. The knowledge produced extended from traditional scientific data to artistic research and studied how the closed community functioned. However, most of the research data was lost in the messy process including bad publicity, financial mismanagement and unclear circumstances that ended the project. In *Evergreen Inner Jungle* we wanted to study the knowledge production processes and the fragmented nature of the knowledge produced but also possibility to entangle the art, the artificial nature, and the research practice in Botanical Gardens together. "These initiatives and the tradition of botanical gardens itself, present the endless curiosity we share but also the obsession of trying to control, order and classify. These enterprises demonstrate the absurdity of normalized phenomena. In the process of taxonomy, we merely produce fragments. But these fragments, artworks, texts, plants and objects, when exhibited and shared or displayed bring us together, they create new fragments and fragments create stories. And the stories we tell matter." (Porin kulttuurisäätö, 2021)



Abandoned Gardenia greenhouse, 2020

I have started to find the concept of the Anthropocene a bit exhausting. There have already been a significant number of art projects about it, and I am not always sure about their achievements. It is increasingly difficult to find new angles from which to approach it, create embodied knowledge and understanding based on experience, precisely because it is such a huge concept and topic. However, using elements connected to our everyday environments and making our nearby surroundings visible can increase sensual knowledge. The above image depicts Gardenia in Viikki, Helsinki, a former botanic garden/garden attraction in northern Helsinki that was run in collaboration with the city and the University of Helsinki. The tropical garden was open to the public for less than 15 years and when it proved unprofitable, it was closed and all the plants were left to die. For almost ten years it remained a dusty plant graveyard. Gardenia, the zombie plants inside, and the history of the site inspired our imagination. Instead of the Anthropocene we produced the *Biosphere 2* project, an interdisciplinary closed-system experiment that began in the 1990s and took the concept of the noosphere as a starting point. We planned a project which was to be realized in this former greenhouse in Helsinki. However, when we were awarded the funding, the original site was sold, meaning our project was later realized in the Kaisaniemi Botanic Garden. After all this turned out to be the perfect environment for it, even if I did regret the missed opportunity to work in this sci-fi/dystopian building.

# ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology is a scientific field studying human life and culture in their various forms at different times. Even if the mediums and methods are different, artistic research is not too distinct a practice from this. These similarities have been explored by anthropologist Tim Ingold who states that “research is fundamentally a practice of art.” (Ingold, 2018, p. 1). His idea of “the relational view of the organism” presents an idea of an organism always existing in relation to other organisms: “a discrete entity as a node in a field of relationships.” (Ingold, 2002, p. 4). This resonates how I understand art and artistic practice, and being in general, and why I also agree with Ingold’s conclusion that this conception forces us to think in a new way about the interdependence and environments of organisms.

Art faces the same risks as anthropology. It is possible to be so fascinated with the chosen subject that one loses oneself in it, becoming critical towards the lost enchanted life, and building practice on nostalgia. The same risk of romanticization is present in both art and anthropology. In his book *Walter Benjamin’s Grave* (2006), anthropologist Michael Taussig visits the grave of the philosopher. The visit evokes an array of thoughts and emotions, such as the fetishization of places that occurs when “the aura of scientific expertise” is combined with “the romance of fieldwork”, creating master narratives that might never have existed without the practice of anthropology. (Taussig, 2006, p. 34) This fetishization and creation of myths, structures, and kinships, can also be discovered within the arts.

Anthropology and art produce knowledge about places in the world. Art and anthropology approach their research questions with a greater emphasis on negotiation than tests. Both value suggestion and observation, both admit how questionable the nature of the concept of “truth” and “objectivity” is. Artistic research and research-based art might lack the aura of scientific experimentation. At times, the existence of artistic research has been justified by adopting the form and language of science. This problem is also mentioned in the *Manifesto of Artistic Research* (2020);

Currently, the defenders of artistic research are working with a relatively coarse-grained understanding of theory, discourse, and reflection which hinders more than advances the development of a specific praxis of artistic research. This is also due to inadequate analogies: invoking, for example, terms from scientific research like “laboratory studies” and “experimental systems,” language which misleads from the beginning, as if, on the one hand, the artistic element of research exhausted itself in a series of experiments and, on the other, as if research were an art whose privileged site is the laboratory. (Henke *et al.*, 2020, p. 11)

This manifesto highlights that, in the process of presenting artistic processes in the same form as the sciences, the result is that the specific form of intellectuality may be lost. The manifesto argues that instead of following a strict method, art takes detours and creates new routes and paths “which continually generate new and un-expected counter-expressions, and do not set a goal for their nonlinear ‘experiments,’ but instead trigger irritations and thus daring revelations.” (Henke *et al.*, 2020, pp. 11–13) The manifesto suggests, that if artistic research and its unique methodologies are trusted, developed further, and successively incorporated into academic discourse, the effects could be considerable for the entire academic field. Artistic research creates the space to explore thresholds, to produce knowledge and new methods, often at the border of language and outside of conventional, scientific knowledge systems. Instead of the neutral and sterile laboratory environment, artistic research and anthropology utilize the lived habitat as laboratory, a place of knowledge production and experimentation.

Due to the fact that research- or activist-oriented artists are often concerned with social relations and societal structures, public spaces are the ideal sites for their research. Artistic research projects often start with a research question, “Artistic research is not the research of art. ‘Researching’ is a form of ‘finding.’ There is always an element of chance in finding.” (Henke *et al.*, 2020, p. 18) In this dissertation, this mode of working is examined through examples of productions done in public places. In the context of the so-called *Pori School*, every event and every exhibition can be considered a research project, where

life and its particular stage and structures are examined in certain times and places.<sup>15</sup> Events like Space Invaders use space as a laboratory, where the history and the predicted futures of the neighborhood are observed with different mediums. “Laboratory” is also a term taken from scientific research and criticized in the Manifesto, because it is misleading considering methods used in artistic research. However, when a public space is used as a laboratory it becomes both the place of study and the subject of research. Previous research about the location is observed, while the area is researched with the working group. The observations are discussed both within the group and with the locals, their stories and narratives are listened to, and new ones are created.

## A. SPACE INVADERS V – TOLERANCE

Drawing together different methods, agencies and motivations does not always occur without conflict. When the fifth Space Invaders (*Space Invaders V – Tolerance*, 2017) took place in Tampere, the location Hiedanranta was a target of massive construction plans. Art was one of the means the city used to create an attractive atmosphere in the old industrial site and improve its brand. Their actions were, however, questionable, as artists and cultural workers who were increasing the value of the area were not properly taken into consideration when planning the future of it. They were merely generating surplus value for the future luxurious neighborhood, without gaining anything concrete. The large construction companies and the urban planners were quite carelessly exploiting those in precarious positions, probably without understanding that they were doing so. With old mansions by the lake and old factory buildings with rustic charisma, the area was unique and pretty but it suffered a lot because of the factories. The lake was contaminated and many of the buildings were dangerous. The theme was tolerance and along with Aalto University and Tampere University, we created an interdisciplinary project exploring the resilience of both the environment and its inhabitants, human and non-human.

In addition to exploring tolerance in the context of nature – how it is, or is not, capable of adapting to changing and even damaging conditions – we

<sup>15</sup> I am not suggesting that everything should be contemplated as a research project or that this would be a meaningful approach in every case, but also I do not believe that the research-based approach is in conflict with aesthetic aims.

also explored tolerance as a social issue. In 1969 Herbert Marcuse, an academic who was member of the Marxist-influenced Frankfurt School, wrote a critical review on the theme, coining the concept of “Repressive Tolerance”. (*A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, 1969) According to Marcuse, tolerance had become a form of passivity in a radically unequal society, serving the cause of oppression. (Marcuse, 1969, pp. 95–137) Lately, similar ideas have been presented by, for example Slavoj Žižek, who in the essay “Tolerance as ideological category” (Žižek, 2008) states that problems of inequality, exploitation, and injustice are reduced to problems of intolerance. The concept of tolerance lies in the complex intersection of individualism, collectivity, universalism and particularity. In recent social discourse, the limited nature of merely tolerating has been questioned: tolerance does not mean the same thing as acceptance, and tolerating does not secure possibilities for participating. The documentary film *Boiling Point* (2016) was screened during the Space Invaders event. The film shows how “Financial inequality, lack of vision, fear and anger especially towards asylum seekers, has been growing rapidly in Europe, also in Finland. People are increasingly afraid that their home environment is becoming unrecognizable and undesirable. Populist demagogues have risen to harness these fears and to raise people against each other.” (*Boiling Point*, 2017) In the film we can see what happens when there is no tolerance but also why more than merely tolerating is needed.

The event was organized in the form of a school camp. The co-curator and teacher of the course, Eliisa Suvanto and I arrived at Hiedanranta with a group of students and artists, with whom we lived, worked, cooked, ate, studied, and produced an exhibition. Eventually, tolerance was not only a theoretical theme but also something that was very much needed throughout the process. Tolerance and resilience helped us cope under pressure. They helped us adjust and adapt. Tolerance made it possible to survive situations that might otherwise have been unpleasant and uncomfortable.

During the event, we researched the environment, social issues at work in addition to the urban planning process. Not all the research outcomes pleased the local participants. Together with Maija Jokela, we organized a critical workshop about so-called “nice activism”, a form of bourgeoisie activism that takes over the city space by producing fun events like restaurant day, where everyone can build their own restaurant or a kiosk for one day in order to question its target groups and potential impacts. Eventually, it turned out that this kind of

nice activism and art was exactly what the city of Tampere and the development group were aiming for: rather than radical acts questioning the state of the environment or the lake, or the ethical issues related to the process, "nice activism" aims to strengthen the community but ultimately is about elevating the brand image of the city. The intervention should, therefore, look appealing, be easy to use for marketing purposes and, in the end, not change too much. This kind of activism does not cause inconvenience. This is activism that can be tolerated.



Anna-Sofia Sysser and Helen Aleksandrova,  
*Space Invaders V – Tolerance*, 2017.

In the above image, Anna-Sofia Sysser and Helen Aleksandrova lie in an old fountain set in the yard of an old mansion in Lielahiti, Tampere. The picture was taken during the *Space Invaders V – Tolerance* event in 2017, which explored human and non-human tolerance and resilience. We touched upon themes of crisis from multiple perspectives – from environmental to societal, from individual to global. The industrial waste from surrounding factories have permanently damaged the area, itself now under construction. Skateboarders, activists, urban planners and artists were given (almost) free reins to use and take over this unique location. Ultimately, was more or less about creating surplus value for the big companies benefitting from this free branding work. The crucial question became; how much artists are expected to tolerate just for the sake of being able to perform their profession?



# ARCHIVE

The archive is a collection of knowledge and objects. For a surprisingly long period of time, archives, like libraries and museum collections, were generally considered somehow neutral and objective. Collections in western museums were praised, not problematized. The last decade has seen an active turn in rethinking and deconstructing archives. Feminist and decolonizing practices intervened, making visible the hierarchical arrangements at work in archives of various kinds. These practices and interventions have shown how hegemonic structures are constructed and maintained, often based on the exploitation of those in weaker positions. The construction of archives has been anything but a democratic, egalitarian process. Neither have archives been mutually open for design and use by all. Jacques Derrida points out how this constructed order is already embedded in the term itself and how archives are spatial in essence:

*Arche*; we recall, names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, there where things commence - physical, historical, or ontological principle - but also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, *in this place* from which *order* is given-nomological principle. *There*, we said, and *in this place*. How are we to think of *there*? And this *taking place* or this *having a place*, this *taking the place one has of the arkhe*?<sup>16</sup>  
(Derrida and Prenowitz, 1995, p. 9)

Archives make different ideologies visible at different times. Archives are a repository for knowledge, they are where we collect knowledge and later, investigate its procedures.

<sup>16</sup> In this text Derrida not only connects archive to the concept of a place, but interestingly also to the concept of *unheimlich*: "All that Freud says is that we are receptive to an analogy between the two types of transgenerational memory or archive (the memory of an ancestral experience or the so-called biologically acquired character) and that "we cannot imagine [*vorstellen*] one without the other" [SE 23: 100]. Without the irrepressible, that is to say, only suppressible and repressible, force and authority of this transgenerational memory, the problems of which we speak would be dissolved and resolved in advance. There would no longer be any essential history of culture, there would no longer be any question of memory and of archive, of patriarchive or of matriarchive, and one would no longer even understand how an ancestor can speak within us, nor what sense there might be in us to speak to him or her, to speak in such an *unheimlich*, "uncanny" fashion, to his or her ghost. *With it*." (Derrida and Prenowitz, 1995, p. 27)

Archives are like public and embellished diaries of institutions, cultures, and nations. As diaries, they are often embarrassing from a contemporary perspective and raise questions about what to do with them and how to interpret them. There is no objective knowledge, rather fragments based on choices made by subjects. Reconsidering archives is reconsidering how we see our past, but also the future. As Derrida points out, “The archive has always been a *pledge*, and like every pledge [*gage*], a token of the future. To put it more trivially: what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way.” (Derrida and Prenowitz, 1995, p. 18) This comprehension of archive as a site for potential change has been utilized within visual arts as well as theory, even if it sometimes remains a question If the form of an archive in an exhibition context is merely being repeated or revisited or if it is being reconstructed or reconsidered.

Archive is a form that has been widely used in the context of contemporary art over the past decade. Dashing configurations with all kinds of visual elements and objects have been shown in many of the big events and biennials, creating bridges between art and science, past and present. The fashionable show RIBOCA, curated by Katerina Gregos, announced itself as “a critical site of artistic experimentation and knowledge production, an activator of co-operation and exchange between local and regional actors and institutions, an instigator of generosity towards peers, and a barometer of current social, political and economic issues altered through artistic practice.” Gregos continued with the declamatory words:

The 1st Riga Biennial aims to paint political, personal and existential portrait of the unpredicted times we live in and to relate to tectonic shifts that are taking place in the public as well as private realm. Whether one defines the current era as the ‘Anthropocene’, the ‘Capitalocene’ or the ‘Chthulucene’, it is certain that we have entered an era of epochal shifts. This is at once both exciting and frightening. The artists in the Riga Biennial are examining these changes and our attempts to cope with them, summoning ghosts from the future and recalling prophets from the past. (Gregos and Maes, 2018, pp. 17–28)

The biennial included an array of different archives. It was almost as if they wanted to emphasize this by locating the event in the former faculty of biology

of the University of Latvia. At times, one couldn't tell if a room was life or art, a laboratory or an artwork, a scientific diorama with taxidermy or an installation. Some of the works presenting archives were more obvious than others. For example, the *Encyclopedia* (2015–2017) by Heldén, Johannes + Jonson and Håkan included library catalog cards with prints about fictive animal mutations created by an AI. However, the biennial also managed to do more than merely exhibit the most self-evident archive representations. It approached the city as an archive, encouraging the public to explore the different eras and sites of Riga.

## A. PORI BIENNALE 2020 – NOT TO SING LIKE A CITY BIRD SINGS

When we think about the island of Reposaari we think about the sea, and the forest. We think about doing together, and imagining together. We think about time that expands to thinking, eating, cooking, and going to sauna - everything becomes entangled. Without a doubt Reposaari is one of the essential elements in Porin kulttuurisäättö's practice. It is part of our personal story and ideology, where a place, art, their politics and experiences are inseparable. To us Reposaari is like an endless summer camp. Simultaneously it is – a bit like Porin kulttuurisäättö – its own curious and distinct realm where multiple forces – global and local, urban and nature, structured and unstructured – intersect. (Porin kulttuurisäättö's curatorial text in the Biennial catalogue 2020) (Jensen, Suvanto and Porin kulttuurisäättö, 2020)

Archives create an understanding that is based on the whole, not only singular parts. Forming an archive takes time and effort. From 2011 to 2019, Aalto University has organized courses on Reposaari, a small island off the west coast, near Pori. During the courses, students got to know the island, its history and made a number of site-specific works. Many if the works have been inspired by the unique nature of the island, the ballast plants, the rocks with old engravings and quiet atmosphere. It has been fascinating to witness how, year after year, the same forms and approaches emerge in the works, it is as if the environment is a more powerful force than the intentions of the individual artist. In 2020, we wanted to explore this phenomenon further and so the works were collected and exhibited in the fourth Pori Biennale by Porin kulttuurisäättö.

The name of the biennial, *Not to Sing Like a City Bird Sings*, evokes how we feel about Reposaaari. It is a place that changes the rhythm of our being. It is almost as if the sky and the sea get bigger when the city gets smaller, as if there was more air to breathe. For the biennial, co-curated with Eliisa Suvanto, we wanted to open up the archive of works and study them as a whole but also invite people to Reposaaari, to share what we love and admire. We also wanted to make the works available for the residents in Reposaaari who have, year after year, seen the students arriving and working but hardly ever had a chance to enjoy the actual works. The exhibition was supposed to take place in an old research center where the Aalto courses were originally held. This was to be used as a short-term residency for artists to produce site-specific works before the exhibition. I wish I could say that this was I dream project come true. Instead, it was a dream project that did not come true. Or it did, but not as planned due to COVID19.

Unlike many of Porin kulttuurisäättö's shows that had taken place in July, the 2020 biennial was planned for early June, meaning that we were supposed to leave to Reposaaari in May. It was soon evident that this was not possible. Also, because Porin kulttuurisäättö has always promoted itself as a flexible agency aiming to reconsider and deconstruct practices in the artworld, this was a moment to prove this flexibility and use our skills and experience to create new means and standards. We decided to shift the focus of the biennial a little and, in addition to exploring how place impacts artworks, we wanted to study how a sense of a place is transmitted through different mediums. Instead of taking the public to see the archive of the works where the actual works were made, we created an online exhibition and a material publication that opened both the archive and the place up to the public all over the world, locked down in their homes.

We wanted the public to feel the place instead of just seeing it. When something is encountered on the screen instead of an embodied, spatial engagement I often feel that the experience becomes more or less dulled. The online exhibition and publication tested the limits of this kind of experience. believe that the diversity of works, the various mediums and all the different approaches from spatial to theoretical or personal made this possible. However, the process was not easy and there was much sorrow. We grieved the changes, and while grieving we also felt bad for doing so, as it felt like there was so many more important things to mourn amid the crisis;

Currently the whole world is suffering, and the future is uncertain for most of us. How to make and exhibit art in times like these? Are we entitled to grieve the loss of a project and the personal expectations we had for it: working together within a place and a theme that meant so much to us? Are we entitled to mourn art as we have known it, while concurrently hoping this situation produces solidarity and new, more sustainable practices? And, is the global shock that is inevitably also an individual crisis, the best moment to re-evaluate and to recreate the practice of this field? (Porin kulttuurisäätiö's curatorial text in the Biennial catalogue 2020)

But why shouldn't we mourn and grieve? Is it because, no matter how much we believe in what we do and in art, we are influenced by the normative idea that art is less important in the world? In a moment of crisis, is it the first thing we should give up? But how to give up something that is a livelihood, a life world for many? It is a profession, but also a community, a way of living. The biennial gave us an opportunity to mourn together but also actively work together and positively influence the condition we were living in. When many artists were financially suffering because of the situation, exhibitions were cancelled, job opportunities were scarce, the new form of the biennial enabled us to invest in materials, accommodation, and travel, to invest in artists. The online format, the exhibition, the opening and meetings, made it possible to bring people together from all over the world. This was comforting in the middle of this time of alienation. An important part of this was the *Kitchen Philosophy* opening event by Taina Rajanti (always the heart of the kitchen in Reposaari) and the Kitchen Philosophy team. The kitchen has always been an important dimension of Reposaari. It was even more so during this time, it became possible during the opening and all-day event, to invite artists, guests and former students from all over the world to meet, discuss, and to make food together.<sup>17</sup> Amazing dishes were created and happy reunions were experienced. This would not have been possible if the opening were a live event. We knew we were working in the dark, considering how the near and far future seemed so unknowable. Instead of trying to analyze the situation and speculate possible scenarios, it felt good to organize something together.

<sup>17</sup> "Kitchen Philosophy" has been a constant feature of the Reposaari experience since 2011. "It refers to the definition of the four days course every Autumn as a total work of art, a Gesamtkunstwerk, where each component – lectures, assignments, discussions, meals, sauna, free time – is an essential part of the whole. Taina Rajanti & *Kitchen Philosophy* (Jensen, Suvanto and Porin kulttuurisäätiö, 2020)



Students in Reposaari

This picture is from Reposaari, where we have returned year after year with different groups. From 2011, Aalto University has organized courses there. The structure has most often been the same: on the first day the students get to know the island, on the second day they realize an artwork that somehow responds to the environment, and on the third day they make an artwork that responds not only to the environment but also to some of the works created on the second day. It has been fascinating to see how the works resemble each other, how strong the impact of the place is. This theme was explored further in 2020 when Porin kulttuurisäätiö opened up this archive of works and created its fourth biennial around the topic. However, the archive does not only constitute the works but also the stories; pieces of Reposaari that, those of us who have been there, recognize and carry with us.

# AUDIENCE, PUBLIC, SPECTATORSHIP, PARTICIPATION

The mainstream contemporary art world focuses on the production (artists and works of art) and the distribution (museums, galleries, and publications) of contemporary art. Mediation between the work of art and the audience is usually the purview of professionals designated as educators, and the reception of the art is measured once it appears in respective venues. Fault – the inability to comprehend and appreciate the work of art – is often attributed to a notion of deficiency: lack of knowledge on the part of the viewer, lack of labels on the part of the museum, and, less often, lack of clarity or quality on the part of the artist. This gap between art and its audience is dramatically pointed out by the example of public art, since it is on the street that, it is felt, the work of art meets an uninformed and unwilling general public.

But what if the audience for art (who they are and what their relationship with the work might be) were considered as the goal at the center of art production, at the point of conception, as opposed to the modernist Western aim of self-expression? And what if the location of art in the world was determined by trying to reach and engage that audience most effectively? (Jacob, 1995, p. 50)

When independent curator Mary Jane Jacob writes about the gap between art and its publics, she points out multiple features of art practice and the act of perceiving. The idea of the incompetent spectator who needs to be educated, the concept of the unwilling public in public places and the way art has withdrawn from everyday life. The new genre of public art has, since the late-sixties, questioned this gap which is, at least partly, a relatively new and artificial construction. Despite this critical discourse and practice, these presumptions are still very much alive. These presumptions are most obvious when it comes to art that occurs outside of traditional neighborhoods, especially in suburbs, where the audience is often considered to lack the requisite knowledge, education, and understanding. This is rooted in the idea of art as cultural capital, making it a question of class and education.

But do we really need an educated spectator, or to educate them? And what does this actually mean? How much art is about understanding based on knowledge and how much about the experience? I would propose it is the latter, as one of the main strengths art has is its multisensory capacity to touch, to cross the borders of conventional knowledge and language, to reach towards the unknown. Related to this, it can also speak to different groups of people with different backgrounds. This, of course, means that art needs to be taken to where it can reach and engage audiences most effectively, as Jacob writes.

The term *audience* refers to a hierarchical relationship structure where there is an active author who is delivering content and a passive audience who is receiving it, even if this staging has been questioned and re-interpreted many times. And despite the multiple types of public art practices and the variety of forms it takes, it is surprising how art is still so often reduced to two categories: traditional object-based art in a (valuable and festive) public place or participatory art in poor neighborhoods. However, not all art aiming to actively reach multiple audiences is participatory art. The problem with participatory art, art that is often used as a tool to activate, or even very much hierarchically to cultivate, the so-called “bad neighborhoods”, is that it usually activates those who are already active. Short term projects with artists might be cheaper than long-term social solutions. They are easy to document, hard to criticize as there is usually not much taxpayers money wasted, but the long-term impact remains a question. Another problem, for example one that was brought up in *ARS & URBIS: Art in Urban Planning seminar* (Turku, 2015), is that instead of solving



possible problems in certain neighborhoods, participatory and community art projects may end up stigmatizing these neighborhoods. In one of the presentations it was mentioned how in Varissuo, one of the suburbs in Turku with a questionable reputation, the residents stated that “no, not again” when yet another community project was launched. It makes sense to ask, as Pascal Gielen does, “is the revival of community art merely a perverted side effect of ongoing neoliberalization and the dismantling of the welfare state, or does the community now offer a powerful alternative to hyper-individualization and endless flexibility?” (de Bruyne and Gielen, 2010, p. 3)

To create lasting and meaningful participatory processes takes time and resources. *ANTI – Contemporary Art Festival* dedicated especially to live art is held annually in Kuopio and concentrates on being open to all kinds of publics and fosters accessibility and participation. The festival has been held since 2002 and has developed multiple ways of increasing participation: “projects by artists from around the world inhabit the spaces of public life – homes, shops, city squares, business, forests, lakes – and directly engage communities and audiences in the making and showing of their work. The festival is free to attend.” (*ANTI – Contemporary Art Festival*) In 2014, the festival launched a new model, where the festival collaborates each year with a non-art related event or agency. This collaboration has influence on the chosen theme of that year. This has helped the festival reach new and larger publics, it has created new communities and increased its social impact. One of the key elements in reaching especially locals is to hold activities throughout the year, not only during the busy festival period: time- and site-specific artworks are presented under the concept of public art and are entangled with everyday life; the works can be encountered in the city space while travelling to school or work. (Tuukkanen, 2019) While public art used to be monumental, the new public art is often produced in dialogue with different agencies, and most importantly, it considers the very question of “the public” as its starting point.

Considering what it is that constitutes the public is always a balancing act. Professor and curator Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger presents the relationship between “the audience oriented approach slipping on the side of populism, elitist curator centeredness and inbred institutional experts”, stating that, “on the one hand, without an audience there are no encounters or art exhibitions. On the other hand, artists, curators and art organizations have knowledge and ex-

pertise that make it possible to develop new ideas and research and making art more meaningful in our time in the world.”<sup>18</sup> (Rastenberger, 2017, p. 102) Working in public space could be understood as an escape from some of these intersecting expectations. What attracts me to working within the public sphere is the idea of possibility of refusal or surprise as opposed to the participatory aspect: the possibility that the unwilling and the uninformed audience might or might not participate and how this can happen in ways one cannot control. The event, act, artwork, object, the experience of something changing in the scenery can disrupt the ordinary flow of everyday events and open up space for something new. Or it might just annoy and irritate, but these feelings too can lead to new narratives, new knowledges and new ways of sharing knowledge.

It is easy to confuse liking art with understanding it or with experiencing it. Art displayed in new locations may not be liked or appreciated, but this does not mean that it does not have some kind of impact, or that it does not create new knowledge about the place in which it is displayed or about the world of art itself. This is especially the case when working on something that is, more or less, an experiment. When playing with the novel, the new, we cannot expect everyone to like it. How is it possible to like something that one does not know and recognize? In this gap between known practice and unknown outcome is also the possibility of novelty, of trying out new things in the public sphere – to test them in practice, to see how they work and what kind of reactions they provoke. To learn from these experiments and reactions demands listening, which, in turn, can be seen as a critical practice in the context of the classical understanding of public art, historically based on the idea of artworks representing the ideal, the accepted and the highly valued in a particular culture – it has been a hierarchical structure more about teaching than learning.

Instead of the object, the so-called “new genre public art” explores relations and what they can tell us about art, public space and audiences: “All art posits a space between the artist and the perceiver of the work, traditionally filled with the art object. In new genre public art, that space is filled with relationship between artist and audience, prioritized in the artist’s working strategies.” (Lacy, 1995a, p. 35) Rather than simply placing monuments in the city space, contemporary public art can create situations, events, happenings, interventions, encounters that may or may not be recognized as art, but nevertheless provoke strong reactions and feelings.

## A. PORI BIENNALE III – CENTENNIAL

Once every hundred years, people are let to decide what kind of art they want to see. “Why is it always a biennale? Why not a centennial, an exhibition that would take place every hundredth year?” This question was asked during the first-ever Pori Biennale in 2014, and now this year’s exhibition is based on it. Today we approach this question in relation to the public, after a hundred years the perspective might be completely different. This question in mind the exhibition is focusing on two big themes: how to overcome the generalizations concerning the opinion of the so-called general public – often used in order to create a notion of a homogeneous group with a limited capacity to understand art – and on the other hand contemplate what contemporary art is in this moment and furthermore what it possibly can be in the future? In what kind of a world would the second volume of Centennial happen?” (Porin kulttuurisäätiö et al., 2018)

The third Pori Biennale *Centennial* took as its theme the so-called general public and how it is (mis)understood. Working with different audiences in different places, locations and cities has made it obvious that, firstly, there is no such thing as a “general public”, a homogeneous like-minded group. Secondly, the general idea of this group proliferates as somewhat incapable of appreciating any challenging contemporary art and more likely in need of cultivation. This is also the reason why public art is often overly simplistic and “has become a stereotype”, as writer and curator Giles Waterfield says: “To succeed, it needs to rely on a shared visual language, accepted and understood by its audience (sometimes, in the past, an elite audience).” (Landmark, 2008) Public art hardly ever surprises, and is usually immediately recognizable as art, or documented as happenings by a communal participatory project – as if leaving visual marks equals to making a difference.

One of the most problematic aspects of this conventional conception of public art is the hierarchical structures it creates and maintains. Even public art and art projects aimed at empowering, often turns against their means and ends up strengthening existing power relations. There is always an individu-

al in power making the judgments and decisions for those whom the art and empowering is aimed for. In Centennial, Porin kulttuurisäätiö wanted to question the traditional way of encountering the public in art and direct attention to the indefinite understanding of the concept of the general public. The idea was to hear what the public has to say about art and their own expectations. To gather these sentiments, we did a survey during the Truth About Finland (Porin kulttuurisäätiö *et al.*, 2017) exhibition in the summer of 2017. In the city center of Pori during a day in the autumn, we approached random passerbys in the streets. 117 people answered the questionnaire and shared their ideas and thoughts about what kind of art they would like to see in the future.

Porin kulttuurisäätiö's survey suggested that the variety of preferences are broad and cannot be predicted. What was evident, is that more than pure aesthetic values are expected from art. The survey indicated that people feel insecure and worried about the world, about the environment, equality, animals, social justice and wellbeing. Art was seen as a much-needed critical voice. It was obviously also thought to have an impact. In the Centennial catalog the survey was opened up and analyzed both in Porin kulttuurisäätiö's text and in diagrams and lists:

The concern about lack of empathy, the state of the environment, our world and mankind and are very much present in the answers collected through the survey on which Centennial is based on. Behind both the exhibition and the questioner is confusion about the often-used concept "general public" and its hopes and needs. Quite often the term is used as an excuse when there is lack to provide something new, to challenge, think or implement things in an unprecedented way. On the other hand, it is also used as a justification for not supporting politically or critically engaged practices, especially through public funds. Throughout the years the projects of Porin kulttuurisäätiö have been realized in places enabling encounters with a heterogeneous and polyphonic group of people. These confrontations have become an essential part of our practice and lead to questioning the previously mentioned assumption about the taste of the "general public". In order to prove our hypothesis right, we implemented the two-part survey to collect data on people's willingness to experience

art, and in case they did want to experience it, what were the hopes and wishes: what, how, and where.

Our survey proved that the variety of preferences is broad and can not be predicted. Much more than pure aesthetic values are expected from art. And even if a painting was the most wanted medium, the difference between performance art was very small. For most people, all techniques and mediums as such were welcomed or simply of no importance. The perhaps surprising popularity for performance arts can be explained through the strong tradition and current scene of Pori. On the other hand, the city is also known for its liberal attitude towards street art and multiple murals in the urban landscape. Despite this (or because of it), only three people expressed any desire to see more street art in 2018.

It was remarkable what was and is expected from art and how this then defines the role of art. This notion is also related to how and where art is exhibited. Art is considered to be important and people – in general – wish to see art, yet many feel disconnected or out of place in museums and galleries. The art institutions and more traditional places of exhibiting art are still seen as somewhat elitist and exclusive. Instead, art should be presented in places, surroundings, and environments of everyday life. Artistic practices are expected to have both capacities and urge to address current questions and issues, and contemporary art is seen to have critical potential. Simultaneously it is hoped to provide surprises, possibilities, and tools to reflect one's own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. (Porin kulttuurisäätiö *et al.*, 2018)

One reason for the demand of having art outside museums can be that part of the survey was done in Porin kulttuurisäätiön's exhibition, and Porin kulttuurisäätiö has created a tradition of bringing art and audiences into new and interesting places outside institutions. It is possible that it was conducted in a city more known for its ice hockey team than its love for fine arts, as one of the residents suggested when answering the survey. But, also, the survey tells about

the sense of belonging: do I belong to a museum or a gallery, do I feel at home or at ease there? Is it possible for me to enjoy the art exhibited, to experience it without feeling out of place in a museum? And, as the survey showed that art is understood to have revolutionary potential, maybe some of this revolutionary possibility is lost when these controversial ideas are institutionalized?

## B. PARTICIPATION

When art is removed from the white cube, the relation to audience becomes more acute. The public hasn't specifically chosen to experience art, but the encounter is paradoxically more random and more central. This also makes the concept of "audience" a curatorial issue in a new way. Like curator Magdalena Malm suggests:

As projects appear in various locations and media, the issue of the audience is always present. Who are they, how are they to be reached or will they rather be an inherent part of the project? In many of the projects the audience is the main character of the work, without whom the project cannot take place. This means the audiences become a curatorial issue that needs to be carefully considered in the conceptual framework and produced accordingly. (Malm, 2017, p. 10)

Working with the public doesn't necessarily mean participatory practices, even if they are often interpreted as such. When the aim of a project is to activate and encourage participation, the expectation is often to create a non-hierarchical and democratic platform where everyone is heard. This, however, is naïve in a situation where the rules and standards are set by professionals and those participating are not. Neither is it possible to reach everyone or be reached by all. One can even wonder if it is a reasonable expectation to wish to do so. Also, while it is important to create possibilities for participation, it is as important to respect those who refuse to participate, especially in a society obsessed with productivity, efficacy, and activity. As Rancière states;

Our artists have learned to use this form of hyper-theatre to optimize the spectacle rather than celebrate the revolutionary identity

of art and life. But what remains vivid, both in their practice and in the criticism they experience, is precisely the ‘critique of the spectacle’ – the idea that art has to provide us with more than a spectacle, more than something devoted to the delight of passive spectators, because it has to work for a society where everybody should be active. The ‘critique of the spectacle’ often remains the alpha and omega of the ‘politics of art’. What this identification dispenses with is any investigation of a third term of efficacy that escapes the dilemma of representational mediation and ethical immediacy. I assume this ‘third term’ is aesthetic efficacy itself. (Rancière, 2011, p. 63)

In the *Centennial* project, where the aim was to reach the spectators at a more fundamental level, the exhibition itself partly failed on these terms: when the exhibition based on the survey was launched, we could not reach those who we had reached with the questionnaire. Rather, the project was realized based on the ideas, hopes, and wishes the public had expressed in the survey. The artists were selected based on this and their works responded to the answers. We chose artists who were able to create spaces for surprising and aesthetically interesting encounters but whose works still had critical potential. We wanted to present a variety of different mediums and practices and lower the threshold to enter the exhibition. We found a perfect location for the event in the central Pori, where an old flower shop space and a very curious shopping passage called “citykäytävä”, “city aisle” a grandiose name for an almost invisible spot in the city, had been empty for a while and available for us to use. However, the exhibition did not attract the general public in the way many of our previous projects had done. It was sited indoors which meant that it did not change the city space or the environment in a way that many of our projects had previously done, and therefore it didn’t evoke curiosity in the same way. The public needed to open a door and enter a space that was filled with things mostly recognizable as art. This already presented an obstacle. Instead of the general public, we were able to attract art professionals and *Centennial* became probably the first exhibition where many travelled from different cities. Later, the gallery 3H+K moved to the same location, so the project did have a long-term impact on the local art scene.

Johanna Tuukkanen, former artistic director and senior manager of *ANTI – Contemporary Art Festival*, has presented the various forms of participation in the context of ANTI throughout the years: bodily participation, participating in a dialogue or a discussion with an artist, participating in the process in different roles (as a performer or a person or presenting a community), and how these different forms of participation have had a direct impact on the formulation of the works. (Tuukkanen, 2019) What Tuukkanen doesn't mention is the passive participation that was encountered during the Centennial exhibition, the kind of participation Rancière urges us to respect. The project proved to us that there are multiple ways to participate and consider participation, and that one approach should not be valued over the other. There is value in passive encounters with art, that is, the subversive power of refusal. Not all passivity is "useless passivity", and "refusal is not the same thing as doing nothing", as Judith Butler notes in *The Force of Nonviolence* (2020). (Butler, 2020, p. 202) The concept of "private" is attractive to me because a lot in contemporary art is about the concept of "public": public art, public places, public discussions, public confessions, public funding. Perhaps, passivity is a refreshing option for active participation, active citizenship, active neighborhoods, activated elderly people, or sometimes, even activism. Everyone is having burnouts, maybe it is time to be passive, create passive art, and expect no more than passive receiving.





Visitors in *Sandstorm* exhibition, Yyteri 2019

In the above image, we are giving a guided tour during the *Sandstorm* exhibition in 2019 in Yyteri. The guests are climbing a sand dune. It is a very hot day, the sun is shining. The image is taken at the end of the tour and I know that most of the visitors are hungover. It is, after all, Pori Jazz festival and many have come to Pori to party. I also know that the guests are getting tired, even if they are visibly happy and excited about the exhibition. I am starting to get a bit worried that they will dehydrate or have a heart attack. When the concept of the public is discussed in art discourse, it is often with reference to questions of taste or comprehension. However, in practice, it is often very concrete and material questions one needs to think about: safety, accessibility, transportation. Especially when working outside of museums and galleries it can be hard to guarantee security. Therefore, balancing between creating experiences that challenge, exhilarate, and reward but that do not harm visitors or turn out to be too demanding is essential. This is one reason why we often want to guard our events ourselves. The other reason is for the sake of encounters: it is very rewarding to be able to talk about the exhibition with a guest and to hear their thoughts. I think this is where we have learned the most, and what has also given us inspiration for new projects. It is good to be challenged. When a visitor asks “why are things like this done?” it does take one’s thinking trajectory in completely different directions. It illuminates new areas that need mapping, and helps us decide how precisely to map them.

# AUTHORSHIP AND AGENCY

Milja Sarkola's *Pääomani* ("My Capital", 2020) is a theater play and book about an author obsessed with the idea of money, struggling with the insecurity of their profession, and the angst of inherited capital and class. One of the scenes takes place in an artist's residency in the US. A young female artist asks if she can use the leftover photos the older male photographer has thrown away. The older male artist is thunderstruck and starts a long monologue how his art cannot be used by others, as he has been mastering this method for decades and it belongs to him. The outcome of his authorship is only his own. (Sarkola, 2020) The scene is a caricature of different approaches to the question of authorship. If an artist is a sole genius creating new worlds and ideas from nothing, or if art is the outcome of a certain time and place, the embodiment of a zeitgeist, more than subjective interpretation. The tendency to rethink archives, the canon, and the nature of collections has brought the concepts of authorship and agency under a new kind of focus. The project of reconstructing the idea of the author as a white male genius through collective and practice-based practices has shifted attention from authorship, to the question of who is heard, who is recognized as an author. What does agency mean and who is allowed to have it and by what means? The death of the author is not a novel theoretical concept. Roland Barthes inaugurated this notion in 1967 with his seminal essay *The Death of the Author* (1977): "we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author." (Barthes, 1977, p. 148) The essay, however, is more about literary criticism than about authorship, and it has, at times, been interpreted as a counter strike to the rising number of female authors. Guarding the holy aura of authorship, the literary critic was rather willing to sacrifice the concept of the author rather than admitting that woman can write.

Achieving authorship is also related to the positionality of the author. Typically, authorship is not passively received, instead it requires active acknowledgements. Those who lack idols and positive role models often find it more difficult to occupy a position of agency. In the fluid field of the arts, being a professional is not a fixed position. Not even education leads to a sense of being an author or a professional. Being paid for what one does is one route to this, but being paid is hardly ever a permanent position, so one cannot rely on this. Authorship is not only about making something but is also about being seen as a maker, recognized as an author. This is what makes it difficult, and why the concept goes hand in hand with norms and structures. Being recognized as such is the first principle for being recognized as an author. Authorship is not only a question of making and creating but a question of multiple power relations and societal structures. "Intellectual freedom depends upon material things." (Woolf, 1989, p. 108) Later, this idea of profession as a result of social situations was developed further by Linda Nochlin in her essay *Why have there been no great women artists?* first published in 1971.

There are multiple ways to become a professional; education, practice, practicing a profession, being paid to do something, becoming an expert. In art, however, the question of professionalism is more complex than this. It is a question of identity, structures, living conditions, being recognized as an artist, recognizing oneself as an artist, and being able to practice one's profession. "But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction - what has that got to do with a room of one's own?" This is how Virginia Woolf begins her enduringly important essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929). The essay is about the conditions that make art possible, the conditions that make it possible to write. To write, or to do any kind of creative activity, one needs privacy, a room of one's own, money enough to live. It helps if one was sent to school, learned grammar and logic, but most of all, encouragement: "The world did not say to her as it said to them, Write if you choose; it makes no difference to me. The world said with a guffaw, Write? What's the good of your writing?" (Woolf, 1989, p. 52) For female authors, authorship has always been a more complex phenomena than for males, who might take it for granted, Woolf presents very contemporary ideas about shared authorship: "For masterpieces are not single and solitary births: they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of people, so that the experience of the mass is behind

the single voice." (Woolf, 1989, p. 65) Canons create possibilities for authorships, possibilities to be seen, and therefore canons should be constructed so that they enable becoming an author for diverse groups.

Writer and feminist activist Audre Lorde, who was born 1934, five years after *A Room of One's Own* was published, revisits the theme of a room of one's own, material conditions, and class differences in the context of creating art, not only art in general but also different forms of art, stating that;

Of all the art forms, poetry is the most economical. It is the most secret, which requires the least physical labor, the least material, and the one which can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper. Over the last few years, writing a novel on tight finances, I came to appreciate the enormous differences in the material demands between poetry and prose. As we reclaim our literature, poetry has been the major voice of poor, working class, and coloured women. A room of one's own may be a necessity for writing prose, but so are reams of paper, a typewriter and plenty of time. The actual requirements to produce the visual arts also help determine, along class lines, whose art is whose. In this day of inflated prices for material, who are our sculptors, our painters, our photographers? (Lorde, 2017, p. 97)

These examples suggest that authorship and agency are more related to the material conditions than one would immediately think. And this is a crucial question considering what kind of art is produced and by whom. What kind of questions are being studied and mediated and how? Material conditions are also present in the concept of ownership. Who is eligible to claim something as their own?

## A. OWNERSHIP

To justify and motivate for public art, the term 'ownership' is often utilized, especially with reference to how art can increase community participation and a sense of belonging. This application of the term 'ownership' refers to the feeling ownership evokes as opposed to legal ownership, though they are funda-

mentally related. Owning property creates a sense of ownership (as we came to realize in Matinkylä) and it confers power to the owner. Ownership is a matter of both public and private. When sites that used to be public, such as malls in suburbs, are increasingly privatized, a communal sense of ownership is foreclosed and ownership of the space is narrowed to include private entities. It is not “our” space anymore. Rather, it belongs to corporations and can only be used by those who have wealth.

In the context of contemporary art, the concept of ‘ownership’ is widely used and refers to ownership of one’s own practice but also to the degree of involvement residents have in their neighborhood. Art can be perceived as a threat to this sense of ownership or as something that can increase it. I have had a strong belief that art, by intervening in the everyday, can bring people together, creating new narratives to be shared. Ultimately, these discussions create communities. Recently though, I have started to doubt this optimism. Where does this idea of art as something inherently positive, or interesting or sharable come from? Do we need to foster this notion of art? Or should we exercise more criticality? Criticality may be especially appropriate in cases involving an unknown group of artists intervening in a familiar environment with acts that might not make sense to the local community. In the middle of the struggle of everyday life, would you notice small acts of art? Would you consider them life-changing? Or would you rather perceive them as not intended for you?

Perhaps, questions of ownership, within the context of art, are most present when established monuments are criticized, when a public who would not usually feel a great deal of investment in art or its freedom rushes to defend these very qualities. In this sense, ownership may also be considered in relation to nostalgia. Certain artworks are seen as grounding elements of the golden age, parts of the past that form the foundation for today’s world. What and how then, would it mean for contemporary art projects to increase senses of ownership and belonging?

Art can and should be inclusive. It can consist of an experience that leads to new kinds of perception, new feelings towards the environment and to other beings. Still, it often manages to reach those who are already active within its frames, those who already approach spatial art projects precisely because they already feel a sense of ownership regarding art and its accompanying events. This can lead to compelling discussions about a certain area and its community, but it

can also turn out to be a complete fiasco, such as the *Space Invaders V* in Matinkylä proved to be. We wanted the event to be something enjoyable and collective for the working group and the neighborhood. However, the neighbors were very upset about the project and hated everything about it. The various ways public art projects are perceived can sometimes be explained by considering the differences between various areas. For example, in suburbs people tend to have stronger reactions because they are often not as accustomed to contemporary art. They may lack cultural fluency. Their degree of ownership, in terms of art in the public realm, is higher/lower than in the city center. I believe most of these ideas are more or less lazy explanations and also based on certain kinds of unrealistic hopes one has about working in different neighborhoods. City dwellers may be used to this kind of busy energy, perhaps more accustomed to unexpected encounter. Perhaps this familiarity with art on the part of city dwellers is one of the reasons art has been invading new and "fresh" neighborhoods. But then, surely a variety of reactions should be expected? Suburban neighborhoods cannot and should not be considered fun fairs for artists who have become bored with city centers and want new, usually cheaper and less crowded, inspirational locations. When experimental and/or research-based projects are taken outside of city centers, the reception cannot be controlled. A negative reception may result, just as readily as a positive one and for research and art it can be at least as significant.

One important aspect of creating possibilities for ownership and belonging is recognition. Art can allow people to feel seen. Increasing diversity in representations can also increase ownership in a larger variety of groups. Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of relational aesthetics was that art could create communities. However, according to some interpretations, the concept only strengthened the distinctions between different roles, such as "exploited performers" and the "guilt-ridden liberal art consumer" (as queer theorist and art critic Jennifer Doyle calls the involved parties.) Doyle states that "the more a work looks like a relationship, the more important the place of affect and emotion may be to critical engagement with it." (Doyle, 2013, pp. 89–90) Ownership is more than just proprietorship. It is a feeling and as Doyle shows in *Hold It Against Me*, feelings and emotions are traditionally difficult in contemporary art as they have been considered inferior to rational analysis.

The concept of ownership leads to the question of how art is considered in the society. Art is bestowed with, especially considering the resources provided,

immense responsibility. Why is it exactly that art is held responsible for these social conditions and sentiments? Why are economists not held responsible? Or engineers? Or public healthcare workers? Could this distribution of responsibilities be exactly because of the difficult feelings and emotions that art evokes?

When I first started practicing as an artist in Helsinki in the early 2000's, I considered myself to be an original and authentic painter. I painted open mouths with teeth. I was quite happy with how they turned out. One day, I was watching the news and there was a clip from an exhibition, I think it might have been Jani Hänninen's. The clip featured a painting with a mouth and a set of teeth. It was remarkably similar to what I had been painting. I became upset. I started screaming, yelling and telling my partner at the time that the established, male artist had stolen my painting style. I have come to understand that rather than consciously and maliciously stealing my original teeth painting, Hänninen's work, along with my own, had been the product of a certain time and place with its accompanying forms and painterly idioms. It is surreal how similar forms seem to come into existence in different places simultaneously. This anecdote demonstrates that ownership is not as simple a concept as it might seem. Especially when working collectively, the line between what is yours and what is mine becomes increasingly porous and fine, until it almost disappears. As a curator working on collective projects, this blurring of the line often troubles me: being aware of us working on the project already sharing some ideas and thoughts and practices. Discussing a project within a group necessitates the sharing of ideas which can lead to unconsciously adopting ideas that perhaps weren't originally yours. How do you grant the requisite ownership when the process is necessarily shared?



Milja Sarkola: *Pääomani*, Q-teatteri 21.2.2020

The above installation image presents the stage of Milja Sarkola's *Pääomani* in *Q teatteri*. I was hesitant to use it, as nothing in the picture, even if I had taken it, was mine. The play was not mine, the set design was not mine. The experience and the interpretation, however, was mine but these were coming to life through an accumulation of previous experiences, texts I have read, plays I have seen, discussions I have had. We create but do we ever really own authorship? Can I claim something as mine? Working in collectives probably changes how one feels about authorship and agency. Practice is not an individual feature but a shared one. Still, collectives change, we take shared ideas, thoughts and forms to other collectives, to other projects and events. We might not want to use them as we are not sure if they belong to us but neither can we leave them, as they have become part of us. How much are we willing to share? How much are we willing to give for the common good? If everything I have and am is shared and commonly usable, who is the "I"? Who am "I"?



# BECOMING

Art is a constant state of becomings. It becomes in the process of making and becomes with every new encounter, with every new interpretation. Every being is always in a state of becoming. The world is never finished, it is always happening. In contemporary discourse, the concept of becoming is indebted to Deleuze's philosophy of difference and transformation. Historically, the notion of becoming owes a great deal to Heraclitus' notion of not being able to step into the same river twice. Movement and change are inevitable. As a philosophical concept, "becoming" refers to the notion of constant movement, instead of "being" in a static state in which things remain the same. Process philosophy, the ontology of becoming, and the lineage from Heraclitus to Heidegger, from Nietzsche to Deleuze, provides tools for exploring processes in the context of art and relation. The constant shift is already relational. In *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019), Rosi Braidotti explores becoming as a vital materialist continuum and non-linearity that helps question and create new engagements between institutionally implemented "major" and marginalized but "ethically transformative and politically empowering" "minor" sciences:

The vital materialist continuum sustains the epistemology of becoming that is the conceptual motor of the Critical PostHumanities. It can be served by establishing a new parallelism between philosophy, the sciences and the arts (Deleuze and Guattari 1994). But it can do much more: Bonta and Protevi (2004) stress that a materialist 'geo-philosophy' helps to redefine the relationship between the 'two cultures' of the 'subtle' (Humanities) and 'hard' (Natural) sciences. The Critical PostHumanities encourages new creative engagements between them. DeLanda (2002) praises the intensive mode of Deleuzian science for its anti-essentialism and points out that 'minor' science also replaces typological thinking. The virtual and intensive becoming supplants the ruling principle of resemblance, identity, analogy and opposition. (Braidotti, 2019, p. 126)

Becoming has taken different meanings in philosophy at different times. For Hegel, becoming is the movement of maturing spirit, material formulation, where the spirit is itself the spirit of this formulation. This becoming is an active process where, as Susanna Lindberg writes, “while the human being shapes the world, they are also shaped by the world”. (Lindberg, 2012, p. 29) This materialistic approach to being and becoming has been a prominent part of contemporary philosophical and art discourse. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have guided theoretical thinking into a radical post-humanistic field, aiming to deconstruct hierarchies by presenting possibilities of metamorphosis: *becoming the other*. Becoming is becoming-animal. Becoming an insect. Becoming female. As this metamorphosis questions the traditional idea of singular subjects and stable identities, according to Deleuze, Guattari and their followers, it creates space for new ways of being, empathy, and understanding. This theory, however is only useful in certain cases, mostly it makes it obvious how impossible it is to see the limitations of one’s positions from the perspective of a white male author. Even if, as in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari state that “there is no becoming-majoritarian; majority is never becoming. All becoming is minoritarian.” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 106) it isn’t explained how it would be possible to become a minoritarian, how to imagine and transform the position of a minoritarian from a majoritarian position? One could argue that only a white male, at the apex of the pyramid, can imagine being freely able to transform from one identity and position to another, or wanting to become the other.

“Becoming” a subject is a complex process embedded and formed by various power relations, conditions and (normalizing) social practices. It also depends on the particular subject position. To be recognized as a subject and “social existence” is not equally available to all. The concept and idea of becoming offered by Deleuze and Guattari does seem overly optimistic, even as a theoretical attempt to think differently. When those in more precarious subject positions, lacking both the freedom and the recognition, are taken into consideration, Judith Butler’s understanding of becoming sounds more credible:

A critical evaluation of subject formation may well offer a better comprehension of the double binds to which our emancipatory efforts occasionally lead without, in consequence, evacuating the political. Is there a way to affirm complicity is the basis of political agency, yet

insist that political agency may do more than reiterate the conditions of subordination? If, as Althusser implies, becoming a subject requires a kind of mastery indistinguishable from submission, are there perhaps political and psychic consequences to be wrought from such founding ambivalence? The temporal paradox of the subject is such that, of necessity, we must lose the perspective of a subjective already formed in order to account for our own becoming. That “becoming” is no simple or continuous affair, but an uneasy practice of repetition and its risks, compelled yet incomplete, wavering on the horizon of social being. (Butler, 1997, pp. 29–30)

In feminist theory, the idea of becoming originates from Simone Beauvoir’s claim that one is not born, but becomes a woman, which would then necessitate an understanding of the term “woman” as always in process, “a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end.” Butler writes, continuing that “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.” (Butler, 1990, p. 33)

Even if de Beauvoir’s becoming is about social normalization and Butler’s is about *passing* and the hard work it requires, and are thus both quite different from Deleuze’s idea of becoming, all of these have had a significant impact and also Deleuze’s theory has been positively appropriated in feminist thinking. For example, Rosi Braidotti uses the concept of becoming as a creative force of undoing structures, empowerment, and transformations:

Becoming is a question of undoing the structures of domination by careful, patient revisitations, re-adjustments, micro-changes. A long apprenticeship to minute transformations, through endless repetitions, will replace the illusion of a royal road to the revolution or of one single point of resistance, and assert instead the constant flows of met(r)amorphoses. Becoming is a nomadic kind of revisitation or remembering which traces empowering transversal lines that cut across the staticity of sedimented memory, activating it by de-programming it out of the dominant mode. Becomings are creative work-in-progress processes. (Braidotti, 2002, p. 116)

For Braidotti, the epistemology of becoming, sustained by the vital material continuum, is “the conceptual motor of Critical Posthumanities.” This epistemology can establish a new parallelism between philosophy, the sciences and art and create new connections between them: “The virtual and intensive becoming supplants the ruling principle of resemblance, identity, analogy, and opposition. Non-linearity also takes the form of breaking up established conventions.” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 126)

The posthumanist and materialist perspective has much potential. In order to consider art and interdisciplinary approaches, new parallelisms are needed. However, Braidotti’s take, like Deleuze and Guattari’s, can also be interpreted as alienated and privileged. Writing about nomadism, Braidotti translates literal to metaphorical. This has been criticized by feminist writer and scholar Sara Ahmed, who notes how, according to Braidotti, the nomads and migrants become representations, something other than themselves. (Ahmed, 2000, p. 82) Instead of becoming something, there is the risk of appropriation and misleading. As Ahmed writes: “To say, ‘we are all exiles’, is to conceal the substantive difference it makes when one is forced to cross borders, or when one cannot return home.” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 81) Even non-linearity requires existing on the line. Becoming, when considering the human condition under capitalism and colonialism, is only a possibility for those whose being has never been systematically and epistemologically questioned.

Perhaps the concept of becoming is most useful when it is understood as an opponent to the rationalistic idea of wholeness and completeness. Our being is not a work or a game to be completed, there is no prize in the end. Everything is changing around us all the time, in a constant flow, so how could a subject be the same, unchangeable, from day to day? To become does not lead to this finalized version of oneself, rather it is a possibility for the others in you. “To become is not to achieve a final state of being; it is to give more of a chance to that which rumbles in you, but you are not.” (Bennett, 2001, p. 26)

Art can also be understood as a place of becoming and as an entity always in the state of becoming, a possibility for the other in you, and can even involve trying on the position of the other, but only to some degree. It is a suggestion and a proposal and a possibility for other perspectives. Every time I encounter art that touches me, a little bit of the other penetrates me. From Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* to Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* to contemporary art and bodily acts, like

Artor Jesus Inkerö's "holistic bodily project" where;

Embracing hyper-masculine bodybuilding standards, and using the supplements, gestures, attire and behaviours associated with this subculture, Inkerö (who uses the pronoun "they") manipulates both the viewer and the external qualities of self-representation. Conflating artist and persona, they use online culture in their work as part of their self-transformation, a performance that is both a physical and social experiment and one that performatively addresses the visual and societal expectations of gender. (Kerr, 2020)

Still, art is not a magical free sphere and, as the discussions on cultural appropriation, decolonialization, and intersectional feminism have shown, to do this, the artist needs to be aware of their position in relation to the other as well their motivations creating such narratives and representations. With this in mind, art can be a tool for increasing empathy. It can offer different narratives, different ways of being and becoming, making different forms of being relatable. The positive interpretation of the concept of becoming is to understand it as a form of compassion and process of empathy: "the man who suffers is a beast, the beast that suffers is a man", as Deleuze describes in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (2002), stating that "This is the reality of becoming". (Deleuze, 2002, p. 22)



Still image from *Slow in Pace of Movement* (2013)

The above image depicts a video still from Porin kulttuurisäättö's *Slow in Pace or Movement* (Porin kulttuurisäättö et al., 2013) project that studied tardigrades and asked what we, as humans, can learn from these resilient small beings. In the image, I am dressed as a tardigrade, a water bear, posing before a bear statue in front of the Pori Town Hall. During the project we tried to find actual tardigrades but it turned out to be more difficult than we thought, so we created our own version of the eight-legged, usually about 0,5mm long, microscopic creature. Eliisa Suvanto created a tardigrade outfit and I became the tardigrade. Like many other Porin kulttuurisäättö's projects, it played with multiple concepts from scientific research, from belief systems to the concept of becoming and imitation, in both a serious and playful manner. The picture presents a double imitation gesture, referring to the Deleuzian conception of becoming: me imitating a water bear imitating a bear, and the bear being a symbol for the town and its identity. Even if the Deleuzian approach in the project was partly a joke, it made me both consider and doubt his idea of becoming more carefully. It is very privileged to think it possible to occupy the position of the other. The tardigrade is and remains, the other. There is no way – no matter how much research I deploy, how much time I spend, how much compassion I feel – I could become a tardigrade. I can sympathize and empathize with the tardigrade. I can learn from it, I can live with it, but becoming the other is, as I see it, the ultimate fantasy of control and takes over another's subjectivity.

# BEING-WITH, CO-EXISTING

Art is an opportunity to increase and understand, if not the lives of others, then the shared nature of the world. Art also evidences the constructed nature of hierarchical structures that place humans at the top of the pyramid. Contemporary discourse questions the way we think of evolution as a separated development of different and differentiated species, with the hierarchical tree of life where humans are the most complex creatures on top of all the other living beings. Orthodox western philosophy has, throughout its tradition, concentrated on the rational, moral subject as an individual, and forgotten that we only ever exist in a state of relation. Feminist scholar, philosopher and scientist Donna Haraway combines ideas of making and staying with the trouble with ideas of becoming-with, making kin and symbiosis or “sympoiesis”, as she calls it, “a carrier bag for ongoingness, a yoke for becoming-with, for staying with the trouble of inheriting the damages and achievements of colonial and postcolonial naturacultural histories in telling the tale of still possible recuperation.” (Haraway, 2016, p. 124) Haraway reconsiders fundamental concepts like being, thinking and knowing, and emphasizes their collective and situated nature.

The philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy brings another perspective to the question of collective being. He considers the first person plural and the effects of using “we” instead of “I”: “A singular being appears, as finitude itself: at the end (or at the beginning), with the contact of the skin (or the heart) of another singular being, at the confines of the same singularity that is, as such, always other, always shared, always exposed.” (Nancy, 1991, p. 28) Nancy and Haraway both approach being as shared and embodied phenomenon in a way that challenges the tradition of individual-centered thinking. While Nancy can be considered radical in a way he handled western metaphysics and its central concepts, Haraway radically reformed the way theory is used as a political tool and written many of her key works in the form of a manifesto.

But, like English philosopher Simon Critchley presents, also Nancy's theory expands to practicality. In his reading of Nancy's *Being Singular Plural* and the fundamental ontology he notes, Critchley posits that it's not only an ontology, it is also, and must be, *an ethos and a praxis*. (Critchley, 1999, p. 245). This is how the practice of art as practiced-with could be understood there must be an ethos and a praxis – and that this is a responsibility that needs to be considered. The liberal modern human subject on top of the pyramid is a subject that has, at least to some degree, come to its end. The more that is learned about the other, the more this subject position is questioned. The faster the world gets ruined, the more the actions stemming from this ideology are challenged. The state of the world today has made co-existing one of the most critical issues of our time, and being-with, co-existing, co-appearance, are all concepts opening to many directions that need to be observed today. Nancy's *Être-avec* to Martin Heideggers *Mitsein* to the post-humanist discourse of being with the other and Haraway's question of how to think-with, live-with and be-with all the other planetary organisms, or *symbiotic planet*, as evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis titles the fact that “we are symbionts on a symbiotic planet.” (Margulis, 1998, p. 5).

Especially since the Enlightenment, the singular and rational human subject has been emphasized as the center of the world – almighty but also individually responsible. This is the burden bestowed to compensate the power and has been justified in different traditions, myths and religions, such as Christianity: “God destines the animals to an experience of the power of man, in order to see the power of man in action, in order to see the power of man at work, in order to see man take power over all the other living beings.” (Derrida, 2008, p. 16). Now we ask, if this power is justified, where has it taken us and all the other beings? This turn in thinking, that Nancy has even called “a new Copernican revolution” – a revolution at the level of social being (Critchley, 1999, p. 244) is also as a question of surviving the new climate regime (Latour, 2017) or a question about how live on a damaged planet (Tsing et al., 2017)

Haraway writes about this responsibility, also calling it response-able in this context, referring to our capacity to respond to the demand of the other, and how this is not the same for all. We, companion species, as she calls our co-existence, are responsible and infect each other all the time, but this does not mean that we are all similar to each other: “We are all responsible to and for shaping conditions for multispecies flourishing in the face of terrible histories,



and sometimes joyful histories too, but we are not all response-able in the same ways. The differences matter – in ecologies, economies, species, lives.” (D. J. Haraway, 2016, p. 29). We tell stories and through these stories, we shape the conditions for multispecies togetherness. Stories store memories, lives, differences and they turn into collective thinking and knowledge, maps to navigate through the complex system of co-existing.

## A. SPACE INVADERS VI – LIVING TOGETHER

The theme of 2018 Space Invaders (Jensen and Suvanto, 2018) was *Living Together*, borrowed from Judith Butler’s text about precarious lives and lives that matter. (Butler, 2016). The event, organized together with *Publics*, a curatorial agency in Helsinki, Aalto University, and the University of the Arts Helsinki, took place in Kyläsaari *Uusix*, a day center for long-term unemployed people. *Uusix* is run by the Social Services and Health Care Division in Helsinki and it provides activities aiming to evaluate and rehabilitate. It is designed to support its customers' life management skills. The goal is to get them back to the labor market. Employment support services facilitate the integration of the unemployed and partially employed into society and the job market. The services provide broad-based networking, guidance, assessment, and rehabilitative employment services. (*Employment support and social rehabilitation*, 2022) An important part of the practice is the community the service provides, and facilities that can be used for learning new skills.

However, because the unemployed as a demographic is often invisible to the those assumed to be the productive part of the society, this rehabilitation practice seemed to be invisible to the city running it. Every year since 2013, Space Invaders has organized together with different cities, institutions and agencies, previously in Pori, Espoo, and Tampere. The discussion with the City of Helsinki about possible locations, started a year before the actual event. However it soon became clear that it was leading nowhere: no one knew about the empty and available locations (even if there were plenty). They were too expensive or too far away. *Uusix* was not mentioned before a friend working there as a designer told us that there was plenty of unused space and that it was one of the locations the city is, or at least has mentioned to be, developing for the use of all city residents.

Uusix is located in a very fascinating and not too well-known neighborhood not far from the city center and quite near to where Aalto University's art department used to be located. However, the area seems almost abandoned and is surrounded by a wasteland. According to the city, the area is under improvement, but what kind of regenerative projects were taking place remained unclear. For us, the collaboration provided both an interesting location and an abundance of material resources because Uusix recycles almost everything the city of Helsinki discards.

At the event and during the course we organized to accompany it, we discussed the theme and what living together could mean, what forms it could take. Many of the works turned out to explore solitude more than togetherness. Perhaps, thinking about being together with others leads one to consider the self in relation to the other. Especially touching was Parsa Kamehkhosh's piece *Today Might Be the Last Day*, a performance where the artist gave instructions for what to do if he died at that moment. He was lying down in one of the racks in a messy storage space with closed eyes. Even if it was about singular, individual death, an experience that can never be shared, or even fully understood, it presented the inherently relational nature of one's death. It always touches others, there are always tasks to do that are left behind, things and stories to pass on. Being is, even at its end, being-with.



Parsa Kamehkhosh's *Today Might Be the Last Day* performance, 2018

This is an image from the *Space Invaders VI – Living Together*. It pictures messy storage shelves with tools and indefinite objects along with a person, calmly lying resting on one of the shelves, his eyes closed, his hand resting on his chest. The image is a component of Parsa Kamehkhosh's piece *Congratulations*, described as "a life-long project including a series of performances/practices through which I prepare myself for death." (Kamehkhosh, 2018) The work included a performance and a list of tasks that needed to be done should the artist die during the performance. The work was a poignant reminder that not only do we live together but we also die together. The solitude of individual death touches others, it concerns others. There are both practical and emotional matters that need to be taken care of. Our living and our dying are not private. They are shared and, like the location of the exhibition and the performance being a rehabilitation center for the unemployed underscored, socially and structurally controlled.

# BODY

In the pharmacopornographic era, the body swallows power. It is a form of control that is both democratic and private, edible, drinkable, inhalable, and easy to administer, whose spread throughout the social body has never been so rapid or so undetectable. In the pharmacopornographic age, biopower dwells at home, sleeps with us, inhabits within. (Preciado, 2013, p. 207)

Chris Burden, an American performance artist, probably most known for the works that target his body – having pins pushed into his body, spending five days and nights in a locker and having himself shot – has said that he thinks his art is “an inquiry, which is what all art is about.” (Stiles and Selz, 2012, p. 899) Art as an inquiry exceeds traditional methods, and provides results that could not be generated in other ways. When I consider art as knowledge production that can also surpass the limitations of verbal and already existing knowledge, then how can art increase understanding? In a world full of knowledge, art can surpass language-based, purely intellectual reason (if we differentiate knowledge-based on the traditional mind-body-dualism), rational and conceptual awareness. Art can be constituted by bodily experience, by the different senses. Thinking happens not only collectively, as presented in the previous chapter, but also through different senses: I think by doing. This is part of my methodology: I think in open space, walking, or swimming, my skin touching water, my muscles working. I think badly and uncomfortably sitting down in front of my computer. I frown, my body straining. Theory and art happen when I bodily occupy spaces. When my flesh pushes empty air out of its way, palpate meanings, feelings, ghosts, and spirits from the past and the future.

Beginning with Plato and Aristoteles, western philosophy has separated the body and the mind. Especially since René Descartes formulated the idea of intelligence as the mental and prior to the body that cannot think, the body has been subordinated to the mind. The body is the machine or the corpse, as the human itself is the rational animal. The soul, the spirit, intelligence, consciousness have all been qualities of the immortal, non-spatial side of our being,

while the body is what ages, is tied to space and time. According to cartesian dualism, it cannot think and does not go to heaven, but remains, decays and rots. Descartes' contemporaries found this proposition problematic. Theologian and philosopher Henry More wanted to resist atheism but also felt that matter alone could not explain everything and that everything needed to exist in space. He claimed that soul was necessary for life, that plants and animals had souls. Still, the body itself was seen as inert and passive. (Henry, 2007) Because the body was considered inert and passive, it was long forgotten. "In the philosophical tradition that begins with Plato and continues through Descartes, Husserl, and Sartre, the ontological distinction between soul (consciousness, mind) and body invariably supports relations of political and psychic subordination and hierarchy." (Butler, 1990, p. 12) In this tradition, producing gender asymmetry, the mind is associated with masculinity, and the body with femininity. To re-think gender hierarchy, this mind-body distinction should be rethought.

Not even Hegel, who aimed to create a theory of everything, really considered the body: "In Hegel's Phenomenology, bodies are almost never to be found as objects of philosophical reflection, much less as sites of experience, for bodies are, in Hegel, always and only referred to indirectly as the encasement, location, or specificity of consciousness." (Butler, 1997, pp. 59–60) The body is there, but it is never taken into consideration, in distinction to, for example Michel Foucault, who brought the body into the center of his study of power and structures:

Within the Hegelian framework, the subject, which splits itself off from its body, requires that body in order to sustain its splitting activity; the body to be suppressed is thus marshalled in the service of that suppression. For Foucault, the body to be regulated is similarly marshalled in the service of suppression, but the body is not constituted prior to that regulation. On the contrary, the body is produced as an object of regulation, and for regulation to augment itself, the body is proliferated as an object of regulation. (Butler, 1997, p. 34)

Bodies do not exist as such, as Sara Ahmed clearly articulates in *Strange Encounters*:

My concern with the embodied nature of strange encounters requires that we first ask the question, ‘what is the body?’ I will argue that there is no body as such that is given in the world: bodies materialise in a complex set of temporal and spatial relations to other bodies, including bodies that are recognised as familiar, familial and friendly, and those that are considered strange. (Ahmed, 2000, p. 40).

Even if the tradition of separating body and mind is long standing, it has also always been questioned. This is not a surprise considering the body connects us to the world, the senses. It is not through the immaterial mind that we experience the world but with our physical bodies. Being-in-the-world is embodied being, it is material being in a material framework. Michel Foucault has shown us how the body is an object of multiple disciplinary acts, how biopower functions through it, creating obedient subjects. The body is not a neutral concept, but a hierarchical and gendered one. The body, in general, compared to the mind, has been considered irrational and disobedient, but some bodies are even more illegible than others. The female body, or a black body, bear different connotations than the white male body, which has traditionally been seen as a neutral character. For example, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva have argued that the female body is figured beyond language, as language itself is a construction of hegemonic patriarchal structures. According to both Cixous and Kristeva, both the female body and female language poses a threat to the order and control maintained by the patriarchal system. Cixous proposed a new language and style of writing, *Écriture féminine*, a language that would create space for female gender, identities, and narratives outside of structures not capable of fully recognizing the feminine existence.

In recent decades, new materialism, feminism and post-humanism have brought the body into the center of philosophical consideration. Rosi Braidotti refers to the notion of en fleshed or embodied materialism and states that she wants to think “through the body, not in a flight away from it.” (Braidotti, 2002, p. 5, 63) Braidotti’s take on the body is highly political. As she articulates in her mission, “The old mind-body liaison needs to be reconstructed in terms which are not nationally driven, top-down and hierarchical”, noting that both “nature” and “the body” are slippery categories that tend to slide towards essentialism. (Braidotti, 2002, p. 5, 63)

A body, the skin and the flesh, both separate us from other beings, but also tie us to them – as bodily creatures we invade the space and the globe together with others. “Temporally speaking, a body is a living memory that endures by undergoing constant internal modifications following the encounter with other bodies and forces.” (Braidotti, 2002, p. 99) The body and memory are entangled in a spatial phenomenon. In his book *The Memory of Place* (2012), Dylan Trigg explores the relation between identity, place, and memory, and the “dynamic movement of memory being between place, cognition, and embodiment.” (Trigg, 2012 p.xxv) Trigg takes phenomenology as his starting point, stating that “not only does the body become constitutive of the world, but the world itself is possible only through the experience of embodiment” (Trigg, 2012, p. 13). He expands this exploration from the familiar to the unfamiliar and uncanny, a spatial experience at the intersection of memory, place, body, and imagination. Trigg calls the human body “a privileged vessel of time and space” (Trigg, 2012, p. 180) In his book, Trigg presents different types of memory and writes about how “habit memory contends with the notion of putting the past into use. This means that habit memory’s relation with the performative dimension of learning places is in the remit of mere survival.” (Trigg, 2012, p. 49) This performative element of bodily memory and survival is at the core of the concept of biopolitics and biopower.

## A. BIOPOLITICS/BIOPOWER

The exercise of power can produce as much acceptance as may be wished for: it can pile up the dead and shelter itself behind whatever threats it can imagine. In itself, the exercise of power is not a violence that sometimes hides, or an implicitly renewed concept. It operates on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of active subjects is able to inscribe itself. It is a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases or contrives, makes more probable or less; in the extreme, it constrains or forbids absolutely, but it is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. (Foucault, 2003, p. 138)

Biopolitics, or biopower, are structuring and normalizing powers referring to the normalizing practices states and societies use on bodies to create and maintain order and structure. “Disciplining the body means socializing it into acceptable, ‘normal’ behavior in terms of choices of love-objects and modes of externalization of the drives.” (Braidotti, 2002, p. 123) These normalizing practices often take place in institutions and public places. They are so common that we don't always recognize them, or they are masked to work for the benefit of citizens. For example, healthcare is a good and important service, but it can take offensive forms for those who do not fall into normative frameworks or they may present normative demands directed at certain kinds of bodies, such as the assumption of reproduction in case of female bodies.

In her book *Caliban and the Witch* (2004) feminist activist, writer and teacher Silvia Federici studies the history of feudalism to capitalism from a feminist perspective, focusing on the body, tracing the history of the bio-power regime:

It is my contention that it was the population crisis of the 16th and 17th centuries, not the end of famine in Europe in the 18th (as Foucault has argued) that turned reproduction and population growth into state matters, as well as primary objects of intellectual discourse. I further argue that the intensification of the persecution of ‘witches’ and the new disciplinary methods that the state adopted in this period to regulate procreation and break women’s control over reproduction, are also to be traced to this crisis. (Federici, 2004, p. 95)

Before the population crisis and witch-hunts, women had power over their body. They could control reproduction in ways that were subsequently deemed witchcraft. Federici explains how new forms of surveillance were adopted, how the female body became public property, and how procreation came to serve capitalist accumulation. She shows how Foucault, when analyzing power techniques and disciplines, has ignored the structural gender differences. While “Foucault is so intrigued with the ‘productive’ character of the power-techniques by which the body has been invested, that his analysis practically rules out any critique of power-relations”, Federici states. (2004, pp. 8–9) She claims that “*Caliban and the Witch* shows that the body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory has been for male waged workers: the primary ground of their ex-



ploitation and resistance, as the female body has been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for reproduction and accumulation labor.” (Federici, 2004, pp. 8–9)

While art is not a biopower-free area, through its position as a counter to hegemonic regimes, it can explore the mechanisms of biopolitics and make them visible. Art can deconstruct expectations and norms, present alternatives, and familiarize them. Also, because of its complex relation to capitalism and labor, it can critically observe these phenomena and maybe even present alternatives. The more diversity we see in our everyday life, the more normal diversity becomes. Increased amounts of representations of genders, sexualities, people of color, and disabled bodies also mean improved and more diverse discussion. Popular films like *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) and *12 Years a Slave* (McQueen and Ridley, 2013) have created public awareness of how the assumption that the main character, or the subject in general, is white, in its turn impacts how, for example, black skin is seen. The technology of the cinema has often reinforced white supremacy. Curators, art theorists, artists and critics operating within feminist and de-colonial frameworks, use various counter-hegemonic strategies in re-writing art history and increasing inclusion and diversity in art. Tackling eurocentrism, like Maura Reilly writes, in the contemporary art world is challenging and the implicitly Euro-US-centric contemporary art has been rarely questioned. (Reilly, 2018, p. 103). Contemporary discourse is changing this, but change is slow. *Already in Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990) Judith Butler demonstrated that norms, such as gender expectations, are formed and maintained by representation and repetition. This means that representations and repetitive acts are naturalized and it is hard to track them, but their repetitive nature is also a possibility and challenging them might also help to reconstruct norms, especially by those in privileged positions.

In her book, *Bad Feminist* (2017) Roxane Gay does not specifically mention the term biopolitics or biopower, but she does write about privacy, about how privileged people are also privileged with more privacy. Those carrying visible signs of otherness are in more danger than those considered “normal”. One of her examples is pregnancy, which renders women’s body public property. Another is the act of coming out as a culturally expected spectacle, especially when it comes to a public figure. Instead of being liberating, public coming out can increase the sense of marginalization. (Gay, 2017, pp. 172–175) Coming out as a

cultural convention can be linked to biopolitics. The demand to perform coming out publicly connects to the demand for confession under contemporary conditions of life. Foucault argued that “one must show one’s wounds in order to be cured” (Foucault, 2003, p. 163) This long continuum of compulsive confessing, which Foucault links to Christianity<sup>19</sup>, could be argued to have led to the proliferation of autofiction and its incorporation into mainstream literature. Sharing intimacy and the everyday valorizes the act of compulsive confessing, but in a form that is almost like a social norm today. The boundaries between public and private are in constant flux, and social media has made public confessing easier than ever.

In the biopolitical state, private and public, control and desire are inseparable, to the degree where Preciado states that “our contemporary societies are gigantic sexopolitical laboratories where the genders are produced.” (Preciado, 2013, p. 119) He calls our time “the Pharmacopornographic Era”<sup>20</sup>, and explains how sex and sexuality became the main objects of political and economic interest. Preciado refers to Michel Foucault’s biopolitical description and how it suspected a new system of control, and presents that we are now witnessing changes in capitalism that are characterized by “the transformation of ‘gender’, ‘sex’, ‘sexuality’, ‘sexual identity’, and ‘pleasure’ into objects of the political management of living”, as well as “by the fact that his management itself is carried out through the new dynamics of advanced technocapitalism, global media, and biotechnologies.” (2013, 25) According to Preciado, pharmacopornographic gender is a “somato-discursive construction of a collective nature, facing a scientific community or a network.” Preciado writes how “technogender is a public, scientific, community network biocode.” (2013, p. 118) Today biopower is not only state control, it is something that is consumed, watched, injected, and swallowed: “the contraceptive pill is an edible panopticon. (Preciado, 2013, p. 202) Our bodies are observed and controlled from the outside, but also from the inside. Preciado describes and analyzes different mechanisms of biopolitics today, claiming that gender is not separable from politics or technology.

19 “Christianity requires another form of truth obligation different from faith. Each person has the duty to know who he is, that is, to try to know what is happening inside him, to acknowledge faults, to recognize temptations, to locate desires; and everyone is obliged to disclose these things either to God or to others in the community, hence, to bear public or private witness against oneself.”(Foucault, 2003, p. 162)

20 “The term refers to the process of a biomolecular (pharmaco) and semiotic-technical (pornographic) government of sexual subjectivity of which ‘the Pill’ and *Playboy* are two paradigmatic offspring.” (Preciado, 2013, p. 34)

Our life and death are not as private as we might think and hope. Neither is our body. The image on the next page depicts a work titled *Trans Healthcare* (Auer, 2017) by artist Camille Auer. It was exhibited as part of of Porin kulttuurisäätiön *The Truth About Finland* project. In the image, a naked person is sitting on the floor, pointing scissors towards their genitals. Finland, a country often considered equal and progressive, still has a law that violates trans rights, human rights and the right to self-determination (for example, until 2023 individuals had to provide proof of infertility before they could be granted legal gender recognition). The work refers to the question of trans rights as a vulnerable minority that is not taken into account in public decision making, but it is also an example of how our bodies are controlled and governed. This governance is directly related to the question of power. The more legible the subject, the more bodily freedom the subject has. The white cis male has the most control of his body. Subjects drawn outside of this position have less autonomy. A similar pattern is traceable in Judith Butler writings where the most precarious bodies are not mourned.

Our body, our skin is where we both continue and separate from the rest of the world. As Auer writes;

The outer limits of a body are porous. Touching a table, at the contact point, you can't tell which exact atom belongs to the toucher and which to the touched. We continuously seep into our surroundings and they seep into us. Affects seep through us, desire, despair, boredom. Abject seeps through us, sweat, tears, dandruff. (Auer, 2020)



*Trans Healthcare* by Camille Auer, 2017

# BOUNDARIES AND BORDERS

Our body is also one of the fundamental limits to our existence. It conditions how we perceive the world, how we relate to the world around us. A reasonable subjective being is tied to the concept of boundaries. Boundaries create structures we can rely on. Boundaries between ourselves and the world, between ourselves and the other, are created by our own flesh, norms, and ideologies. Some boundaries are more evident than others, the borders of my body are (usually) distinguishable, but, for example, class or political distinction can be more abstract.

The post-humanist idea of nomadic subjectivity and symbiotic co-existence with others deconstructs how we think about boundaries. Concepts like cyborgs, becoming-animal, symbiotic beings with machinery have all questioned traditional human qualities and even blurred the much-emphasized border between “natural” and “unnatural”. The blurring of these lines means questioning the concept of the other, and, gives a material and concrete form to what Julia Kristeva explored as the other in me;

A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for instance – I would understand, react, accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond

the limit - *cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3)

As our being is being towards death, the limit between life and death is often considered to be an ultimate and final one. There is no space for negotiation. Most concepts change and vary through space and time, but life and death are trusted to be somewhat stable. “There is no possible negotiation regarding life: life is or is not”, as Luce Irigaray writes (*Through Vegetal Being* 2016, p. 19). As death is the ultimate limit, it has generated an uncountable number of representations. The human fascination with death has taken numerous forms in popular culture and lore, from vampires to ghosts. Perhaps the hardest to romanticize of them all is the living dead with their decaying corpses. Zombies come back to life still bearing the same form they previously had, familiar yet uncanny, lacking what makes us human, but still resembling themselves as humans. Sometimes the uncanny trespassing of borders is not named. It is merely a haunting feeling, nothingness:

The room speaks, yet no one speaks behind it. The chairs rattle, yet nothing is moving them. And then there is nothingness. Silence. An abundance of time passes, veering off toward the solar system, before igniting into a void. A massive space remains, and our memories grow quiet. Freed from the burden of time, we begin to think that our bodies have returned to their nascent state, at once rejuvenated by the immediacy of the present. Essential are those moments in which we suddenly become aware of this emergent state, whereupon the luminosity of a strange visit suddenly departs our bodies. Only then, in the brink of an incipient absence, do we realize that, all along, we were never alone. (Trigg, 2012, pp. 288–289)

According to Trigg, the border between life and death is far from being as simple as Irigaray presents. Life is also a question of time. If we believe that everything in this planet is circulating matter, then living and dying are inseparable, “the dying is within the living and the living within the dying”, like Karen Barad

writes. Barad claims that “loss is not absence but marked presence”, and that “hauntings are not immaterial. They are an ineliminable feature of existing material conditions.” (Barad, 2017, pp. 112, 106-107)

It is not only through horror stories and zombie films that art can touch borders of our conception. Even as death is a perfect example of the imaginative power that art has and how we through art can touch something we can't know: the moment of death cannot be experienced or understood and we can only approach it with representations. Art can be a means to study the death of the other and the death of the self, but even when it is not about death, art is about borders sharing experiences that are not yet known and also experiences that can be considered “inner” but through art take a shareable form. Art can interrupt the idea of our borders as solid boundaries. The coherent idea of the self is shaken, because art can work like touch: to touch means to be touched. To encounter art means to be open to an opening of the other, inviting the other in. When I encounter an artwork and give it an opportunity to change something in me (regardless of whether this happens immediately or later) I accept that afterwards, I will live with its ideas and thoughts as part of me.

She would start to get this surreal feeling, as if she was looking back on something while it was actually occurring, but for some reason she never blamed it on the book: she always thought the sense of déjà vu was to do with her own life. Also, at other times, she remembered things as if they'd happened to her personally when in fact they were only things she'd read. She could swear on her life that this or that scene existed in her memory, and actually it was nothing to do with her at all. (Cusk, 2018, p. 245)

I carry these experiences provided through art in me. My feet feel the sand I was standing on while looking at the artworks in the Sandstorm exhibition. I feel sadness when I think about Felix González-Torres. I taste sweet-salty toffee and the thought takes me to Venice, to New York, and to Istanbul. My personal history as a feminist is entangled with the feminist artists that came before me. My perception is guided by the perception of others, the works they have made and the sentences they have written. My old painting *Famous Female Artists* would not exist without Linda Nochlin or Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Curating is all about boundaries and borders and the act of moving and shifting them. Drawing lines is to mark these boundaries and allows contemplation of how the inner sphere can take form in the outer existence, how a formless process necessitates forms. It can also be a sense of being on the edge; on the edge of comprehensiveness, on the edge of the artist's personal limits, on the border of too much or too little. I believe curating has a special relationship with boundaries because it often occurs in the space between – between the artist and the artworks, the exhibition and the audience, the theme and the implementation, but maybe most crucially, between the artist and the artist's mind and the notion of a discrete self, an "I". In this space between, the individual's boundaries are usually drawn and now redrawn and dismantled. Curating, at its best, is a way of almost surpassing the boundary between self and other. Thinking together becomes a moment of shared action and it is almost as if the boundaries were dissolving, as if common thinking becomes an entity of its own. These moments of positively losing sense of one's own boundaries are rare. They can happen during sex, or other intense physical activity when the flow of feeling surpasses the analytical and intellectual self. Or when closely working together, also a flow moment of a different, but just as effective, kind.





Drawing touch, 2018

The drawing pictured above is about touch but it is also about boundaries and borders. Touching is always an act of surpassing borders. My research questions often fall into unknown in-between spaces, which means it often necessitates cross-disciplinary cross-medial thinking and practicing. My research moves across cultural boundaries and norms, physical and bodily borders, national borders. Writing a dissertation is about drawing limits; what is included and what is excluded. Writing and documentation are attempts to cross borders, borders between the event and the experience, immediate experience and mediated experience, and ultimately between you and me, I and the other, as I am here sharing my experiences, my thoughts, my ideas, my visions and my reflections with you, the reader. The drawing touches the text it cites, but it also explores the inner experience of touching and being touch through materiality and act of touching – my hand touching the brush drawing lines to paper. The surface of the paper being visible, almost palpable by hands.

# CANON

“Cats do not go to heaven. Women cannot write the plays of Shakespeare.” (Woolf, 1989, p. 48)

In *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf tells a story of Shakespeare's sister in order to highlight the conditions that are needed for making so-called great art, and how a canon is created: while Shakespeare went to the grammar school, lived an active life, worked in the theater her sister stayed at home, did not go to school, was told to do housework instead of reading, escaped marriage to London, was laughed at when telling she wanted to act (“no woman, he said, could possibly be an actress”) and finally committed suicide. And: “Had she survived, whatever she had written would have been twisted and deformed, issuing from a strained and morbid imagination. And undoubtedly, I thought, looking at the shelf where there are no plays by women, her work would have gone unsigned.” (Woolf, 1989, pp. 48–51)

Even if art is sometimes presented as free, the world is full of different boundaries, starting from the eternal question of what counts as art: what is considered as art, which is considered as good art, who is accepted as an artist, what kind of questions art should deal with. Canon is about drawing these boundaries. The canon of art in art history refers to the recognized masters, the conventional timeline of great artists, heroes, usually males, most likely white. The much-loved myth of suffering, lonely genius has lately been questioned, but it is persistent. Even the artists suffering from the consciences of the myth sometimes seem unwilling to let go. The suffering genius is a myth written by another suffering genius, another male author writing the story of the other. This tradition is still very much well and alive today. One only needs to take a look at how the museum collections are created, or, for example, how art discourses in public media are being formed.

Canon is often referred to as a collection of great works as if the greatness was an objective attribute, but the idea of greatness is far from neutral:

Curating makes arguments about feminist art histories and strategies concrete; curating constructs certain kinds of historical narratives, or in some cases intervenes in existing narratives. As such, while scholarly histories and theories of feminist art and culture are crucial to the feminist projects of expanding histories as well as interrogating the structures through which art is made and historicized, curatorial practice is one of the most important sites for the constitution of both historical narratives about feminist art (the histories of feminist art) and feminist theories of curating and writing histories (the feminist histories and theories of art). (Jones, 2016, p. 5)

In the process of writing this, my supervisor Bassam El Baroni rightly asked if “the concept of the canon about historical artists and artworks or is it still an ‘alive’ concept that will persist into the future, is there a canon of current contemporary art as such or has it been replaced by market value for example, or perhaps there are many canons of current contemporary art, how do we measure their relevance?” El Baroni named Jeff Koons as an example of an artist who might be included in a canon formed in response to a market logic. However, for experts in the field of contemporary art, Koons is more or less irrelevant. El Baroni asked, if “the concept of the canon is still relevant in such a wide and expanded and differentiated field of art or is it something that belongs to a bygone era, modernism. Has it been replaced by nodes of power and influence generated by different forms of appreciation (financial, pedagogical, theoretical, social) or does it still actually exist as an operative concept?” I would argue, following what Jones suggested, that canon is relevant for not only considering the past but also the future. Even if El Baroni’s suggestion makes sense inside the art field, we are beyond the concept of canon and there is more diversity in discourses, still and even inside it, the canon exists. One does not need to look further than university education where the process of maintaining and creating the canon is still well alive and kicking. A positive outcome is that when and if the curriculum is not critically revisited and approached, students will give feedback. Also, as a response to El Baroni’s comment and question, I think his

example perfectly presents why experts and professionals are much needed. That is, to study the existing canon in the context of the contemporary field and make the needed adjustments, especially if we understand “canon” as a loose and flexible structure.



The artist-activist group Guerilla Girls have been making visible oppressive structures and flaws in the canon for decades. Unfortunately, their work is still relevant and needed.

Guerilla Girls is a group of anonymous activists and artists formed in 1985. With their interventions, posters, stickers, questionnaires, books, billboards and talks, they have highlighted the lack of female artists and artists of color in museums, galleries and art magazines. Since 1985, there has been substantial change but changes have been slow and hard-won. The famous artwork poster *The Advantages Of Being A Woman Artist* (Guerilla Girls, 1988) includes slogans such as; “Working without the pressure of success”, “Knowing your career might pick up after you're eighty”, “Not being stuck in a tenured teaching position”, “Having the opportunity to choose between a career and motherhood”, and “Not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius”. The poster is, unbelievably, still accurate and very much applicable to contemporary conditions. In autumn 2020, I had a conversation with a mid-career female artist who stated that she is hedging her hopes on being discovered when she is 80 years old. I am not sure if she was quoting the famous Guerilla Girls statement, or really hoping that, someday, her struggle as an artist would be over.

# CARE; CARING

This thesis is founded on the idea that art has potential to increase democracy in public spaces, equalizing meaningfulness and memories connected to lived environments. Today different neighbourhoods are entitled different kinds of artworks, permanence, visibility and possibilities for participation. As an experiential and embodied sphere, art can surpass many borders, such as language, in order to reach beyond the self and toward others. Art produces understanding and knowledge that are more than analytical. Art affects. Therefore, when exhibiting art in public, possible effects should be carefully considered from different perspectives. Although it is also important to note that it is never possible to fully understand all aspects one's actions. The sites in which events take place are often full of surprises. It is impossible to predict everything and fully control the space. To add a further layer of complexity, the effect of the projects are rarely visible immediately. The effects continue to develop in the future, when the act or artistic work is interpreted and reinterpreted, shared, and takes different forms. There are various ways for approaching the sites of installation or where art takes place, from merely a background display to an essential and organic part of the show. Understanding that one's actions have consequences is a way of caring for the world and those we share it with. Care is a method for using different environments. It is also a way of creating a shared understanding of the project and practices within the working group. Adopting this method signals to the group, the artists and other participants, that they will also be cared for.

Care is the essence of curating – conceptually, linguistically, and, as I understand curating, how to put it into practice. Caring is a way of being in the world, caring for it and caring for those we share the world with. It is the verb for empathy, for being-with and living-together. It is also a verb that is very much gendered. Caring is traditionally considered a feminine quality. This is not only a theoretical, philosophical or ideological question, but has political, material, and concrete overtones when it comes to, for example, labor. Caring for others as a job is seen as valuable but not worth much compensation.

The artworld is sometimes expected to be free from traditional gender roles and, to some extent, this might be true. Still, we can't escape from the structures and traditions we live within, one more proof of how little autonomy and freedom art ultimately has. As a curator is also a carer, this position often also gendered. Especially a female curator is easily expected to be a nurturer, a caring figure, while a male curator is more of an artistic leader of a project. At times, it feels as if artists raised as males embrace more caring and nurturing from curators. It is also true that care and hospitality have been widely discussed and emphasized in the art field during the past decade. This is a welcome change, but it also makes me wonder if we are in a field so precarious and uncertain that we are actually unable to entirely fulfill these notions of care and hospitality we are presenting. Could it be that we are causing more stress and uncertainty when we aim for conditions of care that the structures at hand make impossible? Do we risk taking the attention away from critical societal and structural problems with all the talk about soft values.

As a curator, I am not only responsible for the concept of the show, funding, theoretical framework, marketing, and supporting artist through the process of making the artwork. I often end up feeding the artist and cleaning up after them. This, of course, is also related to the nature of the projects happening in a summer camp-like location, but I argue that the set-up would not be the same if it male curators were in charge. As an equality-orientated person, I find this frustrating, especially when, even after years and years of working, I seem to be unable to solve this. The frustration then unravels in ways that take comic form and tend to repeat and highlight gender roles, stereotypes, and expectations. In *Space Invaders V – Tolerance* (*Space Invaders V – Tolerance*, 2017) which took the form of a school camp we asked, how far can tolerance extend and what are we willing to tolerate? In the end, it turned out that I was hardly able to tolerate the situation of living with artists and students. Eventually, the situation turned me into this caricature of a martyr and self-sacrificing mother figure, walking around in the huge old house, collecting trash, serving food, and forever shouting "I am not your mother!" I have to admit that it was not the highlight of my career.

## A. TO CARE

"I imagine different doomsday scenarios and how to live through them, what I need and how I will feel about being the one that survived. In my artistic oeuvre I in a humorous way create a series of works where I play with the idea of being an artist-prepper who by collecting working materials prepares for the future catastrophes. I act as most of us and think about myself, my family, my loved ones and my friends: those who are mine to care for. Imagine if I and all the others on this planet could think about the entirety. Think collectively and give up privileges that at least most of us at this point at least anticipate that we have to give up but instead close our eyes and keep living more or less like we always have, pretending this does not concern us." (Tedsdotter, 2019)

For the 2019 *Sandstorm* exhibition (Porin kulttuurisäätiö et al., 2019), Swedish artist Linda Tedsdotter continued with her series of works called *Apocalypse Insurance*. In this series, she plays with the idea of surviving the apocalypse. Who and what needs or is worth saving? In this light, caring becomes a very selfish act. In *Sandstorm* she built a raft only accommodating her nearest and dearest. Also, this project shows how pathetic our attempts are when on the threshold of a major catastrophe. We put our hopes and energy on a shoddily built raft that can do very little to protect us, expect to gain a few more hours or days with the ones we love. She begins her text by stating how she used to think art was virtuous and essentially good. Then, she writes, "The other day I started to think that maybe art is the source of all things bad. That it was exactly art, which thousands of years ago furthered greed and selfishness, leading into capitalism and then finally created the foundation for the environmental problems we face today." This was probably a reaction to the question we had posed earlier, about how the group of artists comprehend their own practice and if the climate crisis and recent discussion about art's ethical and environmental premises has changed this. It sometimes seems like even if we can point out faults in the society around us, we are blind to our own actions. A large amount of trust in art and in our own practice is needed in order to cope with the precarity of the field. When one stops to reflect on these from a new perspective, it can be startling.



Believing in all-mighty art can be a driving force but also believing that art can be the source of all things bad, or good, can also sound slightly megalomaniac. Tedsdotter's text is an example of an approach which encourages studying one's practice in a continuum where art is not seen as "free" or a "counterpower" but something that is elementally embedded in the history of human culture, its profits and mistakes.

Art, as a human activity happening in the context of prevalent culture, is neither good nor bad, but it can be used for different purposes. We are not always capable of controlling how it will be used and interpreted. Artists making objects in the early years of capitalism could not have foreseen what would come. And yet, if anything, art can sense what will be, what is to come.

## B. CURIOSITY

Curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought it back to life. Or maybe it was care? To understand, to foresee, to anticipate, one must be curious. Caring and curiosity originate from the same root, from the old French word *curios*, which comes from Latin *curiosus* 'careful', from *cura* 'care'. Caring and curiosity are not only seen as essential parts of human development in general, as they lead to observing, learning, exploration, investigation but also exist at the core of artistic practice and research. Michel Foucault writes about this relationship:

Curiosity is a vice that has been stigmatized in turn by Christianity, by philosophy, and even by a certain concept of science. Curiosity is seen as futility. However, I like the word; it suggests something quite different to me. It evokes "care"; it evokes care one takes of what exists and what might exist; a sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilized before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same thing in a different way; a passion for seizing what is happening now and what is disappearing; a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental. (Foucault, 2003, pp. 177–178)

Foucault points names multiple things that make curiosity indispensable when it comes to art and research. Curiosity is about being open to the unknown nature of the new, of the present we have not already framed, named and structured. It is about being open to the uncanny nature of the possibility of knowledge we do not already know, that we might not recognize. Curiosity is about respecting the unknown nature of the world, without immediately reducing it to the already known, to the traditional hierarchies and sameness. Diversity and multiplicity can be increased in processes by involving different opinions and different people with different perspectives and working methods. While it is sometimes difficult to fulfill one's curiosity alone, a collective can be seen as a method for creating knowledge beyond immediate understanding, sameness, and coherence. When aiming to explore the new, knowledge that lies on the threshold of happening, still a nonknowledge, can be a safe space for curiously feeling out different possibilities.



Lunch in Cholula, 2019

This image above was taken in Mexico during the seventh *Space Invaders* (Jensen and Suvanto, 2019). It was a perfect lunch in the middle of a hectic day of visiting possible locations, meeting people and getting to know the city. When we started working with the projects, we tried to feed our artists but we did not really have time or energy, or sometimes money, to care for our own wellbeing. For the second *Space Invaders* I remember Eliisa Suvanto and I bought three bottles of rosé wine and one grapefruit. Today, I consider eating and especially eating together, as an essential part of my practice. It has been important to realize that projects can be intense and demanding, there needs to be breaks. Eating and cooking are good excuses for stopping for a moment and coming together. They are concrete acts of care. Taste and smell stimulate the senses and therefore create moments to be remembered. This Mexican lunch was one of them. Another was a barbeque party during the same project. The artist Marcelino Barsi made a perfect cactus salad. The evening brought together people working in the field of art. During and after dinner, we went through the project and its theoretical background. We read books out loud, and played a board game that involved guessing famous artists. From *Sandstorm* exhibition I remember the Mexican dinner we made for the artists and all the surprise assistants and guests that gathered around the table at the end of the day. And a lovely Middle Eastern meal Linda Tedsdotter made us. From *Pori World Expo* I remember all the different kinds of fried potatoes we ate everyday in a nearby bar until the bartender told us that we could not keep living like that.

# COLLECTIVES

“A collective is what does not stand still but creates and is created by movement... And yet a movement has to be built. To be part of a movement requires we find places to gather, meeting places. A movement is also a shelter.” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 17)

I am an artist, curator and researcher whose projects often unfold as collectively realized practice-based art events. I work collectively for a variety of reasons. Collective practice provides support and strength. It strengthens your thinking and argumentation, encouraging you to think out loud and test your thesis within the group. A collective is a safer space for trying out new ideas, for innovating and creating: collectives give you the courage to try things you wouldn't dare try alone. Choosing collectives over individual work is a political choice. It is an attempt to question the enduring myth of an individual (male) genius, who solely creates, with excessive power, new visionary worlds, feeding them with his own suffering. In addition, collective work is more fun: “I want to stay with the trouble, and the only way I know to do that is in generative joy, terror, and collective thinking.” (Haraway, 2016, p. 31)

Artistic collectives have, in one way or another, always existed. They are not a new phenomenon. Recently, however, they have become more visible and more common. I have started to consider this proliferation of collective as a parallel phenomenon to post-humanist research, in that it not only questions a human-centered organization of relations, but also individual-centric ways of thinking. In her book about artist Felix Gonzales-Torres, the curator and author Nancy Spector examines how the writings of Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault shaped the “Postmodernist sensibility” at a time when the superiority of Western thought was questioned, the myth of man as a subject of the world revisited and the legitimacy of cultural authority was challenged:

This privileged position – man as unitary and dominant subject – came under scrutiny, as artists began, in their work, to ask questions about the mechanisms of power inherent in such systems of modern-day representation as advertising, architecture, fashion, film, print media, television, and the visual arts: To whom is representation addressed and who is excluded from it? In what ways does representation define and perpetuate class structure, sexual difference, and racial difference? What does representation validate and what does it disavow? In what ways does representation foster erotic and economic desires? And, ultimately, would it even be possible to dismantle, or at least transform, the mechanisms of representation, which, like those of ideology, are seamless, transparent, and always present? (Spector, 1996, p. 4)

This shift in the late 1970s was visible in the works of many feminist artists exploring sexual difference and how it is constructed through repetition and representation, but also by way of other artistic strategies aiming to question existing power structures. One of these strategies was collective working, dismantling the “myth of the author”, influenced by Barthes’ essay *The Death of the Author*. (Spector, 1996, p. 10) Spector cites Group Material, a New York based artist’s collaborative, as a significant example. Group Material, formed in 1979, revisited the idea of “political art” and explored questions of exhibition making, curating and artistic work. As Spector writes, “In appropriating the exhibition format as its artwork, the collective assumes a curatorial role that is at once creative, instructive, and subversive”. (Spector, 1996, p. 12) This method of using the exhibition, or installation, as a medium and curating as an artistic tool has also been present in Porin kulttuurisäätiön’s practice, where studying different formats, methods, strategies, roles, and identities has occurred more through making and creating than verbal articulation.

Spector’s description of Group Material’s political agenda resonates with my own approach to art, my position adopted throughout this dissertation and in my own curatorial practice. Spector writes, “Group Material’s agenda is highly ‘political’ in that it seeks to effect social change through the dissemination of information as well as through aesthetic experience. The group’s members, however, refuse to be categorized as ‘political’ artists. In their view, all cultur-

al production is in essence political, since it is impossible to ever truly escape ideology.” (Spector, 1996, p. 12) Various deconstructive tactics can be used simultaneously. For different participants they can mean different things, from aesthetic pleasure to research to political activism. However, for the collective using them it is beneficial to be aware of the different tactics and what they need and mean.

Sara Ahmed refers to collectivity as part of a movement and a movement as a shelter. A collective also needs to be actively created. Creating collectivity has spatial dimensions:

Community is not just established through the designation of pure and safe spaces, but becomes established as a way of moving through space. Becoming street wise defines the subject in terms of the collective: the wise subject has collective knowledge about what is, ‘safe, harmless, trustworthy’ and what is ‘bad, dangerous and hostile’ that gives that subject the ability to move safely in a world of strangers and dangers. (Ahmed, 2000, p. 34).

Collectivity is a demand and a relief. You are never alone with your work and thinking, but you also need to be there for others, creating the guidelines and goals of a movement and mapping ways of reaching those goals. This research is my take on the mapping process, a project of sharing what I have learned along with others, and also a way of showing my gratitude for the official and unofficial movements and collectives I am and have been part of: the feminist movement and the Feminist Party in Finland, the Curators Union and all the collectives and working groups I have been lucky to be part of.

Collaboration is at the core of feminist artistic practice. Suzanne Lacy observes activist strategies in the context of new genre public art and names collaboration as one of the core elements of the feminist art movement in the seventies:

Moving into public sector through the use of public space, including the media, was inevitable for artists who sought to inform and change. Because of their activist origin, feminist artists were concerned with questions of effectiveness. They had fairly sophisticated

conceptions of the nature of an expanded audience, including how to reach it, support its passage through new and often difficult material, and assess its transformation or change as a result of the work. Seeing art as neutral meeting ground for people of different backgrounds, feminists in the seventies attempted artistic crossovers among races and classes. Collaboration was a valued practice of infinitely varying possibilities, one that highlighted the relational aspect of art. (Lacy, 1995a, p. 27)

Many of the methods named here can be seen as an elemental part of feminist and activist art today: using art as a space for gathering and thinking together, reaching different audiences and supporting them (without patronizing them), using public space and collaboration. In addition to this, Lacy suggests feminist art practice and collaboration as both a motivation and a strategy when it comes questioning the myth of an artist genius.

How we see the role of the artist is also related to how we understand art and society in general. Is art understood as mere self-expression by private individuals or as something that happens within a community? Artist and art historian Suzi Gablik considers how the turn in public art, or art in the public sphere, questions the traditional conceptions of artist's work: "Much of the new art focuses on social creativity rather than on self-expression and contradicts the myth of the isolated genius-private, subjective, behind closed doors in the studio, separate from others and the world." (Gablik, 1995, p. 76) She also points out how this impacts the role of art in addition to the tasks it is expected to perform in the world: "The model of the artist as a lone genius struggling against society does not allow us to focus on the beneficial and healing role of social interaction". (Gablik, 1995, p. 80) When criticizing the concept of art as an autonomous entity without social relations or responsibilities one must, however, keep in mind not to turn it into a mere tool for increasing social well-being. Art has more than just instrumental value, which is important not to forget in public discourse.



## A. PORIN KULTTUURISÄÄTÖ

Porin kulttuurisäättö is a collective that began as an artwork. The name itself is a pun that does not really translate: in Finnish “säätio” is a foundation or a trust, but “säättö” refers to kind of a mess, muddle, hustle, hassle, or a one-night stand. The project started as a reaction to something we had witnessed while studying in Pori. During a famous annual Jazz Festival, the city center fills with visual arts in all kinds of pop up shops and galleries. With a group of fellow students and colleagues at that time, we started questioning the quality and narrow range of art presented. Studying and working in Pori we knew that the city had much more to offer when it comes to visual arts and wanted to challenge the custom of mainly exhibiting landscape paintings and cheap watercolor works. We wanted to present the kind of practice that was the core of Aalto University's MA program in Visual Culture back then; interventions, socially and spatially engaged thinking, taking art out of studios, classrooms, and galleries. The first event we organized was an exhibition called *Sponsor*. Porin kulttuurisäättö announced an open call framing it as a foundation and asked for works realized with 20€ grants. The works were then exhibited in the city space and in the main exhibition venue, the small studio I lived in at that time.

Since its inception, Porin kulttuurisäättö has since the beginning been about collective and process-based practice. During the past seven years, a need for sharing and communities seems to have increased, even to the extent where people are sometimes willing to give up their own individual practice, even ownership, name and identity in a project in order to be able to create a whole, a new collective entity. It does require trust and may partly be about a willingness to take a chance and speculate. It is also a sign of how many people are tired and feeling alone in their work. Giving up one's own authorship is very much against the neo-capitalist idea of an artist as someone who needs to create their own brand to succeed. Perhaps because the idea of “success” in our practice is not based on material values, we have been able to create these places and moments of trust in order to find out the qualities that are crucial in art today. It could also be the case that only artists who know that their “brand” is strong enough to be reconsidered and deconstructed are willing to play and test out a different approach, or that they see that the brand and image of the collective is will also strengthen their individual brand.

With these multiple and sometimes contradictory reasons and motivations, the question of values becomes relevant: how to mediate the values in a project and make sure the collective shares the same values and has a mutual understanding what they mean? This is a critical question that can lead both to confrontations and to new knowledge. *The Truth About Finland project*<sup>21</sup> is a good example of a collective method. We chose a 100 artists to present a diversity of approaches for the catalog, and a smaller working group that would actively work together to face questions of national identities and how birthdays of nations are celebrated. The group was tasked with presenting different knowledges in order to support shared learning but from approximate backgrounds so that there was a shared starting point and mutual understanding of our goal. The final group was composed of artist Erno-Erik Raitanen, artist collective Honkasalo-Niemi-Virtanen, historian Miikka Tervonen, and feminist curatorial duo *nynnyt*. Together with Porin kulttuurisäätiö, the group worked to deepen the understanding and thinking, providing different perspectives on the question, national identities and art, at hand. Even if we didn't always agree, there was enough time for everyone to explain themselves properly, and for others to digest the discussions.

One of the discussion points that resulted in disagreement was how the swastika, which has a peculiar position in Finnish history, as an example of ultimate evil could be represented in the context of the event: how it can be part of a presentation but not represented as a symbol? The swastika has a contested position in Finnish culture. As a symbol it is, or at least this has been the intention, sometimes, like in the air force, separated from the "bad swastika". This has been studied by Finnish artist Minna Henriksson, who against public expectations claims that the swastika still used in national symbols has its roots in Aryan racism. (Haapoja, Henriksson and Koitela, 2015, p. 12) The group had intense discussions about whether the swastika could be presented and appropriated. Was it possible to deconstruct its position in Finnish culture or is it a symbol too offensive and triggering to be ever presented? During *The Truth About Finland* event in Helsinki, Tervonen gave a performance-presentation on the theme, combining his personal history to the national history. All the visual representations of swastika were removed from the exhibition space (Tervonen, 2017). One of the main reasons for the success of this approach was the passion-

21 Further explored in the chapter "Representation".

ate attitude of the group. Everyone was genuinely interested in the theme, and wanted to invest time and effort in the process. In a project where participants half-heartedly participate merely to show their own work, the curator usually needs to push things forward all the time, sometimes almost forcibly. Even if the end result is adequate, the process is always less satisfying and productive.

Working as collectives is also a way of questioning the traditional methods of working and the notion of separate genres in art. Even if we do work within the field of visual art, from the beginning of our collective practice, we have included researchers, historians, writers, scientists and representatives of municipalities and cities to our projects. It is not only about learning and creating new knowledge with cooperation, but about making existing interdependence visible. We want to acknowledge those we need in our own practice, instead of pretending that our art is made in a vacuum, or on a blank sheet of paper, without any outside influences. Practice as such blurs the traditional split between art critic and art, form, object, and material. Practice happens first and critical appraisal follows. In our projects, words come first, but they may follow forms, objects, acts that we have encountered in the past, and be inspired by places and spaces. Words shape platforms to where we invite artists to work and create forms that then eventually come together and constitute exhibitions but also new words in press releases and exhibition catalogs. The exhibition or event is a place where our thoughts and words become approachable and accessible to the larger public.

Even if words come first, especially when writing about the process and at the beginning of each project, there is a lot of non-verbal action and communication. In the best case, when working as a collective the mutual intuition creates a feeling of being guided towards a mutual goal. Intuitions can be shared starting points or/and goals and the zeitgeist – already tunes the group into certain themes and ideas that the specific time and space has brought to the surface. This intuitive working mostly happens after already working together for a while and sharing a mutual understanding of what kinds of questions and ideas are being researched, while previous projects lead to new ones. Almost anything can be the spark: a place, a space, a comment from a visitor, a discussion with artists, another project (especially the ones we do not like are useful). I am always looking for interesting locations, and this constant searching is a habit that is spreading. Traveling with my mother and my sister is often interrupted by not only me but also them, shouting “look at that place! What a wonderful Space

Invaders spot that would be!" I believe that intuitive working methods that surpass rationality and reason can be key for providing multi-sensory experiences for the audience. The spark and the flow of the project is shared and passed on.

## B. SPACE INVADERS

*Space Invaders* has from the beginning been a different kind of collective to Porin kulttuurisäätiö, even if it is established and run by myself and Eliisa Suvanto, and therefore based on similar patterns of thinking, aims and values. Throughout the years *Space Invaders* has become a dear, useful, but also contradictory project. As it was one of the first initiatives in Finland to use empty or under-used spaces for art purposes it has become known, established, and recognized. We have struggled with funding for many years, put in endless hours of work for free and have even had to take on work for large companies or cities making a profit. This has troubled us over the years. When evaluating Miina Pohjalainen's master thesis *Disappearing islands – Cognitive capital, urban renewal and public art in Kalasatama and beyond* (Pohjalainen, 2020) I found the problem properly articulated. Pohjalainen argues that cities are places for creating cognitive capital, and public art is one of the means by which profit is guided into the pockets of private companies: "The planning ideas of cognitive capitalism from smart city to creative city impact also the modes, through which art practices are introduced and used in the urban planning processes, the ways art exists and is realized within the urban planning fabric and city spaces. Even though the art and cultural sector does not necessarily provide direct capital accumulation for the investors, I would claim that it indirectly plays an important role in the formation of cognitive capitalism." (Pohjalainen, 2020, p. 23)

Every year since 2013 *Space Invaders* was organized at a different location, the location being the starting point for the project and the theme. From 2015 to 2017, *Space Invaders* was also a university course in contemporary art and curating, giving the participating students an opportunity, not only to take the classes and listen to us and the visiting speakers, but also to be part of the whole process of doing an unconventional site-specific and research-based exhibition while getting to know people already working among arts and research.

Each year there was a different theme that is somehow related to the location, but the space itself is always the most crucial question, the starting point

for the research and the artworks and the process. It is also what makes the annual *Space Invaders* collective happen. People visit the space, they experience it, work there, they install and exhibit there, perform, mingle, share experiences and knowledge. Some of these visitors have been involved from the beginning of the process, some only join for one event, they tell stories and share histories and take these experiences with them when they leave.

Since the beginning, the aim was to bring different practices, genres, people, ideas, methods and practices together so that it would be possible even without substantial resources. In the first *Space Invaders* event we used a local gallery for a weekend and invited visual artists, musicians, and performers through an open call. At the time the project started, Aalto University's MA program in Visual culture was still in Pori. What was going on in Pori was not known in Helsinki, where Aalto University's main campus back then was based. Neither did we get to know the students working in Helsinki. This is something we wanted to change in *Space Invaders*. We wanted to create opportunities to get to know each other better. Also, the situation in Pori was no better than in Helsinki. The local art scene, the staff and students at the university did not really collaborate. This is a dynamic we wanted to change. Seeing how our network of independent artists and musicians struggled with the same problems such as funding, we wanted to create a platform where artists who do not usually meet could gather and perform together, even if we could not pay them. At least they would get food, drinks and maybe something else in exchange – for one band we, for example, did a music video.

In the beginning, *Space Invaders* was not meant to be a continuous project. When the first edition was realized without any funding and expertise, we realized how challenging putting on an event like this can be. There are a number of things that demand consideration when installing multiple video works, organizing gigs and performances with PA systems, in addition to feeding and accommodating artists, planning their travels, especially when there is no money involved. And as if this was not enough, for the exhibition we did a large installation piece with Eliisa. This necessitated multitasking. While we were installing the exhibition and taking care of the artists coming and going, I was crocheting a carpet from plastic bags and putting together a curtain from fashion magazines, constantly shouting about how this is the most awful artwork anyone has ever made (it turned out to be just fine). But after this learning

experience and all the knowledge we gleaned from the first event, it seemed like a waste not to use it.

The first *Space Invaders* informed the framework of future events in terms of the space acting as a starting point and the event as a platform for emerging artists and performers (both local and international) to develop their practice. It also functioned as a place for artists from different fields and in different stages of their careers, from different cities, countries and traditions to meet and discuss. The physical space is always crucial for *Space Invaders*. At the same time, however, the situations that arise and become visible through the works of art are just as important. The event focuses on how to create artworks related to the space activated, as well as the historical context of exhibiting art, its hierarchical structures and the social questions it brings up. It also questions the traditional roles of the curator, producer, and artist, suggesting new ways to co-work in productions based on collective working and thinking together.

### C. MAKING-WITH

Perhaps, it was the small scale of the city of Pori or the size of the art department there, or the intensive nature of our studies and the distance to the main campus. It could also be attributed to being alienated from the center of the national and international artworld, but during our time there, the “I” previously used when describing my practice turned into “we”. In different contexts, from research to writing or exhibition making, this “we” means different things. The sometimes confusing “we” gives talks and presentations, writes texts, curates exhibitions and makes art. The “we” is a concrete example of how embodied the experience of doing together is. In both ideological and concrete ways, one never works alone. Working happens in a continuum of artistic practice and within a tradition of artistic research, always together with others. Rather than auto-poiesis or self-making, it is a question of making-with, as Haraway calls it: Tentacular thinking<sup>22</sup>, and “myriad tentacles will be needed to tell the story of the Chutulucene.” (Haraway, 2016, p. 31)

<sup>22</sup> *Staying with the Trouble*, 2016, “Chapter 2: Tentacular Thinking. Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chutulucene,” “The tentacular ones make attachments and detachments; they make a difference; they weave paths and consequences but not determinism; they are both open and knotted in some ways and not others.” (Haraway, 2016, p. 31)

When mapping the new genre public art and the change from public art to art in public places, Lacy mentions collaborative methodology as one aspect of understanding of public art. This new comprehension is a mixture of genres and mediums but combined by the sensibility about audience and social strategy: “This construction of a history of new genre public art is not built on a typology of materials, spaces, or artistic media, but rather on concepts of audience, relationship, communication, and political intention.” (Lacy, 1995a, p. 28). This way of understanding the audience almost as a co-creator was not what we had in mind when we started working on Porin kulttuurisäätiö and Space Invaders projects, but as we were working in public and semi-public spaces and with the concept of public, it was unavoidable.

Making-with is more fun than making-alone, but as always when working with others, it is not easy nor is it everlasting. There is always sadness in letting go of a project, of a group one has worked closely with. There is even more sadness when long-term collaborations come to end. I have been lucky in finding so many good people to work with, people who see the world and art in the same way I do. Sometimes life gets in the way: you move on, or you start thinking about things differently. Or you actually want to get paid for the work you do. Being an independent curator requires a great deal resilience and a passionate attitude. Even if we all work to develop the field and working conditions, there is still more uncertainty than certainty. It is a precarious position with plenty of compromises, and it is understandable if not everyone tolerates these conditions forever. However, it is also a pity, as a lot of knowledge is lost when people continue on to other positions or professions. This is just one of the reasons the independent field needs more long-term funding and stabilized practices.

"The ants will never find anything new  
unless they sometimes leave the existing trail."  
(Gordon, 2017, p. 136)

The photograph on the right (by Niilo Rinne) was taken at the opening of the *Pori World Expo* (Porin kulttuurisäättö *et al.*, 2015). Anni Venäläinen, Eliisa Suvanto, and I, all members of Porin kulttuurisäättö collective from the beginning to 2020, are posing in front of the exhibition pavilion. It is a typical photograph of curators dressed in black holding a glass of wine at the opening - it captures us as a collective, but also it doesn't represent our collective work at all. When struggling with mediating the process phase of process-based practice, collective work as a method is probably hardest to document and mediate. How does one document thinking that happens in-between three people, and later on extends to a whole group of artists and curators? In our collectives we have both clear and concrete roles (non-fixed and more intuitive than articulated) in addition to a democratic non-hierarchical approach where everyone is involved in everything from choosing artists to budgeting, writing, installing and mediating the exhibitions. It has sometimes been maddening, especially when members of the collective have lived in different cities and have had day jobs on the side. It has, however, also been incredibly rewarding to generate all these ideas and then formulate them together; being able to control the whole process from start to finish, from planning to sourcing artists and locations, to applying for funding, to promotion, to exhibitions design, to all the little details that often lead to a new project. We have painted many walls together, written many applications and emails, counted many budgets, bought and eaten many bags of crisps and spent many nights in messenger refining ideas or texts. This collective process often feels surreal to me. Perhaps because there is something inherently miraculous about collectivity, when multiple minds become one.





Porin kulttuurisäättö 2015: Anna Jensen, Anni Venäläinen & Eliisa Suvanto in front of the *Pori World Expo Pavillion*, designed by architect Laura Eerikäinen and artist Suvu Härkönen

# COMMUNITY

“Yksi on joka ikinen tanssija” (“One is every dancer”), Risto 2009

In his song *Elävä ihmisjumala* (“Living human god”), Finnish artist Risto sings “one is every dancer” about that moment when the body starts moving against its will. The sentence, “I am one, there is not one, I am one...” repeating inside the dancers head – that moment when everything is exposed and laid bare, when “everybody is feeling each other’s feelings.” In the song, the explanation for this curious phenomena is a “living human god.” However, if this is interpreted in the context of art as a communal practice, art that happens in and creates community, this could be the moment when beings find meaningfulness together. This is the moment where everyone involved, the community created at that moment and the community itself, is the narrator. This narrator is something larger than a singular author. This collective narrator resembles Schelling's concept of myth as an entity that emerges from nature and the community, as opposed to the creation of an individual. Myth shapes human beings, not the other way round.

Communities are sometimes considered to be based on shared language, land, or culture. An umbrella term combining these ideas could, according to Schelling, be mythology, which creates common world-views originating communities. Ultimately, Schelling claims that it is unthinkable that people would be without mythology:

For, first of all, what is a people, or what makes it into a people? Undoubtedly, not the mere spatial coexistence of a greater or lesser number of physically similar individuals, but rather the community of consciousness between them. This community has only its immediate expression in the common language. But in what are we supposed to find this community itself, or its ground, if not in common world-view; and then this common world-view – in what can it have been originally contained and given to people, if not in its mythology? (Schelling, 2007, pp. 47–48)

Community is also a place for nostalgia, a place of longing. It is presented to us as an ideal entity once existing, but what we have lost and now want back. The lost community is presented as a community of love and understanding, “of harmonious and infrangible bonds”, “immanent unity, intimacy and autonomy and sharing.” Living in a society that is a “simple association and division of forces and needs” we want to regain and construct this “lost community.” (Nancy, 1991, p. 9). We sometimes fail to notice that this lost community is often constructed to serve authorities. In the worst cases, this can be used as a tool for wielding cruelty and terror, as has is the case in, for example, extreme ethno-nationalism and its extermination of the other.

As Nancy points out, we should be:

suspicious of the retrospective consciousness of the lost community and its identity” and he also questions the division between “community” and “society”: ‘Society was not built on the ruins of community. It emerged from the disappearance or the conservation of something – tribes or empires – perhaps just as unrelated to what we call “community” as to what we call “society.’ (Nancy, 1991, p. 11)

Nancy’s theorization of differences between community and society is related to the disenchantment of the modern age, a notion that is questioned and further explored by Jane Bennett, who also highlights the importance of enchantment as a condition of possibility for living an ethical life (Bennett, 2001). In *The Unavowable Community* (1988), writer, philosopher and literary theorist Maurice Blanchot, hints that the ability to understand community has been lost. Blanchot connects the idea of community to death and finiteness of life:

There could not be a community without the sharing of that first and last event which in everyone ceases to be able to be just that (birth, death).” According to him, one does not die because of the community, but the community is because of dying: “As if it could be said: I do not die because the community of which I am part (or the fatherland, or the universe, or humanity, or the family) goes on. Rather it is almost the exact contrary.” (Blanchot, 1988, pp. 9–10)

Blanchot wrote this during a time when he was in dialogue with Nancy. These ideas could also be considered in relation to contemporary discourse. For example, Barad's notion of material that never dies but changes form, in addition to Bennet's observation that all humans beings are made up of vibrant matter with little difference between subjects and objects. If the universe is the community where material circulates, shapes, and reshapes, does it impact the meaningfulness of the moment of the death of the other?<sup>23</sup> Is the community still enjoined to death?

If we think about death as loss and not as circulating material, then possibly yes. In *Frames of War / When Is Life Grievable* (Butler, 2016), philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler writes about grievable lives, arguing that those who are not grieved are not considered living. For Butler, this grievability is the result of norms and structures and directly relates to recognition: "there are norms, explicit or tacit, governing which human lives count as human and as living, and which do not. These norms are determined to some degree by the question of when and where a life is grievable and, correlatively, when and where the loss of a life remains ungrievable and unrepresentable." (Butler, 2016, p. 74) This kind of Hegelian notion is based on the idea of coming into being through the recognition of the other – the other being the one who is communicating with the self, in a community.

In the field of art, this act of recognition plays multiple roles and is related to precariousness. Often those who are recognized, as artists, curators, or even spectators, are in less precarious positions than those who remain invisible. At times, however, this arrangement is the other way around, such as in some communal or participatory practices, where the visibility and attention may actually increase the sense of precariousness. If a project is targeted at a group that is labelled "outcast" and the project is motivated by more or less hidden agendas: it is not the community that is being "healed" or "developed" but rather about the image of those making decisions. Instead of an concrete impact or change, these projects function as symbolic gestures, and can even have similarities

23 "Each human is a heterogeneous compound of wonderfully vibrant, dangerously vibrant, matter. If matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimized, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated." ((Bennett, 2010, pp. 12–13) "Nothingness is a material presence, belying any insinuation of emptiness – an interdeterminate movement, an intra-active self-touching of no-thingness. It is a matter of time-being itself that is at stake in the play of indeterminacy, where an event is not one and living and dying are inseparable..." (Nancy, 1991, p. 11)

to tokenism. “Tokenism” refers to “a member of a group (such as a minority) that is included within a larger group through tokenism” (Merriam-Webster, 1960). Instead of aiming for structural change, the act of tokenism is merely symbolic effort. Christine Tien Wang’s painting from 2012 stated, “Curate this painting into a group show with all white people” summarizes the frustration of being curated to a show as a representation of an exotic other, hidden under the idea of “diversity” or “multiculturality.” In *Curatorial Activism*, Maura Reilly examines the history of exhibitions in order to tackle white privilege and western-centrism in the field of curation. Reilly highlights the risk of mainstream exhibitions “including postcolonial Others as long as they speak of their Otherness.” (Reilly, 2018, p. 104). Reilly’s solution to the problem of precariousness and invisibility resides in the curator’s role, in their efforts and responsibilities. I would add to that and suggest that communities could play a larger role as flexible entities, entities that accept their finitude, as finitude is where “the potential for ethical respect lies.” (Bennett, 2001, p. 76)



*Space Invaders V – Tolerance* working group

This above image is from *Space Invaders V – Tolerance* (*Space Invaders V – Tolerance*, 2017) Hiedanranta, Tampere, where the project was realized in the form of a school camp and a symposium. As I have previously argued, art is a cultural and social practice often part of the creation of communities and identities. Art often emerges from working collectively and in community. Projects are like laboratories for the creation of community. The intensity of a project, its duration and format, strengthens group cohesion and results in meaningful relationships within a group. Like the collective, the community and the structures, feelings, emotions, tensions, power relations, interdependencies cannot be presented in a picture.

# COMMUNICATION

Communication is the act of transferring information from one place or person or a group to another by using mutually understood signs and symbols. The problem is that two entities do not always have a shared and mutual understanding. This often limits the possibilities for communication to happen inside of groups with shared systems of symbols, like language, and presupposes these groups to exist. It excludes those who are not inside the system of language, such as animals, but also everyone who is not recognized within the system's logic.

The 13th Istanbul Biennial (Istanbul Biennial and Erdemci, 2013) titled *Mom, Am I Barbarian?* explored the concept of the other in relation to the city. Curator Fulya Erdemci cited etymology of the word “barbarian” and in particular, discussed its relation to the acquisition of language as a precondition for subjectivity:

In ancient Greece, the barbarian is related both to the concept of the citizen, and also, directly to language. ‘Barbarian’ is the antonym of ‘polis’ (citizen), derived from the word ‘polis’, meaning city-state; thus it relates inversely to the city and the rights of those in it...

From a linguistic perspective, ‘barbarian’ is a definition that marks those who cannot speak Greek, and therefore, those who are not citizens. In fact, phonetically, the word barbarian was an onomatopoeia for a language that people in ancient Greece did not understand. In other words, a language they did not comprehend, the language of the ‘other’, the alien, the most excluded and suppressed. From another angle, the language of barbarians, of those who are marginalized, illegal, and aspire to debunk or change I believe most of these ideas are more or less lazy explanations and also based on certain kinds of unrealistic hopes one has about working in different neighborhoods. the system: the recluse, outcast, bandit, anarchist, revolutionary, or artist. (Istanbul Biennial and Erdemci, 2013, p. 29)

Art is a way of surpassing the gap that symbolic languages create. As Erdemci proposes:

In order to understand the other, we need to learn languages we do not speak, and we need to invent novel languages to conceive the world to come. It is in this context that the 13th Istanbul Biennial claims the role of art is related to creating novel languages, and that art has the capacity to divulge manifestations of the future: can art create such a possibility for the collective imagination? (Istanbul Biennial and Erdemci, 2013, p. 29)

Art is a way of communicating. Communication is a continual question within the professional field of art. As a curator or an artist, one is always working on communication, how one's practice and thinking are communicated. This question of communication takes different forms in different contexts. Communicating a forthcoming project to a working group is different to communicating the final project to a larger public. Communication is often fragile, especially when it comes to projects that are still being formulated. Communication requires trust, trust that the other person will understand, or at least try to understand and trust that the idea will not be stolen. A curator feels responsible for these conditions and still it is impossible to always understand completely, or to prevent ideas from circulating. When ideas are shared, they do enter the brain and the soul of the others. In this sense, they are not entirely yours anymore. They are not public property and should be handled with care. But nevertheless, they are given to the world. In the best possible case, the individual's nascent idea becomes whole through communication. This means communication as a shared thinking process occurring between thinkers, without one of them domineering or controlling the process. In an ideal situation, it might feel as if the project and thoughts were forming themselves in the space between thinking subjects, without an extra effort or struggle.

Recently, new perspectives have been brought to consider communication beyond language, and the theoretical or philosophical value these alternative forms of communication and knowledge possess. Writer and social critic Minna Salami studies the potential of music for non-verbal communication and writes how “the system built upon Europatriarchal Knowledge seldom regards music as having the potential to speak to questions of deeper historiographical and philosophical significance”, whereas “for black people in modern history, music is one of the first sources through which we learn to think critically.” (Salami, 2020, p. 56)



Communication, when confined to language, limits our thinking. We do not have words and concepts for the full gamut of embodied experience. Still, we have intuition for that which is more than or in excess of what we have named. Communication is always about translating, intelligence communicating signs into other signs. As Rancière writes, considering signs as forests and distance as a condition of any community, “human animals are distant animals who communicate through the forest of signs.” (Rancière, 2011, p. 10) *In The Word for World is Forest* (2015) author Ursula K. Le Guin also fabulates alternative options for communication and distance:

Touch was a main channel of communication among the forest people. Among Terrans touch is always likely to imply threat, aggression, and so for them there is often nothing between the formal handshake and the sexual caress. All that black was filled but the Athsheans with varied customs of touch. Caress as a signal and reassurance was as essential to them as it is to mother and child or to lover and lover; but its significance was social, not only maternal and sexual. It was part of their language. It was therefore patterned, codified, yet infinitely modifiable. (Le Guin, 2015, p. 76)

Language can be revolutionary, to speak is to act. In Le Guin’s story the Athsheans have the same word for “translator” and “god”: “one serving as a link between two realities”, “To ‘speak’ that tongue is to act. To do a new thing. To change or to be changed, radically, from the root.” (Le Guin, 1976, p. 84) This is similar to how Barthes suggests that “Changing language is the first step in all renewals, all births, all strong integrations.” (Barthes, 2013, p. 99) Inventing new names is inventing the new, it is changing the world. The invention of names is also an act of care, affection, but also proclaiming ownership. We name our children, our animals, stars and new lands, we name what we conquer. What are the alternatives to naming, speaking, and conquering? I believe there is a shift in the discourse from concentrating on speaking to considering listening. This is related to revisiting the idea of storytelling and fabulation as meaningful acts, as ways of mediating and producing knowledge beyond the Euro- and human-centric conception.

## A. LISTENING

Changing language can be subversive, especially if we also consider how we use language. Shifting concentration from speaking to listening can be a turning point. Listening has long been an underestimated form of communication. It has been misunderstood as a passive and lesser form of interaction. In *The Emancipated Spectator* (2011), Rancière questions conceptions of activity and passivity, asking why we associate listening to passivity, unless through the prejudice that speech is the opposite of action? He states that oppositions like viewing/knowing, appearance/reality, and activity/passivity are embodied allegories of inequality and that emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting. (Rancière, 2011, pp. 12–13) To challenge these old oppositions we need to learn to listen, especially to listen to those voices that have not been heard before. Authority is not about speaking out loud, it is about being able to give space to different voices. It is not self-evident that learning, thinking, and understanding requires listening. Like Nancy justly asks, “Is listening something of which philosophy is capable?” (Nancy, 2007, p. 1)

As a curator, as well as an artist, teacher and a researcher, I value listening as one of the most important skills. However, it is a much more difficult one than it immediately seems. “To be listening is always to be on the edge of meaning”, as Nancy writes (Nancy, 2007, p. 7). Listening is never directly given, but on the verge of happening. Listening is part of the process of making-with. It is the antithesis of the all-knowing superior author authority, who, instead of asking questions, gives answers. It is to be open, to be “inside and outside”:

To be listening is to be at the same time outside and inside, to be open from without and from within, hence from one to the other and from one in the other. Listening thus forms the perceptible singularity that bears in the most ostensive way the perceptible or sensitive (aesthetic) condition as such: the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation, de-connection and contagion.

(Nancy, 2007, p. 14)

Listening is learning. It is a metaphorical act: a need to listen to the world, this place and time, to be able to respond with the right acts and projects. It is also

a very concrete part of work in artistic fields. To listen is to become acquainted with how to continue. To listen is also to challenge the existing hierarchical system of perception and knowledge production. “Listening as an aesthetic practice challenges how as a society we see and how we interact in the production of the visual world. It expands and challenges what we see, without negative illusion in reality of lived experience. Listening is an activity that challenges the philosophical tradition of the West, which positions sound like an attribute to visual and language structure.” (Rosas, 2019, p. 4) Listening is related to the act of storytelling and fabulation – acts highlighted by ecofeminists and other scholars questioning western-oriented mindsets. Listening is connected to responsibility, care and situated knowledges.<sup>24</sup>

*The Shadow Places Network* is a network of scholars, artists and activists who collaborate to document, co-produce and reimagine connections between places and peoples in an era of climate change” (Potter, Miller and Lövbrand, no date) inspired by Australian feminist and eco-philosopher Val Plumwood. In their manifesto listening is presented as a method and politics to be taken seriously: “Shadow places lead us to principles for practice based on an ethics of care and responsibility, an orientation to engagement rather than exploration, relations of consent and accountability, a politics of listening and collaboration rather than isolation or elevation.” *Shadow Places Networks* state that:

...shadow places are everywhere but rarely made visible. They are spatialised and also practiced. Yet, they are connected; their relations to each other, produced in ways that cannot be reduced to spatio-temporal proximity, suggest an alternative map of capitalist and colonial history that speaks of their exploitation, abjection and crisis. Their relations – the network of shadow places itself – trace out a different history and future of global life, that always exceeds capitalist imaginaries, and maintains this in tension with dominant systems of culture and governance. (Potter, Miller and Lövbrand, no date)

Working in shadows and with shadows is a tactical choice – that which happens in margins and the shadows can be brought to light. Simultaneously, shadows are a perfect place to concentrate on storytelling and deep listening.

<sup>24</sup> This idea has been further developed in many of the contemporary feminist theorists, such as Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, Minna Salami and Val Plumwood.



Drawing with Nancy, 2018

What makes singularities communicate and how does the communication happen? Contemplating communication often takes place in the context of language as a system of signs and symbols that are understandable for some and incomprehensible for others. Therefore, language has an inclusive and exclusive element, creating communities and identities. I am interested in communication that happens outside these hierarchical systems, communication that is more spatial and embodied, that can surpass the gaps created by language, where we can accept some amount of obscurity and ambiguousness.

# CONTINUITY

In the independent field, outside of institutions, projects tend to happen in short periods because of the conditions and external terms. Funding is often for months or at its best, a few years. There might not be permanent spaces for practices and collectives to change when people come and go, depending on their situation. Established spaces and employment relationships are difficult to arrange without permanent funding or without an abiding space or employees, permanent, or even semi-permanent, funding is impossible to get.

This also affects the practice of Porin kulttuurisäätiö and Space Invaders. Both started as one-time initiatives but became annual events and an ongoing practice. In a kind of domino effect, each project starts with a research question leading to an event that leading to new questions. Every project generated new knowledge, new material, new results, and new ideas we wanted to try in practice. But development requires continuity. One of the major difficulties has been how to create continuity in a situation where funding is often bound to institutions and their walls: those with gallery spaces or festivals happening in the same place and time every year are seen as stable actors, whereas practice based on trying to deconstruct the concept of the exhibition, finding new ways of presenting art and practice, even if it is happening year in year out, is interpreted as less stable. This, I would argue, makes it hard to create new, more inclusive and approachable practices in art, although this very demand has often been presented just for the independent field. This obstruction makes it more difficult to comment and question traditional museum and gallery practices and to create alternatives and plurality. It is also one of the reasons people so often burnout in the independent field. Without permanent income, practitioners cannot say no to job offerings and need to fund their own, often laborious projects, by working elsewhere.

Fortunately, there are other aspects of continuity. Continuity can also be found in a connection with a place. For many years, Aalto University has organized a course for new master's students in Visual Culture in Reposaari. This

involves taking new students to the same place year after year and giving them the same tasks: to create artwork or artistic act in relation to the place and environment, and to create an artwork or act that reacts to one of the other works made earlier. Seeing these works being made year after year has provided valuable information about how people react to this specific environment, how it is experience and how this experience is mediated. Without this continuity, it would be impossible to notice that it almost seems as if the place itself is partly creating these pieces and acts, that each year a new group of people seem to repeat. This spatiality was further researched in the 2020 Pori Biennial *Not To Sing Like the City Bird Sings*. (Jensen, Suvanto and Porin kulttuurisäättö, 2020) Continuity can also mean working with the same people, the same research questions and traditions. Even in the uncertain independent field, there are stable factors and practices, and hopefully, there will be even more in the future.

#### A. AESTHETICALLY TOLERABLE – TAKING OVER OTANIEMI

Through practice and projects, both *Porin kulttuurisäättö* and *Space Invaders* have been trying to find ways to create continuity while being flexible and regenerative. One of the means to generate this balance between stability and flexibility, has been relocating to different places and locations within the same framework. This highlights how place and location shape practice, event and exhibition.

The second *Space Invaders* was held in a building used as artist's studios that was doomed for demolition. The project was called *The Revolution* (2014) referring not only to cultural revolutions but also to how nature can take over constructed. It also referred to the current situation of our practice in relation to the university: Aalto University leaving Pori and all the activities were being moved to the main campus in Otaniemi, Espoo. The third *Space Invaders* was held in Otaniemi and was titled *Aesthetically Tolerable – Taking Over Otaniemi* (Jensen and Suvanto, 2015). Otaniemi is a suburban area in Espoo, which is a kind of collection of suburbs next to Helsinki, a non-place without its own cohesive identity. At least this was the outsider's view of the area. Otaniemi used to be the engineering campus but when the three universities in Helsinki, the Helsinki University of Technology (established 1849), the Helsinki School of Economics (established 1904), and the University of Art and Design Helsinki

(established 1871), fused both the University of Art and Design and the Helsinki School of Economics moved to Otaniemi as well. This was not an easy transition and in the third edition of *Space Invaders*, we wanted to explore both the nature of the Otaniemi area, which we found aesthetically boring, even if it is a globally recognized Alvar Aalto architecture, compared to the beautiful old factory area by the river in Arabia where the University of Art and Design used to be located. In the event, we also wanted to observe our status as new invaders conquering space in Otaniemi. With the commencement of the project, we had to reckon with our presumptions, as many of the students participating in the process turned out to admire the environment and they did not find Otaniemi as unpleasant as we did.

This did not only make us take a second look at our theme and assumptions about the area. It also made me rethink the research question related to uncanniness suburbs and urban planning I have been exploring and responding to since my MA thesis in Visual Culture. I had considered the suburbs as uncanny, positioning my reasoning and arguments based on my own experience which I, along with like-minded thinkers, assumed to be universal. What if these areas are not uncanny at all but the uncanniness is just my personal feeling of uncomfortable? There are, however, plenty of examples in which the suburbs are considered strange and alienating. So I would not suggest that we throw this entire hypothesis out the window. From director David Lynch's claustrophobic representations to Jeffrey Eugenides' exploration of cloistered girlhood in *Virgin Suicides* to author Riku Korhonen's novels to John Ajvide Lindqvist's horror stories of suburban living and the terror hidden beneath the structured facades. In the essay "Suburban Gothic and the Ethnic Uncanny", Dines considers *The Virgin Suicides* as an exploration of the uncanniness generated by the "suburban gothic": "Suburban gothic has typically been understood in terms of a banal un-homeliness which merely confirms reassuring commonplaces about the postwar American suburbs." (Dines, 2012)

Otaniemi was an opportunity to revisit this notion of uncanny suburbia but also the idea of using existing resources and working in a half-abandoned mall to question contemporary consumerism and how Espoo is being developed. Espoo is a collection of suburban areas and might be considered the capital of malls in Finland. As the malls have grown increasingly large, so the small older malls, such as the one in Otaniemi, have become useless. Larger

malls need more space and are therefore further away from neighborhoods. This entails a lot of traveling and plenty of car use. A number of pressing questions arise from this growth and proliferation of malls, how our shared spaces are used, and what is their impact on the existing shared spaces? Are the old malls inside suburbias becoming even more empty and even more quiet, and even more uncanny? What can be done with the old malls, considering the critical state of the climate situation? Is this really how urban areas should be planned? These were questions we explored during the Space Invaders course and event together with students and artists.

Many of the works exhibited in Otaniemi Space Invaders dealt with the politics of space: for whom is it developed for? How can public space be used? Who is included and who is excluded? These issues took a variety of forms in the exhibition. Andrea Coyotzi Borja organized a Mexican street food kitchen. Architect Laura Eerikäinen created a miniature version of the mall bringing out its sculptural beauty. Tuomo Savolainen's installation explored questions of public, private and being monitored. Jaakko Lieve's intervention and video work presented a public bench redesigned for a more inclusive user group: the city of Helsinki had designed new benches with arm holders making it impossible for homeless people to use them for sleeping. This was most likely not accidental, but rather policy aimed at tidying up certain areas in the city. Similar acts of "homeless-deterrent technology" are used all over the world, one of the most known cases being the London spikes.<sup>25</sup> However, homelessness does not disappear even if sleeping in public places is discouraged, and the city should be accessible for all, not only for those performing normative behavior. In his piece Lieve removed the arm holders and made benches suitable for sleeping again.

26 For example Jennifer Doyle: *Hold It Against Me* (2013)





Andrea Coyotzi Borja bringing equipment to *Space Invaders III*

In the above image Andrea Coyotzi Borja is transporting equipment to the third *Space Invaders* titled “Aesthetically tolerable.” She is pushing a shopping cart, participating in the collective work while producing her own project for the show. At this point, the *Space Invaders* already had an established practice that we could take to different places and locations. Even if some elements are subject to change, the practice itself is still recognizable. Historically, we have found it important to formulate the working group so that there is enough change. We do not want to create a permanent bubble and stagnate within the group, simply agreeing with each other’s ideas and thoughts without challenge. Development requires new inputs and critical perception. Every time we explain our practice and our projects we learn something new about what we do and what we need to do to improve while doing it or mediating it. However, to feel safe and competent we also need the continuity that a certain amount of stability creates. Working with trusted artists like Andrea, who later became part of Porin kulttuurisäättö, and Martinez, who co-created the Mexican edition of *Space Invaders*, creates a sense of belonging, confidence, and friendship that helps the whole group to relax and have faith in the process, even during the difficult moments. The familiar artists can also act as a link, as “double agents”, between us as curators and the new artists, especially in moments where there is a risk of confusion or misunderstanding.

# CURATING; A CURATOR

A medium is so-called because he or she acts as a go-between, an intermediary, a connecting link between the ordinary, physical material life which we are all so familiar with on this earth, and the spirit or non-material life which surrounds us, but of which most people are unconscious. (Bull, 1926, p. 85)

Discussing the notion of “medium” in his book *Mystic* (1926), John Bull refers to various kinds of mediation. A medium is a figure who works as a go-between and link between the material and “spiritual” world. There are many similarities between Bull’s account of a medium and the role of curator. Bull describes a medium as “someone, who possess a highly developed artistic temperament and who is super-sensitive to certain influences which do not affect those who have not cultivated this particular side of themselves.” (Bull, 1926, pp. 84–86)(1926, 84-86) In her doctoral thesis *Software curating : the politics of curating in/as (an) Open System(s)* (Krysa, 2008) curator and scholar Joasia Krysa also considers the connection between spirituality and curating, touching on the relationship between a curator and the community;

However, it should be emphasised that curating is neither exclusive to museums and galleries nor to contemporary culture. The motif of curating was already present during the Middle Ages in Christianity, most often with reference to a spiritual guide or a curate, a person invested with the spiritual care, or cure (*cura*) of souls. In this sense, a curator (a curate) technically means a parish priest. Furthermore, the etymology of the term relates it to the dominant Biblical metaphor of the shepherd and flock that encompasses the idea of spiritual care... (Krysa, 2008, pp. 16–17)

Perhaps, the curator could be considered in these terms. They are required to be highly sensitive to the world, both the material everyday world and the world of spirits and ideas, the *zeitgeist*. Furthermore, they must be capable of mediating these worlds. They must take responsibility for their flock and cure the souls of their fellow beings. The quotes above can also serve as examples of the complexity of the profession, or the very concept of a curator. The term “curator” meaning nothing and everything, a label that can be used but that hardly accounts for all the activities practiced under the title. Bull describes sympathy as a necessary quality of the “office of go-between for the living and dead.” (1926, 84-86) No less is sympathy needed when mediating art, in the go-between praxis of artworks, concepts, sites, ideas, artists, audiences, theories, and studies. This is also how a curator, along with artists, is involved in the process of reacting to the critical questions of time, creating and sharing knowledge and non-knowledge, and increasing and creating a sense of meaningfulness. This, I believe, involves a certain amount of magic and enchantment (maybe used as what the artist Dylan Ray Arnold has called “tactical re-enchantment). I want my art to be charming and enchanting. I want to be spellbound, I want the audience to be spellbound, and hopefully even the artists. This sphere of play, imagination, and enchantment is the reason why I am a bit reluctant to participate in the discussion of the curatorial, even if I see its importance. The curatorial, even when critical about the conception of art as knowledge production, is participating in this act of framing, organizing and explaining. In her dissertation *Why Don't Curators Like Art* (Lio, 2017) curator Carolina Lio observes “the shift, over the last two decades, of curating from exhibition-making to the curatorial discourse, which has caused a progressive detachment of curators from art, in some cases even becoming hostility towards certain practices.” (Lio, 2017, p. 4) Lio’s thesis of curators detaching from art is surprisingly common prejudice, and even if I do understand her point, I do not entirely agree with it. As a practicing curator, my aim is to explore what curating is about, in different contexts, times, places and settings. But, what Bull captures in *Mystic* and what Krysa contemplated in her thesis, is often lost when the curatorial is discussed, that is, the elements of magic and spirituality.

Magic and spirituality do not easily fit into the rationalistic framework of academic art discourse, or the analytic approach contemporary art often demands.<sup>26</sup> Because I am not a curator by education, I have remained relatively

distanced from this specific tradition, from this way of understanding curatorial praxis. I became a curator by making exhibitions where curating is used as a method to learn and grow. More specifically, the practice is based on my background in fine arts and theory, in addition to a site-specific approach. When I write about curating, I write about how I interpret the practice and what it is for me – a research-oriented artist and theorist. My practice began unintentionally because I wanted to make things happen and see structures change. I wanted to create platforms for non-commercial interdisciplinary approaches. It was not about wanting to present specific artworks nor was it about creating a career, but rather, it was about curiosity. What if? What would happen if this was tried and tested? Frustration with the state of things might have played a role too, as well as naive wonderment<sup>27</sup>. For a long time, I felt like a cheat when I was invited to places and events as a curator, because I was not sure if I was one. Still, I am not sure, but it has become a concept I use when my practice requires a name. Maybe this is also the reason why I am so interested in what curating is. It is practice that did not exist for me when I was studying or working as an artist. Curating was not a mental image in my mind, neither did I have role models. This flexibility gives me joy and I feel like I am still able to recreate how I comprehend curating. How I feel about curating resonates with the dialogue between curators Lucy Cotter and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev:

LC: in your essay you also refer to the artist as an ‘amateur’ and to the notion of ‘the amatorial mind’. You write, ‘artists are like ‘amateurs’; even if they know a lot of things, they are really ‘amateurs’. It’s in the ‘amatorial’ mindset that you get to forms of knowledge<sup>28</sup>. Does this amatorial mindset also relate to committedness?

CCB: Yes, because *amore* means to love, so amatorial knowledge is indeed not only a non-specialised knowledge but also committed knowledge at every moment, or a committed form of searching.”  
(Cotter, 2019, pp. 252–253)

27 I believe that naive wonderment can be considered as a method for exploring alternatives for existing practices and discourses.

28 Quoted in the text: *Documenta 13: The Logbook*, p. 291

Curiosity, (re)searching and love – curating, as a profession, requires all of these elements and a certain amount of openness towards the world in addition to a capacity to care about it. This caring and the various forms it takes along with the people involved, brings it all together. Curating is how they are brought together, it is the main element in sharing and creating knowledge or different kinds of knowledge in art. For curator Hans Ulrich Obrist curators are “no longer understood as simply the person who fills space with objects but as the person who brings different cultural spheres into contact, invents new display features, and makes junctions that allow unexpected encounters and results... To curate, in this sense, is to refuse static arrangements and permanent alignments and instead to enable conversations and relations” (Obrist, 2014, pp. 24–25). Even if there are some attempts to increase the value and glamor of one's work, the profession and the practice have indeed become more self-critical and less pragmatic.

This understanding of curating as a practice that does not only mean taking care of museum collections is still rather new. As curator Elina Suoyrjö argues in her PhD Thesis *See me, feel me, touch me, heal me: working with affect, emotion, and creation of transformative energies as a feminist curatorial practice* (Suoyrjö, 2019) the emergence of independent curators came about in the late 1960s and was further entrenched in the 1990s when contemporary curatorial practice became “relatable to artistic practices and a more critical discourse is created around the profession.” (Suoyrjö, 2019, p. 15) Curating, as merely making exhibitions, became “the curatorial,” a cross-disciplinary, theoretical and philosophical approach in the 1980's;

In a nutshell, the focus has shifted from the caretaker of collections and administrator of exhibitions, to the independent curator and practices outside museum institutions and galleries. The discussions have shifted from the singly authored exhibition model, encouraged by the proliferation of biennial culture, towards more discursive models of curating, which propose alternative and collaborative models of curating, and where dialogue, research and process are emphasized.” (Suoyrjö, 2019, p. 71)

I would expand the argument even further and claim that the curator today is an umbrella concept used in so many different contexts, that it could make sense to ask why these practices are even called by the same name.

Even if the turn or differences between curating and the curatorial are not this straight forward in reality, the curatorial can be seen as more self-aware and self-critical, the practice is often more about the process and knowledge produced, than the art objects and exhibitions as such. Not everyone is unequivocally excited about this new conception. Dorothee Richter observes the feminist perspectives on curating and states that:

I also suspect that the once hyped notion of “the curatorial” might work as an “(eye) trap”. The notion of “the curatorial” implies a problematic ennoblement of curating as a meaning producing activity which takes place (as I see it) in a politically and ideological contested field. Putting “curating” on eye level with philosophy, it is in danger of asking for essentialist, supra-temporal meaning production from curating, which would function outside history. Instead, I would propose staying with re-contextualizing, historicising, localising and being aware of the political demands and alliances. Feminist curating is part of a political movement. (Richter, 2016, p. 66)

Even if curating as an umbrella concept can be difficult, there are special features in the profession. One problem in reducing curating to knowledge production or leveling it with philosophy is the fact that the knowledge of the exhibitions do not exist as such. Exhibitions appear spatially and rarely without a context, philosophical, theoretical or social background. These elements combined with art make exhibitions unique, both experientially and methodologically. This complex constellation is perhaps what makes it difficult to explain the core of curatorial practice. The curator, maybe especially an independent curator, often needs to be a multi-talented figure, creating theoretical framework that refer to art history and philosophical discourses, while sourcing perfect exhibition sites, locations, artists. In addition, they are required to produce and mediate critical discussions about an array of contemporary topics. They are also required to be aware of institutional politics. All this while taking care of the artists they are working with. Curators raise funds, count budgets, understand technical

equipment, feed their artists, organize shipping and install exhibitions. They also need to be ready to defend their profession, as it is often questioned and misunderstood. Artists are perfectly able to install their own art, as I have been sometimes told by artists. And sometimes they are able to install on their own, in which case I wonder if curating is a bubble created in which we can feel useful and be critical together. On the other hand, there are artists, especially those who have during their training learned to work with curators, who would not think of working without a curator involved in a project.<sup>29</sup>

Another possible problem with the new forms of curatorial work is its focus on events instead of exhibitions. While there is nothing wrong with events, discussions and public programs, there are, like Gabrielle Moser and Helena Reckitt have claimed, practical and political reasons related to the precarious nature of freelance curators' profession behind this trend. While reading groups and public gatherings can be powerful, they are also cheaper, faster, and do not threaten the jobs of those permanently working in the institutions. And, as Moser and Reckitt state, there is a risk of losing important historical records. (Moser and Reckitt, 2016, pp. 45–46) There is the chance that the historical record later will only show the work of those who were in privileged enough positions to afford exhibitions and catalogs.

This trend is also present in the way curators are educated. Instead of working with artworks or collaborating with artists, some of the curatorial education programs have taken criticality to the core of the practice being taught. There are indeed a number of things that need to be deconstructed and revisited, but it sometimes feels almost as if the art itself has been removed from how curating is considered. In some cases, curatorial education has developed in a direction where art seems to be a problem concerning the profession, instead of being the premise, like for example the thesis *Why Don't Curators Like Art* (Lio, 2017) suggests. It has been argued that the outcome of curating, usually the exhibition, has been the focus for too long. The outcome, however, is also what the curator often works with. Our greatest possibility in mediating our thinking

<sup>29</sup> This symbiotic relationship between artists and curators became evident in interviews I did for an article about the *20 years of Live Art and Performance Studies MA* (Jensen, 2021a) with former and present students. The program that is placed under the roof of Theatre Academy, Helsinki, but the studies include a diversity of collaborations and a close co-working with curators.

and share an impact is the material dimensions in our work that makes it possible for us to reach for others, compared to mediating research, theory or ideas.

The environmental crisis, unsustainable work cultures, precariousness and insecurity signal that conditions need to change. If we want to change these conditions, this requires both thought and action. Like Essi Vesala argues in their master's thesis *Practicing Coexistence – Entanglements Between Ecology and Curating Art* (Vesala, 2019), we also need practice, not only themes and ideas, "What is missing in curatorial discourse is how these threats could be tackled in more pragmatic ways, not only as a topic or overarching theme: what could ecological thinking in curatorial practices mean? What if ecology would not only be a conceptual starting point, but also implemented in practice?" (Vesala, 2019, p. 7) It is not enough that a curator writes critical statements about a theme and event if the thinking does not penetrate the practice. Without art do we need curators? If art events become all about counting carbon footprints then there is very little that can be done. Obviously the best way to reduce carbon footprint is to go nowhere and do nothing. Curating is about balancing these intersecting forces and trying to find solutions. It is practical problem-solving as much as it dreaming, thinking, imagining and researching. It is about being in-between magic and highly practical, concrete issues, questions and answers. Bennet writes that "an ethic for a disenchanted world requires humility but also exercise of imagination. Though not quite an imperative, imagination is an interior 'injunction', a 'weakly messianic' urge to exercise one's capacity to see things as otherwise than they are. Imagination energizes us with alternatives, with the power of new and startling and wonderful." (Bennett, 2001, p. 76) I believe curating is exactly this exercising of imagination, creating wonderful, startling, enchanting and exciting things, while also having a self-reflective and critical relationship to the practice and its outcomes. This combination of wonder and excitement, reflectivity and criticality is key to ethical and ecological issues. Instead of merely presenting, explaining, and copying, we need to enchant and fabulate.

My approach here is only one, very small, slice of what curating can be and mean. As curating has become an established and widespread profession, there is increasing variety in the way it is practiced. There are multiple ways of being a curator today and a vast variety of practices going on under the curatorial umbrella. For myself, curating is closer to artistic practice, maybe because of my



background and education, but it is also because of the way I practice curating. Even if the projects start from a research question it is about giving form to thought and being able to spatially address this form to spectators. It is about the process of formulating the research question at hand and the political agenda into an accessible format. Crucially, accessible does not mean understandable or easy, but rather reachable. An increasing number of curators enter the field from different backgrounds. How they practice curating happens in deep conjunction with other fields. Curator and producer Riikka Thitz works with performance and projects that “operate in the inbetweennesses of the known, unknown, affective and reasoned”<sup>30</sup> and wrote her MA thesis about dramaturgy as a curatorial tool. She presents multiple similarities in these professions; the relational and spatial nature of the practices, critical and analytical approaches, combining content and form, and collective nature of the work, where “one of the most important tasks is to ask questions without an expectation of answers.” (Thitz, 2021, pp. 20–22)

I trust that curatorial practice should be rooted in ethics, and so become, as Maura Reilly states, intelligent curating where “exhibitions function as curatorial correctives to the exclusion of Other artists from either the master narratives of art history, or from the contemporary art scene itself.” (Reilly, 2017) This otherness comes in many forms, genders, those who are culturally underrepresented or unrepresented, those in the margins. Even with the long tradition of fighting for gender equality in the art world and all the discourse taking place today, we are still far from equal. It is not only human equality we need to think of – climate change, extinction of species, and exploitation of other beings we share the globe with are topics art cannot afford to ignore anymore. We need to react, respond and care: *Cura* means to care or to concern. To take care of is to love, so curating is also an act of love. The curator is a caretaker, taking care of the world, her artists, events, exhibitions, spectators, and as I see it, the world. Having started doing shows because of passion, love, and concern, and because care has been an essential part of our toolkit, sometimes to the point of exhaustion, the often mentioned link between care and curating bears mention again. The word curious<sup>31</sup> comes from the same root *cura*. Curating is also about

30 *About Riikka Thitz*. (Thitz, 2020)

31 [1] Curiosity (from Latin *cūriōsitas*, from *cūriōsus* "careful, diligent, curious", akin to *cura* "care") is a quality related to inquisitive thinking such as exploration, investigation, and learning, evident by observation in humans and other animals.[1][2] Curiosity is heavily associated with all aspects of human development, in which derives the process of learning and desire to acquire knowledge and skill. (Wikipedia, 2022a)

curiosity – the desire to explore new ideas, new questions and new answers. Curiosity is often connected to a desire to know how things in the world (be they objects, artworks, natural phenomena) came to be. Curiosity might be oriented toward how ideas are born, how they materialize or not. Curating is endlessly curious about art, politics, society, social structures, so-called nature and culture, spaces, sites, places, people, collectives, communities, presentations and representations, and of course, power relations. Curiosity can also be a trap – something that impedes care. Endless curiosity can be exhausting and hinder deeper concentration.

A curator is like a tree connected to a fungal network that connects many different agents. Facilitating, associating, bridging, and combining. (van der Loo, 2021, p. 119)

Even if curating and caring in the context of curation, is often considered theoretical and perhaps even abstract work, it can be very concrete. Curating is caring for the artists, caring for your colleagues, for the world, and the art field in general. From the beginning Porin kulttuurisäätiön practice has focused on developing enhanced working conditions for artists. As the financial resources have often been small, we have tried to find other ways of supporting people we work with. This can be material and emotional support through the process, creating networks, enabling future work or exhibition possibilities. Properly promoting events and those involved in them might not be the reason one becomes a curator, but it is an essential part of the work.

In Porin kulttuurisäätiön and Space Invaders projects our guideline has been to make the projects as pleasant as possible. This is related to how, in the beginning, we were unable to pay our artists and so, we wanted to compensate their work in other ways. Sometimes this has meant neglecting our own wellbeing at the cost of others, but we have improved. Each year, we have been able to pay more attention to how the projects are executed and how we, together with artists, are feeling. It should be noted that pleasant is not the same thing as easy – independent projects with small resources are hardly ever easy. Especially, as our take on collective curating has not been most conventional one. Instead of focusing on already existing spaces or artworks our processes often start from nothing (“nothing” not meaning the theme or the research question but

existing material conditions). As we do not have a permanent space or funding, we have been able to adjust what we do to the particular theme we are exploring. When this happens together with the group of artists the process becomes shared, the borders between your ideas and mine become vague, and in a sense all the exhibitions become, more or less, *gesamtkunstwerk*, instead of regular group shows presenting artworks from multiple artists under a single title. This requires special trust and increases transparency with the artists, as it does change established hierarchies and expectations. As one of the artists we have often worked with said, “it is never really clear if he was working for us, to get our visions forward, or if he is independently working on his piece, as he normally does”. This, I think, was not a complaint, but rather the artist pondering different working methods and styles.

Having a strong vision for a project is a blessing. It is motivating to work towards and see various elements coming together. It is inspiring to think about suitable artists and collaborators, to discuss the project further within the working group. I love searching for perfect locations to be used as stages for certain themes. But a strong vision is also a disadvantage when things do not go exactly as intended, and these are the moments when ethicality is challenged the most. How to motivate one's working group and the project to continue, when things start falling apart? Failure is, however, also what makes progress, and is an essential part of art. Without being able to tolerate the prospect of failure, I think it would be impossible to work as a curator.



*Curatorial Forum, Saint Petersburg, 2019*

In the above photograph, I am participating in a conversation titled ‘Curating public spaces’, together with Taru Tappola, Carol Stakenas, Naila Allahverdieva, Artem Filatov, Susan Katz, and moderated by Jussi Koitela at the 2019 Curatorial Forum in Saint Petersburg (NCCA, 1019). (I do not look impressed, but it was interesting.) For a long time I suffered from imposter syndrome, and sometimes I still do when asked to talk about curating. Without the “proper” education or museum/institution background, my so-called professional identity has been more fluid than fixed to the title of curator. I often refer to myself as an “artist, curator, writer, researcher, and feminist,” aiming to reduce the burden of any of the connotations. I also do this in order to increase transparency and to point to the diversity of the practices one needs to be able to survive working in the field of arts. We often refer to our practice ironically, as it has been a way to question contemporary art and its funding, as “fudging” or “shuffling”, and “hustle and bustle”. Instead of diminishing our practice, I believe refusing a single title gives us freedom, not to be forced into a serious framework and goal, but rather to emphasize a playfulness that does not mean lowering expectations when it comes to quality. I am, however, grateful for all the invitations I have received during the years to lecture, talk and discuss curating. These opportunities have taught me a great deal and strengthened my professional identity.

# (DE)CENTER

A curator is a storyteller, and a storyteller builds bridges – bridges connecting different times, generations, locations. These narratives impact how places are seen and understood. Curators, like stories narratives, can also produce places. In our practice we have considered the two trajectories of understanding in terms of the particular sites for exhibitions and curatorial projects, and also what lies in-between. There is urban – city centers, meaning both institutional curating in museums and galleries and public art. And then there is rural – referring to everything happening outside of institutions and, often, outside of the urban metropolis. And between these the intermediate spaces, and also spaces that are yet formulating through contextualization, like exhibitions. For the duration of artistic projects, the curator is partly responsible for the increasing visibility of new sites of exhibition. Many different types of urban space have become a playground, the public space being a friend, and enemy in artistic practice: something that is sometimes annoying but also inviting. These qualities make it easy to forget that these sites are a home for others. In different environments, different knowledges and subjectivities are produced and maintained. In this chapter de-centering is used as a concept to refer mostly to concrete and spatial de-centering but also to our practice of de-centering and deconstructing different pieces in the puzzle of art and artistic research – most of all positions of power. Physical de-centering is also mental and knowledgeable de-centering, and vice versa.

Having my background in more traditional white cube art and having studied aesthetics and philosophy of art at the University of Helsinki, it was fascinating and horrifying to start working in public space, to take my practice out of the safety of an immediately recognizable context. This process of moving out of the white cube began when I started my master's degree at Aalto University in Pori in 2010. In the book *Intervention to Urban Space* (Jensen, Rajanti and Ziegler, 2018) we describe the program;

The unique feature of the MA programme that was maintained in Pori for over ten years were the connections with the City of Pori and its urban space, which was the content of a long-term and ongoing practice. Social context and interaction with surrounding society were regarded as important aspects of art and teaching in the MA programme. The core of activities was research and experimentation. These emphases made artistic projects part of the cityscape of Pori and the everyday lives of its residents. Both art and the teaching of art were taken out of academies and galleries, with focus on considering the contexts of art and on experimental interventions. (Jensen, Rajanti and Ziegler, 2018, p. 11)

Throughout my studies, we worked among people in urban space doing small interventions and larger, longer-term projects in empty or abandoned locations. We did also have studios and classrooms, but the most relevant learning processes happened outside. It was not only the theoretical and conceptual knowledge that was relevant but the small practical things you need to know when working outside the white cube, from electricity to bureaucracy and promotion to studying the space, the place and the location. We learned different methods from artistic interventions to public projects of exploring the city, experiencing it, and turning this experience into a sharable form; text, event, artwork, talk.

After finishing our studies, the practice of exploring, researching, and using the city as the main arena, platform and framework continued. In Finland, the gallery system is abusive for artists, who usually pay both the rent and commissions.<sup>32</sup> In Porin kulttuurisäätö and Space Invaders projects we wanted to create alternative and foster more approachable and ethical ways of exhibiting art, also enabling new kinds of approaches and accessibility. Using public space has created possibilities for exhibiting non-commercial artworks and happenings, while it has given our projects their theoretical framework. Using public space for art events is also an excellent possibility for increasing democracy in art, both for those who make it and those who experience it, creating encounters that are impossible in museums and galleries. Art is not only exhibited for

32 There has been improvement and there are more galleries and artist run spaces with better practices but unfortunately this is still the case even with many galleries, even those run by artist's unions.

those who come to see it, it is a surprise for all those using the chosen location. Art becomes a way to communicate with the other and serves as a gift: given for free but also with a possibility for exchange and commitment (Jensen, 2022). An experience is traded to occupying space and attention.

With Porin kulttuurisäätiö and Space Invaders we have continued the tradition of taking art to new areas and different kinds of locations. Within these projects, events have taken place in suburban areas, beaches, parks, bigger and smaller cities. During the years, this practice has also made me question the rights and responsibilities of the curator or artist when going into different areas. How do I enter? What is the position to take when working in a certain area? What are the consequences, and how do we respect resident's ownership? And, what kind of conception art and different agencies related to it are we making? I believe de-centering art is a way of decentering power and knowledge, but this requires curiosity and respect, and consideration what it comes to mediating projects.

## A. PORI

Pori is a small to middle-sized city in western Finland. It is where I and many of my colleagues did our MA's, when Aalto University still offered the program for Visual Culture. Both the program and the city changed my thinking and practice completely. Pori allowed things I would never have tried in the capital region. The program was described as "experimental and research-based" and determined by an aspiration to teach so that the outcome of teaching was not pre-defined, as curator Anni Venäläinen writes in *Mustekala* journal's Pori edition (Venäläinen, 2014). In the same journal, professor Harri Laakso writes about the city itself, and how years in this small-town community can change a person, and how the person then changes the program. He also asks what were the things that made Pori so special, the interests and passions. He names collectivity as one of them, "In Pori one was not alone even if one was taking experimentality or irrationality seriously...we had thinkers that were in margins in other places in the center, and our geographical (distant) position made it possible to experiment our marginal position in research and teaching physically in our everyday lives." (Laakso, 2014). The distance made all the difference. The culture and the structure of art were different in Pori than what I was

used to in Helsinki, less hierarchical, combining different fields, "low threshold practice", as it has been called. As an old impoverished industrial town, the city had a lot of empty or unused spaces that were possible to take over. This was probably also the reason why the city administration was open to all kinds of initiatives. In a smaller town, the city and its representatives were also easier to approach. Personal relations and connections made everything more simple. Even if the city is on the smaller side, the art museum is well-known and has been one of the most influential contemporary art museums for decades. And, surprisingly, the performance art scene in Pori is well-established. This already established scene has made it easier for everyone there to try out different, experimental projects.

In the same article, Laakso questions the idea of Pori as an anchored and stabilized place and how tens of thousands of kilometers have undermined his trust in the solidity of the city – the idea and the image of the city is continually changing and shifting. The city was experienced as a meandering phenomenon, which has also influenced our practice, the phenomenon of meandering defined by Klaver as;

dependent on the complex interaction of many material vectors...  
Meandering stands for an ethics of adjustment, a politics of engagement, enabling deliberation, a sense of experiment: tinkering, thinking, emergent, and transient. Meander brings the social, political, technological, and natural together in an ongoing dynamic. The Law of the Meander is not the straight line but the sinuous back and forth, symbolized linguistically by the prefix re-, the notion of the again and again, the experience one gets in *mêtis*, the exploration through wandering. (Klaver, 2018, p. 58).

We have not owned the city, but we have tried to move with it, curiously studying it. Both with Porin kulttuurisäätö and Space Invaders projects we, we meaning artists, curators and others involved, have been working in public and semi-public spaces since 2012. Through that time, we have become kind of experts in temporary use of space and short-term art projects realized in the public sphere with finite resources. Our projects have become meeting points and places for interaction. In the beginning, it was not so much about the pub-



lic and the spectators, but this has changed radically over the years. Realizing that the spectator does not need to be “served” with certain kinds of art or that considering the spectator might mean changing the idea of art we have, what kind of art is meaningful. Rather, the spectator is a figure with whom we experience the world together and who then interprets our projects based on this experience. A spectator also embodies social structures and political decisions. These shifts in our thinking have made us ask for whom is art exhibited? And what kind of art, where, and when? Our projects have shown that generally public wants to be heard, and art, especially art happening in public spaces and involving the public, is a way of inviting important conversations. Art can be a language for those who do not already have one, who are not heard. Art makes invisible stories visible. Many of these invisible stories happen outside big cities and centers, even if narrations of cities and centers are more popular and widely documented in artworks. Our aim has been to reconstruct this tradition of storytelling, show life and places outside the expected. This has also forced us to think about mediating more carefully. Not everyone will travel to the places we occupy with our projects. How do we make the projects and places approachable for those who live far away? Because of the environmental crisis, this question has become increasingly topical: how do we provide the experiential dimension of art through documentation?

Art politics, the global situation and the climate crisis have forced us to rethink how we practice art and how we feel about the forms it takes around the world. Do we want to be part of the DIY movement, always searching for new spaces, speeding up gentrification, and making it possible for capitalism to benefit from our precarious positions? Do we want to travel to all the mass events and biennials because of habit, to see all the same artworks and artists from city to city, from country to country? Or could we, in our own practice, try to create a more sustainable culture when it comes to making and exhibiting art? And, is colonizing new cities, towns, and locations a sustainable culture? Are we giving or taking when we enter new environments, and does there need to be a balance?

## B. REPOSAARI

Our practice has not only been about urban space. Already in 2011 I fell in love with Reposaaari, a small rural town near Pori. This was when the first seminar was organized by Aalto University in an old environmental research center. I was attracted to its wild wind, beaches, sea, nature, architecture, sea buckthorns, weird histories, and stories. Reposaaari has been a profoundly influential part of our lives and practice. It has provided a site where it has been possible to distance oneself from everything else and fully concentrate on art, research, studying and teaching. It has proven to us the enormous power a location has on determining the meaning of artwork. After witnessing new students work in the area, year after year, it has been exciting to see the same themes, forms, similar approaches emerging again and again. This is what generated the idea of the fourth Pori Biennale, *Not to Sing Like a City Bird Sings* (Jensen, Suvanto and Porin kulttuurisäätiö, 2020).

The 2020 biennial was dissident in multiple ways. First of all, we made the decision to move our exhibition even further away from large masses of people and centers. The Sandstorm exhibition 2019 had proven that it was possible to convince the public to travel, but also that it is possible to mediate a site-specific project, the artworks and the uniqueness of a site, to those who cannot be present. We were ready to prioritize a unique location over one that would be easy to reach, but also to rethink the idea of accessibility: those interested in art would probably familiarize themselves with our projects online, while those living in remote places might not have the opportunity to see contemporary art frequently. However, this does not make them any less relevant an audience. And, it is not only the public for whom the projects are produced but also the creators. Oftentimes the remote, special locations are interesting sites for artists, even if it means that the more typical art audience might not be able to visit in person and in large numbers.

The enjoyment and pleasure gained working in these special locations are aspects of the projects that I have started to value increasingly with every year. In opposition to the sole studio work in front of a computer, it feels magical to feel the sea breeze, to walk in the soft soil of an old forest, to see art emerging on the rocks next to old carvings. To engage all the senses in the experience of making art, to confront visual art or sound art, and simultaneously smell the

pinewoods, feel the sun, get tired because of the bodily exertion that moving from artwork to another requires. To be able to provide an experience of not only the artworks and the ideas but of the places themselves, places one would never usually go to. Remoteness as a resource is a way of thinking that seems to be increasingly popular and is a key element in many of the new rural residencies that are emerging. For example, the residencies I have visited over the past few years; TUO TUO in Joutsa, Finland, Maltfabrikken in Ebeltøft in Denmark, and Stiwdio Maelor in Corris, Wales, are all remote, considering the journey but very much entangled with the contemporary art scene and thinking.

These kinds of artistic practices happen at an intersection of global and local. In my presentation *Global Art in Local Context*, I contended that “local has been kind of a trend the past few years, but my question is if it is just a buzz word for international events and curators, a new land to conquer for organizers, or if the so-called local events are really connected to local environments, agencies, and practices.” (Jensen, 2021b) As an answer to this, I would propose exactly these long-term approaches, like residencies or practices that are rooted to a place. According to Saskia Sassen “Territory, authority, and rights are complex institutionalizations constituted through specific processes and arising out of struggles and competing interests. They are not simply attributes.” (Sassen, 2006, pp. 4–5) Visiting a site for a day or two before starting installation does not provide information about all these complex issues. However, an outside eye can be necessary in order to perceive that which has become invisible for locals. Revisiting a place, like we have done in Reposaaari, and making it available for new experiencing subjects who create new observations and documentations, creates continuity which in turn creates new sentiments and perspectives.

Art can make the value of a place, environment, and nature visible. Finnish ecologist Ilkka Hanski writes about how the images we have of our habitats have great meaning;

...our notion of habitats may differ enormously from what really exists in nature. Our images of habitats have great significance, since the crucial politics related to the future of real habitats is constructed on them. People's notions of the environment may become distorted, or habitats may be forgotten for many reasons. Then there is a risk that they disappear in reality, too. (Hanski, 2009, p. 255)<sup>33</sup>

We don't always need great stories of travel and exotic lands. Often it is enough to direct attention to what is near, with small gestures.

### C. GLOBAL AND LOCAL

I will now consider the notions of local and global before examining them in relation to Reposaari and Pori. The art world, or maybe more precisely, the idea of art as a shared language, is often considered to be global, but this mainly proves how there are problems separating global and western - "global" in this sense often means western art education expanding over the globe, while exhibiting artists from different parts of the world but with similar education. The term globalization, which has been used since 1989 and refers to multiple processes of interconnection and interaction between people, companies, and governments, is entangled with concepts of capitalism and colonialism. All this was very much at the core of discourses in the contemporary art world since the 1990s.

What has been special about Pori is how it turned into a crossroad of global and local, these concepts unfolding multiple times into each other. A smaller town, like Pori, makes it impossible to escape the local and localness. In bigger cities, the local is always mixed with other influences and it means different things in different contexts. A suburb might be local, your neighbor might be local, but the city or its citizens are hardly ever referred to in the same way as smaller boroughs are attributed as local. The local art scene means completely different things depending on which location you are discussing. In Helsinki, it refers to the Finnish art scene, in Pori, it refers to the Pori art scene, and usually only to those artists and agencies who have been there forever and have a permanent location and practice, often created by those living in Pori and taking place in Pori. The degree of exchange and diversity can be considered as one aspect of the local-global formation.

At the same time, Pori has been a precursor when it comes to art and its global currents. As mentioned, the Pori Art Museum has been remarkable when it comes to exhibiting international contemporary art in Finland. Aalto University brought both international students and lecturers to the town. Unfortunately, after the university moved to Otaniemi, and the city's cuts in cultural funding, it is becoming less open to new initiatives. The future of the formerly active interdisciplinary art scene in Pori seems less bright at the moment.

Porin kulttuurisäätiö and Space Invaders have, in every project, combined research questions emerging from global discourse to questions pertaining to local places and communities. During the projects, we have worked closely with local authorities and have been able to create good and functional working relationships with many of them. Especially fruitful was the collaboration during the Sandstorm exhibition where the process was based on knowledge created in already existing environmental projects. Working together was something we both benefited from. We were able to make their work visible and helped them to put their plans into action. In turn, the already existing knowledge and resources, both material and immaterial, helped us produce the project.

With the local art scene in Pori the situation is somewhat different. Even after years of working in Pori we are, I assume, considered outsiders. As we do not have a permanent space but move to a different location every year, and we often work with artists from different regions and countries, our practice perhaps is not seen as local. This not only impacts on how we are accepted, or not accepted, as local actors, but also very concrete things like funding. I believe that everyone agrees that art and culture are good ways of keeping more rural and smaller areas alive, and that different approaches to a certain place are valuable. Unfortunately, the funding system does not support this way of practicing.

One very interesting, but not very successful example of the new kinds of approaches on how to rethink the concepts of local, global, and biennial is by examining the Oslo Biennial. Instead of a “regular” biennial taking place every two years, Oslo Biennial launched an ambitious program extending over a period of five years:

osloBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019-2024 opened on May 25 2019, launching a new biennial model. Its five-year evolving program of art in public space is supported by praxis and infrastructures aimed at fostering and facilitating art practices that engage with the contingency, latency, flux, and vulnerability of public space and the public sphere. In this way, osloBIENNALEN has brought two traditionally distinct art fields together: the biennial and art in public space. (October 2019. *osloBIENNALEN* first edition 2019-2024, 2019)

However, the already large budget was exceeded. The format was experienced as difficult and the local art scene wasn't involved in a way it was earlier promoted. Nordic Art Review *Kunstkritikk* described how “visual artist Ole Jørgen Ness hung several posters describing the biennial as, among other things, a ‘parasite choking the life out of Oslo’s art scene’” in their article about Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk announcing his resignation as curator of the Oslo Biennial (Gabrielsen, 2020). As an experiment the *osloBIENNALEN* was very interesting. Unfortunately, the common problems of mega exhibitions have not been overcome in this case. International artists mostly only visited Oslo shortly before realizing their works, the event remained obscure for the local public, and local actors have, as the *Kunstkritikk* example shows, felt left out, even if involving local practices and knowledge might have been one of the stated goals.

Maybe we are still lacking role models for good practice temporary projects. A good example is the *Skulptur Projekte Münster*, held every ten years since 1977 (Biennial Foundation, 2022b). The project expands the concept of sculpture, spreads to different locations in the city. The event is free for public and, after every exhibition, the city buys some of the works. Even if there is traveling involved, if one wants to go to Münster from abroad, it is not required often as the event only takes place every ten years. To navigate the exhibition, one can rent a bike or walk to see the works in public places. Unlike most large biennials, there are no massive cafes with paper cups and plastic wine glasses, and hardly any merchandise, which today feels fresh and original. Even if the people in Münster did not immediately love the project, it has become a significant part of the city's identity that also has an economic impact. And, unlike most mega exhibitions, the visitors walking and biking around see much more of the city than just the central exhibition venues and museums. This practice has, however, started to change and now many of the events take their public to the many curious and unexpected sites in the city. Biennials in Riga and Istanbul have, for example, spread to many unlikely areas outside of the city center — to islands, to old industrial areas, empty malls, and harbors. Even to places that can be considered unpleasant or unsafe. This was exemplified by a worker who, describing Riboca 2018 (Biennial Foundation, 2022a), advised us not to go to one of the venues, “don't go there, it is a shithole,” she said.



My first meme, with a spelling mistake (the whole word didn't fit the given frame)

This is the first meme I ever made, and I have to say that I am quite proud of it, and how it summarizes the ideas I wanted to present in a paper it is related to (yes, even with a spelling mistake).

For a long time I thought it was self-evident that all meaningful and relevant cultural activities occur in larger cities and centers. Pori and the projects we were able to do there changed my thinking. The particular time also had something to do with it: interest in the local has become a sort of trend. Technology has made it easier to mediate projects for those who cannot make it to where the event happens. This makes it possible to reach those living in different parts of the world. Smaller cities and rural places offer different kinds of possibilities; more space, opportunities to turn inwards instead of outwards, cheaper alternatives when it comes to rent, accommodation, less competition, the possibility of working in peace without being judged and constantly compared. This experience has made me curious about other original initiatives in rural areas, like Marfa, a small desert city known for minimalist art, or Niki de Saint Phalle's sculpture garden in an abandoned quarry.

34 This chapter is partly based on my presentation *Global Art in a Local Context* at the ESA-Arts 11th midterm conference (Online) — THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF ART, parallel session "Presentation and mediation of contemporary art" on Thursday 11th March 2021 (Jensen, 2021b)

However, recently I have started to ponder whether this is not just another version of elitism or exoticism, a repetition of death of the author as the position of the author becomes more accessible to a larger diversity of people. Are we starting to judge the larger shows, biennials, events, the orientation toward the metropolis and art fairs now that flying is cheaper and more accessible for all? When we have already seen all the biennials and capital events? Are the abandoned rural areas the only places left we haven't visited?

Our projects have been motivated by the idea of practice as rooted and local, where it can then act as a platform for global and international art and theory. And, I believe, art today, especially the art of universities, institutions, and academies, is fundamentally global. In contrast to this, local has been a kind of trend over the past few years. My question is whether it is just a buzz word for international events and curators, a new land to conquer for organizers, or if the so-called local events are really connected to local environments, agencies, and practices? Globalization made the world shrink, but in 2020 the pandemic made it larger again. It also made us very much aware of all the borders. Will this change the art world, and does the pandemic change our conception of the "local" and "global" and how do we mediate and exhibit art in the future? How do we maintain the networks created if we do not accidentally meet, when we do not come together in the same rooms during seminars, conferences, symposiums, and events? Where do we find inspiration when the magic of art, experiences, and encounters does not feed our curiosity and imagination?



# DEATH

At the beginning of my research, my hypothesis was that dead and living, or the living and non-living, are the only two absolute concepts – concepts that don't change and move depending on time and place. They are concepts, and phenomenon that cannot be negotiated, and that this is why the undead, zombies, are the ultimate uncanny, precisely because they exceed our understanding of life and death. However, I came to learn that it is far from this simple, that death is not as straightforward as common sense would suggest. There are different phases of death. I once proposed that one cannot be “little bit dead” or “slightly alive.” I came to understand that this is, in fact, possible.<sup>35</sup>

Still, this knowledge does not make it any easier to understand death. This uncanniness is what defines our being. We live towards death, and we carry our future death in our bodies, our aging and dying cells. Trying to solve this, or even just trying to live with this uncanniness, is a feature of human history and culture evident in fables, religions, plays and paintings. Death is the primary question behind all other questions. It is what connects us to the world, what makes us aware of our material position as part of circulating matter. As Barad writes, birth and death are not only the fate of the animate world, but the inanimate too, and living and dying are inseparable, “Particles are born out of the void, go through transformations, die, return to the void, and are reborn, all the while being inseparable from the wild material imaginings of the void.” (Barad, 2017, p. 112) The subject lives towards death. In Heideggerian terminology, subjectivity is based on the idea of “being-toward-death”. The knowledge of the limitedness of our being is constitutive of that very being. This is also the basis of communities: *being-towards-death* is *being-together* and *being-with*. Impending death, and the fact that we cannot feel, understand, see, and communicate our own death, is what we share. Death makes our lives valuable, or at least it

35 The documentary film *Tukdam: A Question Of Life And Death* questions the unsurpassable gap between life and death, “a film about life and death, and where we draw the line between them. We look at such fundamental questions through the focal point of a Tibetan Buddhist tradition of dying that blurs life and death to an unprecedented degree. In what Tibetans call “tukdam”, meditators die in a consciously controlled manner in meditation. Though declared clinically dead, they stay sitting upright in meditation; remarkably, their bodies remain fresh and lifelike, without any signs of decay for days, sometimes weeks after clinical death.” (*Tukdam: A Question Of Life And Death*, 2022)

should do, like Butler has contended in *Frames of War. When Is Life Grievable?* (Butler, 2016)

Our being-together occurs in the context of being-towards-death and is based on the uncanniness of our being here, there is always something that escapes. This is what unites us; an understanding that we are all going to die, while not fully understanding what it means. Death is, even within the context of rationalism and enlightenment, what limits not only our being but also our understanding and at the same time structures it. Our comprehension of the world occurs between the categories of living and dying, and the fact that these states are not possible simultaneously. This is why the zombie, the living dead, is at the bottom of the “uncanny valley.” Uncanny valley is a hypothesis coined by robotics professor Masahiro Mori, expressing the emotional response towards an object and how it changes from empathy to the uncanny depending on object’s human likeness. The zombie represents the least relatable being imaginable. In the *Handling the Undead* (2009) by Jon Ajvide Lindqvist, the moment of the dead coming back to life is also described as a moment when all sense in the world is lost: “Everything is different now. Nothing makes sense. You know? Everything they’ve based all their shit on....pfff! Gone! Death, life. Nothing makes sense.” (Lindqvist, 2009, p. 92) The idea of the returned invalidates everything we know and believe.

Death makes our relationship to time peculiar. It defines it, as we know our time here is limited, but also, we (usually) have no idea how much time we have left. This strange connection with time is also present in the manner in which Dylan Trigg studies death, uncanny, memory and place:

At the heart of our memories of place is the ambivalence of death, which incubates itself as much in the flesh of human body as it does in the flesh of the childhood home. Death alone is the recurring motif of the uncanny, that which forces an unbridgeable abyss between ourselves and the places that detach themselves from our embrace. (Trigg, 2012, pp. 224–225)

We cannot control death, but this does not mean we have not tried. From philosophers to prophets, various scenarios have been created and promises made, and these have been used to control, not only the dead, but also the living.

We have been dreaming about eternal souls to compensate the short-lived, decaying body, and reincarnation, heaven and the eternal divine order that mind-body-dualism has conceptualized into being;

Plato's human/nature dualism has crucial significance for his account of death, which is probably the single most influential feature of his philosophy. Death is the goal of the philosopher because it is the final and most complete attainment of these goals of separation and denial of dependency. It is the ultimate in attainment of distance from the body and the ultimate separation from the entire lower order of nature as the 'world of changes'. It brings at last reconciliation with the eternal divine order to which humans really belong (Plumwood, 2003, pp. 92-93)

We like to believe in endlessness. The promise of eternal life has inspired countless numbers of artists and researchers. Art is expected to defeat death: it is made so that the maker might be remembered and immortalized or to portray those who want to remain within us forever. But we can't beat death, or time, famously presented in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1890), and we can't retain endless numbers of portraits of those who do not want to be forgotten. Carrying capacity, mental and material, of storing pictures of long-dead leaders is limited, and today many of the famous presentations of past leaders have become problematic. This does not mean that art does not handle issues of death and remembrance, quite the opposite. Death is ever present, whatever the theme or the topic of the exhibition claims to be.

Alongside all the various theories and beliefs concerning death, dying is also a biological fact and part of life. Bennet writes that "death is the condition of life, and it is life that can be filled meaning." (Bennett, 2001, p. 84) Instead of setting all hope in an afterlife, the time we spend on earth should be meaningful. Western society has sequestered death from everyday life. The dualistic idea of mind/soul and body created an idea of a split subject, a subject whose soul and spirit, the humanity of the subject, would live forever, but the animal body would die. This animal must be hidden. Death became something that happens where we can't see it, in hospitals and in terrible accidents, an occurrence that happens for the others. Therefore death has become, instead of part of life, a

mythical phenomenon, a philosophical muse, and a spooky unknown. Still, we can't avoid it.

Margaret Atwood calls writing “negotiating with the dead” (Atwood, 2002) and I believe this concerns all art. Art happens in a certain time and space but is always reaching toward both the past and the future. Death, and the *unheimlich*, even if they are fundamental concepts and questions in my thinking, are not things that I often articulate in my artistic practice or discuss with the working group, firstly because they tend to escape articulation and secondly, they already are there, incorporated in everything we do, but not everyone wants to talk about death. Working with the question can open gaps to the regular flow of time, creating new perspectives on places, or on how we are together with other, human, and non-human beings. By working in abandoned locations the intuitive connection is made more visible, paradoxically in a form of disappearance. I believe all art is just different interpretations of the *vanitas* genre and the theme of *memento mori*, signifying the impermanence of life. Or, like one artist stated during a studio visit, that there are artists of life and artists of death, but one can't be both.

In *Francis Bacon – The Logic of Sensation* (2002), Gilles Deleuze writes about Bacon wanting to paint “the scream more than the horror”, and how this scream makes invisible forces, like death, visible. “Life screams at death, but death is no longer this all-too-visible thing that makes us faint; it is this invisible force that life detects, flushes out, and makes visible through the scream. Death is judged from the point of view of life, and not the reverse, as we like to believe.” (Deleuze, 2002, pp. 52–53) Life is the starting point, even if it is determined by death and shadowed by the unknown; “Let us just consider the opening words of Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power*: ‘There is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown.’ We notice that heterogeneity brings with it an ambivalence that can affect the way one conducts oneself in a particular situation”, like theorist Sami Santanen suggests in *Figures of Touch* (Elo and Luoto, 2018, p. 217) In the same publication Harri Laakso considers artworks that “implicate me by making me face the things I cannot escape.” (Elo and Luoto, 2018, p. 209). Art forces us to face what we might not want to face, but it also provides a place for contemplating the unknown, the uncanny, and the incomprehensible, and makes it possible, even if the experience is singular, to approach them together. In my projects, instead of straightforwardly articulating “death” or un-

canny” as a topic, they are present in a form of fragility. Accepting this fragility as essential, maybe even celebrating it in our being, in our work and in our lives. Part of our entangled life is how our lives are entangled with death, how we are part of the matter that circulates and takes different forms.

## A. LIFE CYCLE

In biology life cycle refers to the different stages of life and to the series of changes an organism undergoes, often ending in the generation of offspring. “For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” is a phrase often used in funerals. The phrase is surprisingly material, though has a cartesian tone. That is, your spirit may be taken to heavens, but your body is going to decompose and become the soil.

In *Saatanan kesänäyttely/The Bloody Summer Exhibition* (Porin kulttuurisäätiö et al., 2016), the artist Erno-Erik Raitanen made a site-specific, three-dimensional homage to Hugo Simberg's famous painting *The Garden of Death* (1896). In the painting, the figure of death, instead of portrayed as gloomy and frightening, is presented with warmth, in the garden carefully and lovingly tending to strange plants. *The Garden of Death at Bloody Summer Exhibition* was installed in an old generator room built in the same era as the original painting. With its large windows, high ceilings and the old machinery the room had an otherworldly atmosphere, especially evident once Raitanen filled it with wooden planting boxes. The plants were mostly saved from the trash, half-dead herbs from supermarket dumpsters, garden plants from compost. Raitanen describes the process, "Some will die. Some of them will survive, some of them had no change in the beginning." (Raitanen, 2016)

Our death is not only a singular event, it ends what is occurring between a subject and the other. It is an end to responding, an end to the thinking and speaking subject. This finality of the speaking subject through death is supposedly what makes human death different from other endings in life. As Derrida writes about Levinas, “Death is not for him, in the first instance, a passage from being to nothingness, an annihilation, but, as he often says, the moment when the other no longer responds.” (Derrida, 2008, p. 111).

## B. FRIENDSHIP AND DEATH

Encountering the one thousand guises of loss in the work of mourning stays the slide toward zero. The lost other is literally composed of desire. And this loving desire, infinite though it may be, brings us face to face with loss. As a certain controversial French philosopher once put it, between the two of us, we know that one will die first, 'one of us two will see himself no longer seeing the other.' The inflection is always on the impact the possibility of death makes on one's self-image. The essence of mourning is that we will one day have to say good-bye, adieu, à Dieu, to let our beloved go to God. (*The Hamlet Doctrine* 2013, 136)

We might die alone, but our dying is not a private matter. There is no life recognized as life without grievability, which means there is no death without grieving, mourning and saying good-bye. Mourning is connected to love, and love requires being named and naming. As Derrida himself writes;

A foreshadowing of mourning because it seems to me that every case of naming involves announcing a death to come in the surviving of a ghost, the longevity of a name that survives whoever carries that name. Whoever receives a name feels mortal or dying, precisely because the name seeks to save him, to call him and thus assure his survival. Being called, hearing oneself being named, receiving a name for the first time involves something like the knowledge of being mortal and even the feeling that one is dying. To have already died of being promised to death: dying. (2008, 20)

Death is radically impossible to grasp, but the death-of-the other, death of a friend, makes it considerable. The fact that all of us will die is inescapable. Confronting the death of a friend is reckoning with the temporality of our being. Because our being is shared, so is our death. But resemblance and recognition are not the same as seeing oneself in the other. Jean-Luc Nancy writes that the origin of community is “nothing other than the limit: the origin is the tracing of the borders upon which or along which singular beings are exposed.” (Nancy, 1991, p. 33) Death traces limits, it creates communities, and it creates us as singular beings.



Death in Ebeltoft, 2020

The above image portrays a dead seal from Ebeltoft, Denmark. It is gross and brutal, but also striking and sad. I have always wanted to see seals, but this was not the way I hoped to first encounter the creature. At the residency in Ebeltoft, I spent time exploring the beach and posted my findings on Instagram. Instagram marked this post as “sensitive content.” This response from Instagram says a great deal about how death is culturally handled, or more accurately, how it isn’t. We want to pretend like death doesn’t exist. Like it is not part of the everyday. It is disguised and concealed, just like my picture on Instagram. We need to make a conscious decision if we want to see it. Still, it is the temporality of our being that makes our lives meaningful. Death is not something we can escape. Our relation to death is the longest relationship in our lives, it is different during different ages and periods, but it is the one thing that remains. This is why I believe it should be nurtured.

# DE- COLONIALIZATION

We cannot control our own death, but humankind has a long history of believing it has the right to control the life and death of others. Already in the mid-1800s, Schelling stated that “It is as if the higher and freer development of the European nations becomes deadly for all other nations.” (Schelling, 2007, p. 71) Regarding this still timely notion, it is even more surprising how the western world is still struggling with both understanding and admitting its colonial past and its effects, furthermore, how to utilize decolonizing practices. These are major questions within the field of arts. How to reconsider the canon and collections built on the colonial heritage, and how to change the “story” of modern art, as Maura Reilly calls it:

Barr's (MoMA's 'story' of modern art has achieved iconic status, one that other museum collections have sought to mimic. It is a story that forms the basis of most art-history textbooks and curricula in the West – and it has become so deeply entrenched and naturalized that it exists, largely unquestioned, as *the* history of modern art.” (Reilly, 2018, p. 14)

Not surprisingly, this history includes the male “genius” from Europe and the USA, while women, artists of color, and those outside Europe or North America are excluded. While neutralizing this, the body is excluded. Like artist Grada Kilomba states, “In academia there’s a long old colonial tradition of creating an object that you observe from a distance. You describe, classify and speak about it. You are supposed to be a disembodied theorist and artist. That’s why, when we enter these spaces, we only have heads without bodies...” (Cotter, 2019, p. 380)

Nonetheless, minor changes have been made. In 2017 the curators of MoMA made a decision to replace a number of works in the permanent collec-



tion with works by artists from Muslim-majority nations to increase inclusivity in the permanent collection: “The addition ruptured MoMA’s traditional narrative of Western Modernism, broadening the geographical and cultural scope, as well as the political implications, of its collection galleries.” (Reilly 2018, 14) Even of this positive development, Reilly is critical:

How long will this tokenistic infiltration into the permanent galleries last? And why has this never been done for women artists or artists of color, who are woefully under-represented in these same spaces? Instead of monologue of sameness, why not a presentation of Modernism as multi-vocal, global, diachronic? (Reilly, 2018, p. 15)

However, in art institutions the discourse ongoing, which is more than in many other institutions.<sup>36</sup>

#### 6. *past continuous tense*

The demand for nutmeg increased with raised production of the print press and converged with the exploration, trade, and colonizing endeavors by countries like Spain, Portugal, England, and The

<sup>36</sup> At times, I am invited as an expert when media or institutions aim to discuss or increase diversity. Because it is something I find important, I am happy and thankful for this. It is not, however, so simple. Decolonizing practices go hand in hand with intersectional feminism. Both stress the idea of visibility: who is seen, who is presented, who is given space? Am I, as white, European, able-bodied person legitimated to take the space? Is there someone more fitting, who deserves it more, who would be a better representative? On the other hand, if I am invited to talk about things I know and I am passionate about, then why risk not using this platform. Those invited to substitute me might not be better in representing or increasing diversity, they might be even worse options, as institutions are not always good at considering questions of representation, especially in Finland where the discourse has hardly yet started. But most importantly, and this is what I learned in the Feminist party, we cannot expect people from marginalized positions to take the responsibility for answering these questions and be full-time representatives. Activist and political groups have already woken up to the fact that there is an increased risk of burn-out for those who are always expected to be on top of their activism to present their color, gender, sexuality, and while doing so, educate their allies. Instead of expecting someone to do the work for me, I have decided to try my best to be as good a representative as I can, to keep learning, to be able to tolerate the fact that I make mistakes and try to do better next time. Diversity is not a single thing, neither a simple key to better futures. It always escapes, changes its form, as the more we learn the more we know, the more diversity we expect, the more different ways of being are recognized. The colonizing tradition in the Western world is deeply rooted and its consequences impact the way we see and perceive the world around us.

Netherlands. Nutmegs trees, just like clove trees, naturally grow on the Banda Islands, an Archipelago in the East of Indonesia, part of the province of the Moluccas. On Wikipedia, I read that the exclusive presence of nutmeg and clove on these islands, also known as the 'spice islands', sparked the European colonial interest. The Dutch fought off the Portuguese and English that were actively trading and claimed ownership of all the production and trade on the Banda Islands. After repeatedly failed attempts to agree with the locals on the exclusivity of trade with the 'Dutch East India Company', over 90% of the local population was murdered and replaced with migrants from Java, Papua, and dissidents from other Indonesian Islands, to keep up the production. The 'Dutch East India Company' ran many tradeposts in the Global South and created an incredible revenue. Many cities in Holland were built with the resources from this colonial endeavor that found its heydays in the 17th century. (van der Loo, 2020)

In the 2020 ViCCA Production<sup>37</sup> course, Marjolein van der Loo presented her curatorial research where she approached the question of colonization using nutmeg as a center figure. Tethering this huge theme to a small, unambiguous object rendered the overwhelming topic approachable. The familiar smell and feel of nutmeg connected us as listeners to the narrative. Later, this presentation evolved into a video work, also exhibited in the 2021 *Evergreen Inner Jungle* (Porin kulttuurisäätiö, 2021). Van der Loo's work explored how our everyday lives are entangled with the colonial past, and how that past is not at all relegated to history but something that continues into the present. *The Evergreen Inner Jungle* exhibition took place in Kaisaniemi Botanical Garden and studied how this entangled nature of our being is often structurally hidden, in some places and institutions more than in others. The exhibition explored:

<sup>37</sup> "ViCCA Production was an Aalto University course led by Andrea Coyotzi Borja and Anna Jensen from 2019 to 2021, addressing the idea that artistic research requires experimenting with how the research is performed to a public. Performance here is not synonymous with 'performance art' as such, rather it denotes the performative aspects of presenting one's research. The course facilitates discussions and presentations around this important dimension of artistic practice." (Coyotzi Borja & Jensen, 2019-2021)

...the phenomena of exhibiting foreign plantations in a museum-like setting that has become a convention of its own. In fact, instead of presenting the current situation of the distant environments the botanical gardens globally all resemble each other. They have become representations of Botanical Gardens, exotic and dreamy-like atmospheric places with scientific purposes while also carrying colonial weight, positioned in an intersection of research, environmentalism, leisure and utilising faraway vegetation. (Porin kulttuurisäätiö, 2021)

Van der Loo's thesis, *The Vegetal Curator* (2021), "looks at plants as agents of decoloniality through curatorial and pedagogical processes." (2021, 3) Plants are attributed an active role in coloniality and van der Loo explores the potential of plants as possible agents in decolonial processes in addition to how the curatorial process might be inspired by plants. (2021, 3) The thesis investigates how monocultures caused by colonizers depleted biodiversity and soils, how local ecologies were changed and how this is still an ongoing practice in rain forests destroyed in favor of producing soy and palm oil. Van der Loo states that "To deconstruct and move away from colonialism and apply other perspectives of being in the world than the Western European hegemony, we need to learn to recognize the violence of modernity/coloniality." (2021, 22) Van der Loo also looks at the history of botanical gardens, and how this history is often linked to the image of lost paradise pictured by artists;

Plants and art have carried ideas of modern/colonial imaginations. Botanical research was, in part, a result of orientalism and the Western imagination of an idealized landscape. Early botanical gardens often aimed to recreate the Garden of Eden, a paradise that was the home to the Christian male (Adam) but was lost by the greed and selfishness of the woman (Eve). Green and tropical landscapes full of flowers of this lost paradise narrative have been pictured into familiar images by artists. (2021, 75)

Botanical gardens are historically and scientifically informative, in addition to being lovely and soothing places to visit. Even if one could rightfully ask if there would be any need for conservation work without colonialism, our idea was

not to deny the importance of the research done in the context of botanical gardens or the conservation work but rather explore the experience of being enchanted by the atmosphere while also taking a look at the uncanny tradition of the gardens. Like Naomie Gramlich and Lydia Kray write in their essay “(Post-)Colonialism and the Botanical Gardens at Potsdam”, “Understanding botanical gardens as colonial sites seems particularly difficult: their plant inhabitants present themselves as too innocent, too splendid and too lively to be associated with colonial violence, *white* appropriation and hegemonic systems of knowledge production.” (Gramlich and Kray, 2020) Artist Anna-Sofia Sysser’s performative lecture formed part of the exhibition and was related to her research about artificial tropical and tropicalism.<sup>38</sup> Even if Sysser collaborated with the garden before, some of the personnel were offended by the lecture and the juxtaposition of botanical gardens with tropical leisure attractions. They were eager to emphasize the importance of the research. It almost seemed like they wanted to ignore the popularity of botanical gardens as places to visit and also their role as a public museum that has obligations when it comes to serve visitors.

Many museums and institutions are built on collections and archives based on pillaging the material culture of other countries. The beauty that the western public comes to witness in museums is often the result of the oppression of the other, be it a looted painting an exotic treasure from a colonized country. How museums deal with this discourse today differs. Some are still in denial about their colonial past, some are trying to reconsider their collections and past with repatriation projects and practices. Even if the awareness of violent colonial histories has forced institutions to reconsider their archives and collections, colonialism is not something that can be easily relegated to the

38 “In exploring the sites I analyze how the tropical is constructed through imagery and experience. The sites simulate and present the tropics through nature and vacationing. Warm indoor worlds offer aesthetic experiences and a break from the everyday and outdoor reality. I ponder on the meanings Finnish tropical gathers within destinations and its reflections on our culture. Theoretically I apply the concept of tropicality. It depicts a centuries-old western view of tropical as an environmental other to temperate. Cultures, inhabitants and landscapes are diverse in the tropics, still the tropical is often portrayed stereotypically. Historical, colonial conceptions echo in contemporary representations. The thematics connect to colonialism and environmental crises and reflects our complex times. Through artificial tropical and tropicality one can ponder human-nature relations and nature’s representations. Ultimately this addresses western, consuming lifestyles. It is essential to reconsider our relations to the tropics, expand our cultural frame, approach global dependencies, and strengthen diversity.” (Sysser, 2021)

past. Hanni Kamaly wrote about “The Colonial Entanglements in Swedish Art History” in *Paletten Magazine* (#318 – 2019) pointing out that what we have considered as the past exists as remnants in the contemporary;

Art is entangled with colonial subjugation and racism. Racism is ‘only one element of a vaster whole: that of the systematized oppression of people’. Its images are historically situated, proponents of ideologies of objectification and exoticism, implicated in processes of dehumanization. Recent art criticism, however, perceives a ‘forced’ political agenda in art and art curation, indicating a yearning for the ‘apolitical’ in opposition to ‘discursive turn’. Clinging to an ideal of art that is in and of itself ‘free’ from politics, history and the complexities this entails, is a desperate move into the direction of self-denial – an ahistorical view of one’s taste, desires and thinking. This is nothing but a romantic believe. (Kamaly, 2019, p. 28)

Val Plumwood writes: “To shake the conceptual foundations of these systems of domination we must unmask more fully the identity of the master hidden behind the neutral guise of the human and of the ideals of rationality” (Plumwood, 2003, p. 68) With the image of the hidden master she manages to show how the rational ideas of objectivity and neutrality have managed to hide the hierarchical structures behind conceptual systems. Art is a way of shaking these systems, and while showing what has been, it can also imagine what can be and what should have been. Curator Lisa Rosendahl handles this in the context of curatorial practices and polyvocal biennials:

Perhaps it is a form of epistemological disobedience to attempt to dissolve the boundaries between the past and the present, as between story and history.<sup>39</sup> An art exhibition is in some ways an inversion of a historical museum display. Rather than being under pressure to adhere to the official narrative of what verified facts tell us about what has been, art and curatorial practice allow for the crit-

39 In the original text Rosendahl refers to Walter Dignolo’s ideas of decolonial thinking as epistemological disobedience and European models of knowledge as part of the colonial matrix in *OnCurating Issues* 35, December 2017

ical possibility of also imagining what should have been, could have been, or might still be. The polyvocal and dispersed biennial form can spread multifactored story across a whole city, allowing for encounters with a particular issue from many different perspectives and in many different context. (Rosendahl, Lisa, 2022, p. 41)

It is not only biennials and contemporary art projects that allow us to discuss public space in the light of the colonial past. If it wasn't obvious before, in 2020 the Black Lives Matter movement and the ensuing protests lead to the recognition of many public monuments having a colonial past. This led to the destruction of many monuments and statues. The interface of monuments, public place, democracy, nostalgia, and colonization is complex. The essay "The Power of Nostalgia" (2016) investigates the intersection of nostalgia and colonialization in the East European context;

Democratic space that has been established out of forgery and theft can only decrease, as any forgery and theft means violent occupation of space. Aesthetics and nostalgia have depoliticizing power in this space – it is the power that expropriates the meaning of an artwork and reduces it to an empty tin can. (Rander, 2016)

The demand to remove statues that occupy public space while celebrating and glorifying people responsible for indescribable horrors, is rightful and deserved. There is no need to give space to those figures whose power is based on slavery and the destruction of indigenous cultures. The decisions should not be made based on nostalgia or just habit – the idea that the statue has always been there, so why remove it now – but also, humans tend to have a short memory span and if everything reminiscent of the past is removed, do we risk repeating its horrors?

In 2010 an important piece of art was destroyed in the house of Slovenian parliament – it was the fresco, made by Slavko Pengov in 1958, which depicted the genesis of Slovenian nation and portrayed its key-figures. The renovation works of the parliament house included lowering of the ceiling – this happened to cut off the upper part

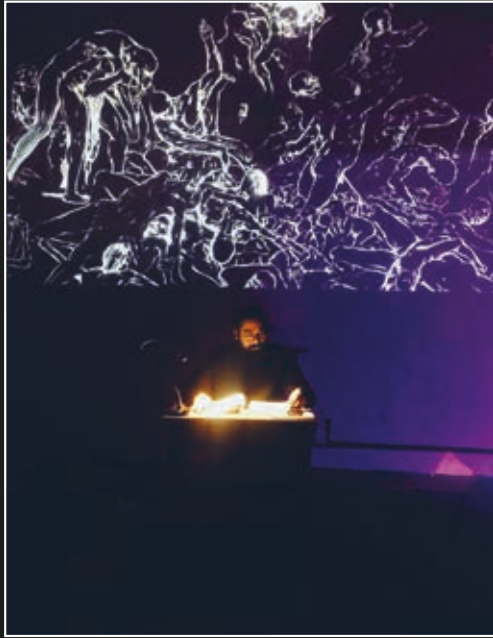
of the fresco and basically decapitated the Slovenian nation with all their important figures. Someone had justified the destruction with the argument that only 2% of the piece was removed. In 2013 the installation “Off With Their Heads!” was made by Slovenian artists Matija Plevnik and Kaja Avberšek – it was based on the reproduction of the space with the fresco. The entrances to this space were made so low, that one could enter only by a bow or without having a head on shoulders. The installation was followed by Mladen Dolar’s essay *Whose is the Head of the People* that discussed over guillotine as the foundation of democracy. As he wrote, the totalitarian regime of Yugoslavia had acted in a traditional manner by hiring the church fresco painter Slavko Pengov to continue his work in a different field. But the contemporary political regime uses a quite different approach that is comparable with a surgical blade – this performs a barely noticeable miniature lobotomy in the name of rationalization that slowly crushes our heads; we are being told that there is no need to worry for our 2% as we still have the other 98%, but they continue to take it from us at every step, presumably for our own welfare and the common. (Rander, 2016, p. 4)

In this picture artist Ali Akbar Mehta is performing *Narrating War* (Mehta, 2018) in *Experimental Event VI – La Torre de Babel* (curated by Anna Jensen, Andrea Coyotzi Borja and Sanna Ritvanen) in 2018. The artist describes the performance *Narrating War* as:

an invitation to imagine a relationship between the ‘known’ and the ‘unknown’ of our collective human history. It is an ongoing series of performance readings of a comprehensive list of ‘wars, battles, sacks, sieges, revolts, revolutions, bombings and insurgencies – from 3000 BC to the present’ that provides a comprehensive tableau of a history of human beings as a continuous history of violence and conflict. (Mehta, 2018)

The performance is not explicitly about decolonization. However, by presenting both historical and current conflicts, the spectator comes to understand the repercussions of violently drawn borders. Mehta’s work shows how colonization still influences the contemporary world, the multiple intersectional actions it has and the much-needed dismantling of structures based on colonialism. It can present stories that make the question easier to approach for those who consider colonization as a distant phenomenon. Finland has a long tradition of simultaneously being a multicultural country with a long history of discrimination and being totally blind to this colonial past perpetuating the naive belief that what has happened in other parts of the world has nothing to do with us. This blindness has gradually been questioned in art, with a variety of acts and discourses. In a global world, the position of innocent bystanders is not possible. Works like Ali Akbar Mehta’s reading engages its spectators and positions them as part of a world built on colonization, not as objective observers of it.





Ali Akbar Mehta: *Narrating War*,  
Experimental Event VI 2018

# DE- CONSTRUCTION

Like problematic historical monuments – that I suggest should rather remain, perhaps as deconstructed elements, or supplemented with explanatory texts – Derrida suggests that history itself is a problem and should be preserved as such;

For at the heart of this history there is something of an abyss (il y a de l'abîme), an abyss that resists totalizing summary. History can't be emptied and closed down, it must remain open as a wound: History can be neither a decidable object nor a totality capable of being mastered, precisely because it is tied to responsibility, to faith and to the gift. (Derrida, 1999, pp. 6–7)

When I name deconstruction as my method and one of the key concepts in my practice and my research, what do I mean by this? Literally, de-constructing, dismantling elements and putting them back together in a different order. Even in a white cube or by a blank piece of paper we never start from nothing. The idea of constructing something completely new in a void is absurd. “Every innovation results from a new interpretation, a new contextualization or decontextualization of a cultural attitude or act.” (Groys, 2014, p. 57) Constructing is always reconstructing, but to deconstruct is to knowingly remake it differently, being aware of the structures and power relations, and aiming to change what is not working. And, perhaps most importantly, considering the uncanniness of our being, deconstruction is about questioning the ontological, essential basis of meaning, to question the rationalistic idea of certainty. There is no certainty.

As an artistic method, deconstruction can be observed in the context of conceptual art. Writer and cultural critic Olivia Laing writes about the *Still and*

*Chew* event by John Latham. In August 1966 Latham invited participants to select a page from Clement Greenberg's *Art and Culture*, chew it to a pulp, and spit the "distillation" into a flask, in which Latham brewed it with acid, sodium bicarbonate and yeast. Latham's distillation was one of the first acts of British conceptual art, and it serves to encapsulate its early mood and moores, the way it turned deconstruction, even destructiveness into a creative force. (Laing, 2021, p. 186)

Deconstructing is, rather than about some innate origin or truth, about creating new possible meanings and interpretations in existing contexts. While doing so it can also change the framework and the context while admitting that the outcome or the new interpretations can never be fully controlled. As a creative method it can function more like a question than an answer, search for "outer limits". According to Laing, the early conceptual artists wanted to "expand the definition of art, to blow the bloody doors off the venerable white cube of the gallery. Impure and fluid, worldly and engaged, in many ways conceptual art was a philosophical quest: a search for a vanishing point, for the outer limits of what might constitute a work of art." (Laing, 2021, p. 186) Instead of handing out new, better truths, deconstruction questions the concept of a natural origin, because many oppressive, normalizing practices in societies are based on ideas of pure origin, this is what makes it an important and useful tool. Deconstruction demands accepting differences. It requires understanding, or emphasizing, that our worlds are different. We experience them differently and they are given to us in different forms. Art can be a place to not only explore these differences but to come together within these different worlds. Something different from your world and mine, and hence a place for more equal encounters.

Art can be seen as already deconstructing existing pieces of worlds, experiences and knowledge. In our practice, we have taken a closer look at the art world and its functions. From this perspective, we have widened the question to concern societal structures in general. Instead of playing by the rules of the art world, we have played with them, and sometimes against them. This, I believe, has partly been possible because of where our practice started. Not working in the expected center (in Finland this would be Helsinki, and all the "distant places" the "distant" meaning the distance to Helsinki region, even if there are, of course, lively art scenes in other places too) of the artworld means being able to work outside of the gaze of the public eye and gives us more freedom to develop

our practice and thinking. Instead of being at the center of attention, evaluation, and almost inevitably, judgement, we have been able to grow and slowly increase publicity. This can already be seen as a way to deconstruct expectations of a practice that is not merely local: How to develop a practice while working in geographical and, considering our research-oriented approach, maybe also mental margins?

Throughout the years of doing projects with Porin kulttuurisäätiö and Space Invaders we have often taken a well-known phenomenon as a starting point and deconstructed its meaning, revisited the idea, or given it a material form. These approaches can encourage deeper consideration of what we have at hand. In *Pori World Expo*, instead of thinking about nations and societies being presented as the “world”, we wanted to focus on the element of becoming-world, how worlds emerge. In the first *Pori Biennial* we wanted to dismantle the concept of a biennial and gather the elemental pieces of creating one, so that in the future we could also rethink how a biennial could be organized so that it might better serve and reflect the contemporary situation. In *Space Invaders IV – Heterotopia* we revisited Foucault’s concept of heterotopia turning it from a literal into a spatial experience. In my dissertation, I am using the form of the encyclopedia, originally understood as a summary of knowledge and information, to explore non-knowledge, the impossibility of organization and taxonomy, and the mediation of knowledges, experiences and feelings. This situated knowledge is related to politics of memory, to historical consciousness and to responsibilities of a curator, as Joanna Warsza proposes, quoting Donna Haraway’s notions of “situated knowledges”: “the perception of any situation is always a matter of an embodied, located subject as well as geographical, political, ideological perspective that is constantly reconstructed by circumstance.” (Rosendahl and Warsza, 2022, p. 89)

#### **A. DECONSTRUCTING DICHOTOMIES: NATURAL/ARTIFICIAL, NEW/OLD**

Deconstruction can be used as a tool to study and question hierarchical categories, such as natural, unnatural, and artificial, and make their constructed nature visible. Gender is one of these categories that is well established as epistemic/ontological and built by gestures and repetition. Judith Butler ap-

proached this question in their groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble* (1990), already in the introduction posing questions of gender as “natural fact”: “Does being female constitute a “natural fact” or a cultural performance, or is “naturalness” constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?” (Butler, 1990) These hierarchical categories are a result of the dualism that Val Plumwood observes in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (2003);

In terms of human nature dualism, this means the boundaries become starkly polarised, appearing as divisions between the whole human and whole mental (cultural) sphere on the one side, and the whole sphere of nature and the body as machine on the other. In the Cartesian and later humanist revolution, the boundaries are redrawn in both the human and the mental area so as to eliminate or submerge the earlier complicating divisions within the category of humans and the category of the soul, to give unified human/nature and mind/body dualisms. (Plumwood, 2003, p. 106)

Plumwood presents a post-humanist re-consideration of many of the concepts and boundaries that have been established as “natural”;

A deeper resolution of mind/body and associated mind/nature dualisms involves finding a non-reductionist basis for recognizing continuity and reclaiming the ground of overlap between nature, the body and the human. Breaking down the dualism must involve remaking the relationship so as to remove the features of denied dependency... A deeper resolution of these dualisms would involve extending concepts of autonomy, agency and creativity to those who have been denied them under the Cartesian division of the world, thus extending the challenge to dualism to include subject/object dualism. Undoing the mind/body and mind/nature dualisms also involves problematising the rigidity of the boundaries, and especially polarised conceptions of identity obtained through exclusion. Postmodern philosophy is beginning to discover the body in the mind, the mind in the animal, the body as the site of cultural inscription, nature as creative

other. We need not and should not follow reductionist positions in denying difference, in denying that the psychological or intentional is an irreducible mode or level of discourse different from the physical. But we can conceive mind as more bodily and body as more mindlike, and we can also conceive their relationship in friendlier and more co-operative terms.” (Plumwood, 2003, pp. 123–124)

Instead of distinctions, nature’s heterogeneity creates continuity. Humans and non-human animals share capacities, from awareness to learning to emotions. The distinction between living and non-living matter is far from simple. “Life in active dialogue with earth others is exhilarating and many dimensional”, as she states. (Plumwood, 2003, p. 139)

Butler’s approach to the question of gender is related to Plumwood’s. Instead of a natural fact, gender is an issue of borders, naturalization, hierarchical dualisms and social structures. Because of its nature, gender can also be de-constructed. Butler’s contention is that gender is, instead of a biological fact, a culturally constructed set of gestures and imitations. Gender is performed, not an objective natural thing (Butler, 1990). How identities are culturally constructed and naturalized goes beyond the concept of gender. These hierarchical structures should be kept in mind when working on art projects in different neighborhoods with different groups. The artworld is not free from the naturalized assumptions and expectations. Language itself is a par excellence example of how things are constructed and maintained, as both Derrida and Butler have argued. Like language, art can maintain and construct, but also deconstruct: art creates possibilities for reshaping constructions and redrawing borders. In *Reclaiming Artistic Research* (2019) Katarina Zdjelar talks about this potential and how she is interested in “the potentiality of bodies, in their ability to demonstrate another reality. I am interested in how even the slightest movement, the most intimate tensing of one’s body, might serve as evidence of implicit ideology. Art can pay attention to these apparent details.” (Cotter, 2019, p. 343) Deconstruction does not always need to entail major changes or radical turns. Rather, it can begin with small shifts and tiny gestures.



Eliisa in Autotalo,  
the *Space Invaders II – Revolution* venue, 2014

This picture of Eliisa was taken in Autotalo, a building where the second *Space Invaders* (Jensen and Suvanto, 2014) was organized. Before starting installation of the exhibition we were visiting the venue and we got slightly worried. The text above the image, introduces my co-curator Eliisa Suvanto standing under a massive hole in the ceiling. The text states, “The tension condenses: which one will be the first to collapse, the organizers or the venue.” Even if this was not the main space for the exhibition we needed to evaluate risks and consider safety. What has this concern for safety got to do with deconstruction? In my practice the act of deconstructing takes multiple forms, from examination of meanings to very concrete acts which involve breaking something down and reconsidering what already exists. Working in spaces like Autotalo which was already breaking down and scheduled for demolition, has metaphorical overtones. It also directs attention to structures and

societal functions. Why are some places considered more valuable than others? Why wasn't this building, that was used as artist's studios and for art school purposes, saved? Today in 2020, it still stands empty, waiting for final demolition. The place becomes a visible and concrete form of the concept. How is the space perceived and understood and how much is this understanding culturally constructed? The experience of the space is never the same for different people and the orientation towards spaces and places can be hierarchical: those making decisions about them are often not the same group as those who are using the spaces. These same questions concern the art world and its conventions that Porin kulttuurisäätiö has been studying: what kind of power relations have created biennials and summer shows? What kinds of meanings do they have for different agencies?



# DIFFERENCE

According to Heidegger, the concept of “being” is already attached to the concept of “difference”, the concept of “being” is indefinable: “This conclusion was drawn from its highest universality. And correctly so – *if definition fit per genus proximum et differentiam specificam*” (if “definition is achieved through the proximate genus and the specific difference.”) (Heidegger, 2010, p. 4) Observing the idea of symbiotic life on a symbiotic planet, Lynn Margulis suggests that “living beings defy neat definition” (Margulis, 1998, p. 9) According to Margulis, everything on this planet has evolved from the same elements and the same explosions: “As the material stuff from which all living bodies are made, we have in another sense been around since the origin of the universe. The matter in the bodies of all life-forms, including, of course, mammals like us, can be traced to the carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, and other elements that were made in the supernova explosions of stars.” (Margulis, 1998, p. 72) The material approach to being and difference is also present in how Bataille considers the question of individual existence. He explores the unity of being in the context of matter and form, coming to the conclusion that the distinction is illogical: “If one thinks of particular object, it is easy to distinguish matter from form, and an analogous distinction can be made with regard to organic beings, with form taking the value of the unity of being and of its individual existence. But if things as a whole are taken into account, transposed distinctions of this kind become arbitrary and even unintelligible.” (Bataille, 1985, p. 45)

What then is difference and is it needed?

Respect for others involves acknowledging their distinctness and difference, and not trying to reduce or assimilate them to the human sphere. We need to acknowledge difference as well as continuity to overcome dualism and to establish non-instrumentalising relationships with nature, where both connection and otherness are the basis

of interaction. The failure to affirm difference is characteristic of the colonising self which denies the other through the attempt to incorporate it into the empire of the self, and which is unable to experience sameness without erasing difference. (Plumwood, 2003, p. 174)

While acknowledging and respecting difference is necessary, as Plumwood points out, oppression and discrimination is also based on the idea of difference, the other not being the same as me, and therefore not as valuable as myself. The difference is naturalized, which in turn affects power relations, social structures, and produces hierarchical thinking. Plumwood's suggestion of continuity, understanding the entangled and networked nature of being, is a way to reconsider hierarchical structures and dualistic thinking. Derrida, in his text *Plato's Pharmacy*, presents *pharmakon* as "difference of the difference" – *pharmakon*, that can be both a remedy and a poison. According to Derrida, "the movement, the locus, and the play: (the production of) difference. It is the difference of difference. It holds in reserve, in its undecided shadow and vigil, the opposites and the differents that the process of discrimination will come to carve out." (Derrida, 1981, p. 443) When considering difference, one should keep in mind that the theoretical, abstract concept of difference is not the same as the embodied difference related to subject positions, laws, structures, and power relations. As Sara Ahmed writes: "I would suggest that this term cannot be contained by a demand for theoretical purity, as it entails the pragmatic and inexhaustible meeting of the ethical demands and conflicts that saturate daily life and inform the embodiment of the social subject." (Ahmed, 2004, p. 51) If the concept of difference is inseparable from power structures and relations, it can also be observed by shaking and disrupting these structures. When disturbing the everyday flow and understanding of a city, for example, attention can be focused on how different places and spaces are serving different subjectivities, how some are included and some excluded based on norms and expectations.

Difference and de-colonization are related to the slow and difficult project of unlearning universalism. That is, to figuring out a world outside of the western hegemony. This hegemony is maintained with the idea of a controllable and organizable world, a world based on the idea of sameness, a sameness that we recognize, understand and grieve. Difference is disturbing, and if it is different enough, it is not recognized.

Since the second edition of *Space Invaders* project, artist Andrea Coyotzi Borja has continued her series of video works exploring the uncanniness of space and the experience of difference. Each one of the videos presents the space where the exhibition takes place that year. The installation itself is often somewhat indistinguishable from the space: a tv monitor in the corner or a monitor left on a kitchen level. In the video, the location itself is combined with background music and with some unexpected happening. In an almost unnoticeable action, Coyotzi Borja shakes the sense of stability by showing us alternative options that could be happening outside the windows here and now. Instead of the calm suburban neighborhood, there could be flames. There could be waves. We want to believe that the world around us is the same as when we left it on entering the exhibition, but it never is. The world has changed and the experience has changed, the subject experiencing has changed. You see and experience the space around you and you see the same space on the screen, you are here, and you are there, but then the eerie feeling of something not being right hits you. First it is the music, almost like a lullaby, but it is not calming or soothing, quite the opposite. You look out the window, you see that everything is “normal”, but the window in the video opens to an alternative reality, where the buildings are collapsing, and the fire is getting closer.

*Grammar has failed existence.*

*We are no longer subjects of a definition.*

*Time stops at the feet of language.*

*Being is a refusal addressed to the other in the recognition of the self.*

*The ones who can, walk upon their two feet. But it's no longer the act of walking, but the privilege to stand. To state an upright consideration towards recognition. Within the best intended wishes for visibility.*

*Future is not a reality, but a promise disguised as a possibility.*

*We are a blunt of the 'possible' that mesmerizes the perspectives of being. And yet we find a way to fade away things.*

*You are forgotten; yet, still existing.*

*(Coyotzi Borja, 2017)*

What is especially striking in Coyotzi Borja's work is how difference is approached as a spatial experience rather than something essentially individual. Instead of problematizing how human differences are presented and how the spectator deals with their expectations and assumptions towards other beings, the series of works presents the viewer with the sense of difference itself, there is no leaning on the other. It must be faced alone, as a personal experience of failed expectations when the expected sameness disappears. The video presents us with a space that we know, yet immediately do not recognize. It is like all the spaces we know, a generally familiar space. We are comfortable with the feeling of familiarity, the coherence. Then we spot the sameness; it is the exact space we are in at the very right moment. This recognition is pleasing, like solving a puzzle, "now I see it", but it also shakes the stability of our experience. How can the space be at once there and here, how come I be in it and not be in it? Then there is the music that transports you to a different, cinematic narrative. You almost know that something is going to happen even if you do not yet know what it is. When you realize that something is about to take place, you fall into this gap between sameness and difference, between known and unknown, your sense of the material reality and solidity is disrupted. The discontinuity of the experience makes the continuity of the everyday visible.



Andrea Coytozi Borja: *The self conscious state of deceit* (2016),  
*Space Invaders IV – Heterotopia*, Espoo

The above image depicts Andrea Coytozi Borja's *The self conscious state of deceit* (2016) in *Space Invaders IV – Heterotopia*, part of her series of works created during 2014–2019. In the image, you can see a monitor on a desk in an empty classroom. What cannot be seen is the work itself, the sounds, the rhythm, or the uncanny experience when the viewer realizes that the space in the film is the same space they just entered and yet different, as the view outside the windows contains an image of crisis. The tension between knowing and not knowing, recognizing and yet being able to tell, between familiarity and the uncanny is created with small twists. It is as if the film wasn't creating these uncanny shifts but just documenting or revealing them. A gap, the real, something that lies beyond the ordinary.

What remains unseen in this image is also the hostility the neighbors felt and expressed towards our projects, how they were not at all happy with the art, and actually stated that it is not art. That something was different disturbed them. We were different and the difference was felt as a threat. For most of the visitors the difference from everydayness was interesting and even a relief, something they expressed interest in witnessing more often in places like the empty old school, in a suburban environment.

# DISTURB, DISRUPT, INTERRUPT

"*Trouble* is an interesting word. It derives from a thirteenth-century French verb meaning 'to stir up', 'to make cloudy', 'to disturb'. We – all of us on Terra – live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbine times. The task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response." (Haraway, 2016, p. 1)

*To disturb, to trouble, to stir up.* Art is a way of disturbing the normal flow of life and the every day. When it is presented in public spaces, it intervenes, whether it was the cause or the consequence. Intervention in a public place is a response to the existing situation, and by intervening, art redirects attention to what might not be ordinarily noticed. Already the fact that there is something that normally isn't, disturbs our usual expectations. Or even if there isn't something that normally is – the uncanny and eerie feeling of something being out of place disturbs the everyday. This disturbance can be annoying, and sometimes instead of enchanting spectators, the public becomes angry and hostile. Sometimes it takes time to digest what was disturbing. Building a narrative takes time. Disturbing is an opening to new encounters, thoughts, dialogues, views, practices.

How does this disturbance or disruption function? Dylan Trigg explains the phenomenon by way of the role of body memory, in the context of defamiliarized experience, place and the concept of betweenness:

I will argue that betweenness is a concept that is fundamentally problematized by the role of body memory. As I will suggest, the cognitive space between place and world is disturbed by the independence of the flesh, which, in its intelligibility, manages to defamiliarize our experience, affective, and particular placement – the three discern-

ible features that contribute to place broadly. In turn, what this will mean is that the privileged observer of place standing between self and world will lose his or her bearings due to the primacy of embodiment. At such point, understanding place between subject and object will be undermined through the the observer's being torn asunder in multiple dimensions. (Trigg, 2012, p. 7)

The place between the subject and the object, the site and the flesh, is subjective, but it is also public and happens in relation to the world, others, and surroundings. In *Interrupting the City – Artistic Constitutions of the Public Sphere* (2015) the editors propose that “*interrupting the city* is one way of forcing the public sphere to renew itself; or if not renew then at least to rehash itself.” (Bax, Gielen and Ieven, 2015, p. 11) The editors claim that this can be done, for example, by providing 'alternative scenarios': “Art and literature create imaginary spaces that shape reality in a different manner or present a new reality.” (Bax, Gielen and Ieven, 2015, p. 20) Interruptions can be small or large, but when pacifying everyday flow is disrupted – where we often become a little bit blind to our surroundings – our senses are activated and our thinking is triggered. This interruption might be annoying or it might be stimulating, but in all cases it makes possible new perspectives and new trains of thought.

What is common for both politics and art is that they propose new, alternative worlds. The idea of the existing world being the only possible state of things can be maddening. Art and politics do not only questions the current state of things but also one's own existence and behavior – is this the only possible way for me to be and act, or are there alternatives? Am I expected to change? What is different when it comes to art and politics, compared to the neo-liberal idea of a subject that needs to be constantly improved, be it by meditation or self-help, is that it is not the singular subject that has to bear the responsibility all by themselves. Rather, it is the whole community that faces the possible alternatives together.

When art is presented in public space it can concretely block and disturb how we use the space. Art in public space tends to interrupt the traditional expectations of productivity and productive behavior. Art in public space also disturbs the conventional way of exhibiting art. Instead of being encountered by the active spectator, who has specifically come to a galley or a museum, art

in public space is for everyone. The author can no longer have any expectations about the public, or how the work is understood, received, or interpreted. Even if art has been in the public domain for as long as the public domain has existed, there is still something subversive about this idea of democratic spectatorship. “Revolution happens where art encounters new looks and new spectators”, as Milja Sarkola writes: it is not about becoming aware of the mechanisms of oppression and power, but about passion, and about the passion that does not fit in. (Sarkola, 2020, p. 160)<sup>40</sup> The revolutionary potential of art is reduced when art is only encountered by those, who do not need or want a revolution.

In the context of art, intervention means a site and time-specific act or artwork that breaks from the traditional framework of displaying art. At the same time, it addresses existing space or situation and possibly some other existing work of art. An intervention thus simultaneously poses questions concerning the making of art and its authorship and the space or situation at which the intervention itself is aimed. While interacting with architecture, activism and urbanism, intervention also has an active and challenging relationship with the history of art and its different genres such as performance and conceptual art. Artistic intervention also challenges spectators by injecting something new and surprising into the familiar and existing. Intervention is a challenge to confront the unknown. (Jensen, Rajanti and Ziegler, 2018, p. 119)

Art in public space can hide or highlight things. It affects how the environment is perceived and can spark curiosity, realizations and the uptake of new narratives. Public art has often been used to maintain and praise existing hierarchies and power structures. For example, bronze statues presenting great, and not so great, leaders signal to these authorities. Even if in contemporary discourse the aims and means of public art today seem to be something other than this, the reality strikes back. One of the clearest examples of this is Nacka in Sweden realizing a new policy when it comes to public art: the “new code” of public art lists attributes like “wisdom, wise”, “for the good community”,

<sup>40</sup> Translated by A. Jensen.



“respect”, “peacefully”, “soft”, while in the “old code” one can find things like “war”, “struggle”, “not in demand”, “disrespect”, “subculture, underground” and “rebellion” (Ulrika Fink 3.10.2019 in *Curatorial Forum*, Saint Petersburg). There is very little art’s disruptive power left in a situation where it is forced to be “soft”, “peaceful” and “respectful” to exist for the public.

In many ways, art and activism go hand in hand, but they are not synonyms as their methods are not completely parallel. Art cannot escape its tradition and its relation to both form and history can be seen as both its strength and weakness. The form of an artwork is a way of creating embodied experience, but it is also why even highly political art can be interpreted as primarily aesthetic. This feature of art is most evident in the museum or other institutional contexts, but it does not mean that art exhibited in the white cube cannot have an impact. Art is always capable of changing the way we think and see things. This change can happen immediately or it can happen slowly, but experiences evoked by encounters with art bear traces. This is why making art and exhibiting art is always an act involving great responsibility.

Haraway’s *Staying with the Trouble* looks deeper into issues of responsibility and disturbance, proposing that our task is to make trouble (D. J. Haraway, 2016, p. 1). To make trouble is to be truly present, to tell stories, to understand questions of mattering. It matters what stories we tell and what ideas we think. It matters whom we think with, “Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all.” (Haraway, 2016, p. 4) Even if all this mattering and being present and being-with means inescapable responsibility that can feel heavy, it is still a relief that we never need to think alone. Our existence, our work, our thinking, our storytelling, our writing always happens with others, never alone.



How to Life: *And that's how the cookie crumbles*, 2019

This is a image from a *How to Life* project we did for Titanik gallery in 2019 (Coyotzi Borja and Jensen, 2019a). Along with Andrea Coyotzi Borja, I explored the everyday and its uncanniness. One way to experience uncanniness is to feel that something is not in its rightful place. This is how intervention art can function: to disturb the flow of everyday life with smaller or bigger gestures. And it is not only the public that feels the shifts, but the one intervening. This makes interventions a good tool for artistic research. Putting a mask on and stepping into public space makes one perceive public space differently. We feel and see the environment differently, and we learn from and about it.



The act of interrupting is not necessarily something that is this massive, loud, and visible. It can be a small gesture, moving things a bit out of their expected place. An act that creates eerie or uncanny moments that questions our perceptions and expectations. *In Space Invaders V – Tolerance (Space Invaders V – Tolerance, 2017)* Lauri Linna explored the contaminated old industrial area by recording the underwater sounds of the lake. Normally underwater life is full of sounds, this one was completely quiet. The disturbing element was an eerie nothingness, what is not there becomes present by way of its absence.

# DESIRE

In 2015, two events took place in Helsinki. Director Milja Sarkola's play *Something Different* (*Jotain toista – henkilökohtaisen halun näyttämö*) (Sarkola, 2015) was held in Q-Theater and the *Mä haluun sut* (*I Want You*) (Hannus, 2015) exhibition curated by Hannus was displayed in Exhibition Laboratory Project Space. Both projects presented female/non-male desire. Still somewhat taboo, female desire was not only limited to heterosexual desire. Even more of a taboo, and maybe most taboo of all, female desire in the context of power relations in the art world. Hannus curated the exhibition using desire as a tool and a method. All the exhibited artists were individuals they desired. The process was not about the theme, not about the so-called artistic quality or the space or the research question, but rather, about lust, hunger, and craving. Both events brought to light the many undisclosed processes often figured as "neutral" or "objective". This challenged the idea of the selection process as strictly professional, or the idea of not letting one's instincts take charge, not letting passion come between a person and a good work of art.

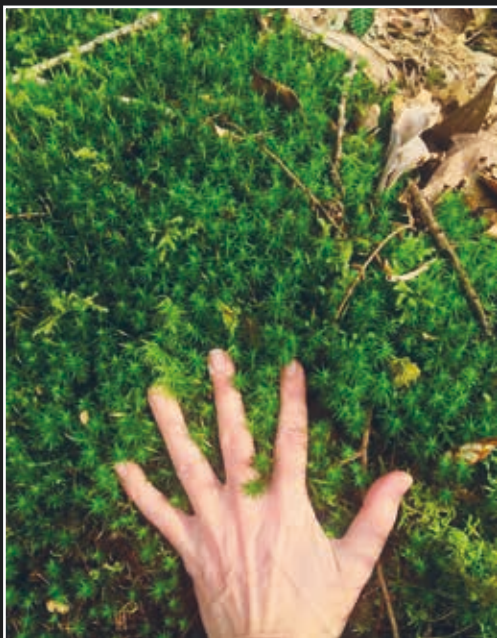
Even if Sarkola's and Hannus' initiatives were quite categorical, they were also highlighting the usually hidden point that good works of art are often about passion, lust, and desire. Desire exceeds the mind-body-dualism. It cannot be positioned. In desire all my senses thirst and my mind longs. When I encounter art that strongly influences me, it is not the analytical process that thrills, it is the feel of the artwork. Artworks, people and places, like this make me dizzy, they twist my stomach, I get goosebumps. Maybe later, I am capable of articulating and analyzing the experience, but there is always something lacking in the verbalized encounter.

Desire is not a simple notion. What we desire is not always good or right. What we desire is not always good for us, nor for the target of our desire, or for the world. In a state of desire emotions become entangled: we want to give, and we want to take. We want the other, who is unknown to us, but we want to come to know the other thoroughly, immerse ourselves with the other, become

one. Desire is an embodied, physical feeling, but what we desire is imaginary. All these aspects are part of desire, regardless of whether we consider it in the context of sexuality, power relations, or art.

Even when the curatorial process is not purely based on desire, desire is part of it. I desire artworks. I desire the idea of them as part of something I am creating. I desire the thinking behind them. I desire the thinking of others and the idea of it becoming shared thinking with no distinct subjects in the process. I desire the world the other is giving me, and I want to pass it on, share it with others. The public, the working group, the potential reader. I want to give, and I want to be given. Desire happens in a network of relations. Rosi Braidotti writes that “desires are political and politics begins with our desires.” (Braidotti, 2002, p. 41) Braidotti also suggests, in contrast to most of western philosophy, that subjects “cannot be reduced to their vulnerable mortality, on the contrary: they are essentially subjects of desire.” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 155) Desire is often considered to be personal and intimate, but in reality, they are very much controlled and surveyed. Desire is connected to two previous concepts, difference and disruption, in multiple ways. Difference creates desire and this is disturbing. Even if our desire is normative, it can be disturbing. The intimacy, the uncontrollable nature of the feeling, the unproductive will.

In *How To Live Together* (2013) Barthes outlines the question of living together as a question of the distance between bodies, cohabiting subjects and desire: “I find other people’s bodies – someone else’s body – unsettling, disconcerting. I desire, I experience the energy and the absence of desire, I engage in the exhausting strategies of desire.” According to Barthes, it is the rules of distance with respect to other bodies that give rise to desire. (Barthes, 2013, pp. 72–73)



Me and moss

This image depicts my hand touching the softness and greenness of the walesian moss during our residency period in Corris. Desire, the strong feeling of wanting something, manifests itself in an act of touching - my body no longer able to resist the urge to touch. This is one of the disturbing collisions in art: the most interesting, appealing art makes me want to touch it but because of their nature as artworks, I am prohibited from doing so. (This could be one more perspective to the question of the phrase *Noli me tangere*, do not touch me, the need to strengthen the link to what is seen by physically touching it). Desire is a state of mental and physical need, want, and hope, intuitive movement towards what is irresistible.

# DUALISM

As we have seen, the deep structures of mastery are buried in the foundations of western intellectual frameworks and conceptual history. There is scarcely a subject or a topic which is not entwined in the knots of dualism these conceptual structures have created. The master's logic of colonisation is the dominant logic of our time. (Plumwood, 2003, p. 190)

What kind of stories are we creating and telling, and how? When I claim that art is a place for creating and mediating knowledge, what do I mean by this, and more specifically, what do I mean by this knowledge? At this point, it is obvious that by "knowledge" I do not refer to the concept of objective facts and information that art generates and passes on, but something more, something that surpasses traditional conceptions of knowledge purely based on reason. The knowledge that art can produce, expands to the unknown, non-knowledge and *antiknow*. It is sensuous as has bodily aspects. This, I believe, is what makes art powerful. Embodied and experiential understanding creates sense and meaning. Like Plumwood writes, "If we are to survive into a liveable future, we must take into our own hands the power to create, restore and explore different stories, with new main characters, better plots, and at least the possibility of some happy endings." (Plumwood, 2003, p. 196)

Why is it then, that the body that fundamentally connects us to the world, other beings, and to our surroundings, has been so completely dismissed? Since René Descartes stated "I think, therefore I am" western philosophy has been defined and challenged by this mind-body dualism. Questioning this division might be seen as a contemporary project led by new-materialists, but it can be traced much further back. Vesa Oittinen writes about Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and how it should be read considering Hegel's fundamental philosophical ambition: to invalidate dualism and to defeat Kant by doing this. According to Oittinen, Hegel attempts to do this by conceiving the concept of spirit: a syn-

thesis of ideal and material, subject and object. (Oittinen, 2012, pp. 48–49) Hegel uses the concept of spirit, *geist*, usually understood in English as soul, mind, or a ghost, something separate from the body, in a more practical and material way. Spirit in Hegel's theory refers to philosophizing history and development of reason. The idea of *zeitgeist*, "spirit of the age", is especially interesting in the context of art which is often the materialization of the spirit of the age – different times create different ideas that take different forms.

Descartes had a major impact on rationalism, proposing thinking as the basis of being. The physical and material body has been divided from the immaterial, non-physical, non-spatial mind and intelligence. This would mean that intelligence is something that the body cannot hold. However, intelligence can refer to logic and reasoning, but it extends to understanding, emotional knowledge, self-awareness, and learning. I would argue that all these features have bodily dimensions. Emotion does not equate with irrational, as Val Plumwood contends:

The resolution of human/nature dualism is closely linked with the resolution of other closely associated reason/nature dualisms, such as the reason/emotion dualism. We have seen how reason/emotion dualism fits the model of denied dependency, especially in the rationalist conception of the ethical. We have noticed how emotion is constructed as the opponent and dualised underside of reason, so that it is identified as an unreliable, unreflective, irrational and sometimes uncontrollable force reason must dominate. We should certainly challenge the narrowing and dominating role of reason. But what is contra-indicated by the analysis of reason/emotion dualism is the replacement of the affirmation of reason by the affirmation of the dualised conception of emotion (as in parts of the Romantic and current New Age traditions). Emotion, like other areas reason has excluded, can be treated affirmatively, as a crucial and creative element, but in doing this we affirm neither the irrational nor the anti-rational. (Plumwood, 2003, p. 189)



When psychology discovered mind the oppositional element of reason was shifted from soul or spirit to mind: Instead of positioning soul or the spirit over body, the mind became the subject of attention and admiration. The body remained subordinate, a shameful supplement. The female body was pictured as more contentious than the male body. This is of course, not only a question of gender but also class and color. When dualism proposes that the material body is not as important, it takes it as a self-evident fact that the material body belongs to a European white heterosexual male because any other body causes trouble and effects how one is educated and treated.

This dualistic hierarchy is not without issues in the context of art. How art has been understood, categorized, and valued throughout the centuries is also a demarcation within the material and immaterial. Art experienced with immaterial intellect, like poetry and classical music, is often considered of higher value than those that have material and bodily aspects, like dance or performance art. Intended or unintended, the Cartesian dualism and mind-body distinction is part of the functions of cultural capital and how social status and power are obtained. If we want to surpass the idea of art as merely goods creating surplus value, we also need to question this hierarchical dualistic tradition. The intellectual property art has should not be understood as something opposite to embodied and sensed experience but as understanding that is especially based on these bodily dimensions of experience



Henrik Heinonen: *lx*, 2016

This is Henrik Heinonen's work *lx* (Heinonen, 2016) in *The Bloody Summer Exhibition* (Porin kulttuurisäätiö et al., 2016). While dualistic thinking has generated a hierarchical idea of mind and body and different senses where seeing is connected to mindfully analyzing art that is experienced instead of the body that encounters the piece, this work proves these structures wrong. Our encounters with art works are embodied experiences, spatial and durational. This work plays with the idea of the bodily impact a work can have, to the degree where it can be harmful, change your cells, or even make you blind, and eventually kill you. The work was installed in a long, narrow room without windows or any other light sources except the work. It took a while for the spectator to reach the work. While the mind was still contemplating the text and its meaning, the body was already exposed to the radiation. You cannot influence one without the other being influenced as well.

# ETHICS AND ECOLOGIES

I think of ethics as requiring both a moral code and a deliberately cultivated sensibility. (Bennett, 2001, p. 29)

As discussed in the previous chapter, mind-body-dualism has put the body into secondary position and praised reason as a universal good. But when increasing sense and understanding of ethics and ecologies, this division should be deconstructed and surpassed. Ethics, ecologies, and environment are questions that can no longer be separated. Maybe emotion as something that rationalism and dualism has also despised, could be used as an intuitive method for approaching these entangled concepts. In her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (2003) Plumwood examines western history and how dualism is linked to our disordered relationship to nature. She stresses the importance of continuity when reconstructing rationalism, ethical and ecological philosophy: “Overcoming the dualistic dynamic requires recognition of both continuity and difference; this means acknowledging the other as neither alien to and discontinuous from self nor assimilated to or an extension of self. I relate this account to contemporary political theory, with its dominant problematic of selfhood and rationality.” (Plumwood, 2003, p. 6)

Ethics cannot be separated from art. Cultural values and ideas of what is right and wrong have always had an immediate connection to how art is practiced and received. These values and ideas change over time and place. Today the idea of “ethics” cannot be limited to considering human subjects, but must be observed as part of our co-existence with our environment and other beings. Our being cannot be separated from the world around us, but it is symbiotic. In this sense, ethics and ecologies are inseparable.

As we share the world with others, these others should be taken into account. And not only other living beings, but the fragile system around us. As

artists, we often believe what we do is inherently good. Often this is true. It is also true that art as public practice is more under surveillance than many other, often commercial, processes going on in our societies: art is already observation and the materials and means of its processes cannot be hidden. How our clothes are made, how our food is produced is not as visible. Neither are the producers as prepared to publicly defend and justify their work. As artists we usually do not have the same economic resources as some others might, which means we often do consume less and accidentally live more sustainable lives than others. All these aspects have led to a situation where we have, not always but frequently, become blind to our own practice. Even if we do not think we believe in art for art's sake, the tradition has definitely marked our thinking. L'art pour l'art ideology claimed that art is about beauty and its own, separate sphere. This understanding of art made it possible for artists to isolate themselves from questions of ethics and ecology for decades. Now, at the threshold of an apocalypse that will sooner or later follow the ecological crisis, artists can hardly sequester themselves from the rest of the world. Beings are responsible, not all in the same ways, like Haraway puts it, but responsible nonetheless: "We are all responsible to and for shaping conditions for multispecies flourishing in the face of terrible histories, and sometimes joyful histories too, but we are not all response-able in the same ways." (Haraway, 2016, p. 29)

The intersection of ethics, ecologies, and art has been explored in many major shows, such as the 2022 Venice Biennale the *Milk of Dreams* (Alemani, 2022), as well as in theory, especially in the framework of feminist curating. A good example is Essi Vesala's thesis *Practicing Coexistence – Entanglements Between Ecology and Curating Art* (2019) in which Vesala studies the entanglement of feminist thinking and ecology in the context of curating, formulating her understanding of ecology as a site where beings and things come together;

The most common understanding of the term ecology is the natural scientific study of interactions between organisms and their environment. In this thesis, the term ecology is used widely to discuss the relationships between all living and non-living things. This cross-disciplinary use of the term is quite common in multiple discourses across the humanities. The interdependence of beings and things, the effects of realizing those dependencies and their agentic consequenc-

es to the surrounding environment are in the core of this thesis, although the research deals with creative and practical processes in contemporary art discourse. To put it simply, ecology depicts the entanglements of bodies, materials and environments.

(Vesala, 2019, p. 17)

Art is an effective way of exploring and emphasizing questions of ethics and ecologies because of the way it *affects* – and the affective dimensions in ethics and ecologies have long been underestimated. When Jane Bennet describes the requirements for enactments of ethical aspirations, “bodily movements in space, mobilizations of heat and energy, a series of choreographed gestures and a distinctive assemblage of affective propulsions” (Bennett, 2001, p. 3), one can easily see the possibilities and effects art can have in the case of ethics.

It is not only that art is a way of responding to the questions ethics poses, nor studying ethics, but ethics and aesthetics have a long history together. For the Greeks, living an ethical life was living an aesthetical life: living a beautiful life. Ethics was more about personal choices for the elite than institutionalized social codes concerning all. Ethics was about the art of life, the aesthetics of existence. Foucault formulates this, also noting that this is not too far from the understanding of ethics in his days, where the ethics are once again more of a personal and private choice than set by the church or legal system. (1994, 104) Thinking about the political situation over Europe today, with the rise of nationalism and far-right parties, could be an interesting starting point for further analysis. When there is no mutual understanding of ethical responsibility, are we giving up on the idea of the common good, like the welfare state? If ethics is reduced to the aesthetics of one’s personal life, how are the others taken into consideration? Has the bourgeois conception of art and aesthetics reduced them into mere symbols of class and taste?

Ethics has long been understood in the context of humankind, but post-humanism has shown how this hierarchical understanding of life that pictures a tree where man as a “complex” creature stands above all else and includes a linear movement down to simpler, i.e. less manlike, living beings has led to not only much suffering and misunderstanding but also to the climate crisis we are now living in. Rethinking these relations and concepts, such as “complex” and “simple,” is a much-needed ethical act.

## A. ENVIRONMENT

Mind-body-dualism can be tracked also in the way environment is approached: in the contemporary discourse, it is either understood or felt. The importance of nature is therefore apprehended in multiple, conflicting ways. Does nature have value as such, or is it meaningful because of its instrumental value? Val Plumwood observes that the concept of reason turns human-nature relationships into master-slave, or, husband-wife;

Dualism has formed the modern political landscape of the west as much as the ancient one. In this landscape, nature must be seen as a political rather than a descriptive category, a sphere formed from the multiple exclusions of the protagonist-superhero of the western psyche, reason, whose adventures and encounters form the stuff of western intellectual history. The concept of reason provides the unifying and defining contrast for the concept of nature, much as the concept of husband does for that of wife, as master for slave. Reason in the western tradition has been constructed as the privileged domain of the master, who has conceived nature as a wife or subordinate other encompassing and representing the sphere of materiality, subsistence and the feminine which the master has split off and constructed as beneath him. (Plumwood, 2003, p. 14)

When studying aesthetics at the University of Helsinki, there was a compulsory module as part of the basic course about environmental aesthetics. During the course, we learned about inquiries and surveys aimed at mapping how people feel about certain environments and hence evaluate these environments according to the survey. I did not, and still do not, see much value in asking people if they judge a river to be worth a three on a scale from one to five, neither do I think it is a relevant way to approach or discuss our environment. It did, however, make me understand my research question better. How to mediate and study experiences that cannot be measured or verbalized?

Flattening the environment into a picture has a long and complex tradition in the history of art. Art explores landscapes, but also produces them. In one of the episodes of Agatha Christie's Poirot films, *The Adventure of the Clapham*

*Cook*, the famous detective Hercule Poirot walks in the countryside with Hastings, hating every minute of it. Hastings finds this curious, as Poirot is supposed to admire landscapes like this. Poirot replies that he does, but in paintings, stating, “yes, views are very nice, Hastings. But they should be painted for us, so that we may study them in the warmth and comfort of our own homes. That is why we pay the artist, for exposing himself to these conditions on our behalf.” (*Agatha Christie’s Poirot: The Adventure Of The Clapham Cook*, 1989) In this instance, landscape is enjoyable or approachable through representation, rather than experienced through an embodied encounter.

We appear to nature and it appears to us as material, bodily beings in constant interaction. The same environment is not the same for all but observed through different perspectives, affected by our gender, personal history, class, race. We, as persons, are products of certain kinds of environments which then impact how we perceive what is around us. For example, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (2010) posits that changes in our environment are presented as a possibility to change hegemonies in general:

Intervention in more obviously material hegemonies is just as crucial as intervention in digital and cultural ones. Changes to the built environment harbour some of the most significant possibilities in the reconfiguration of the horizons of women and queers. As the embodiment of ideological constellations, the production of space and the decisions we make for its organization are ultimately articulations about ‘us’ and reciprocally, how a ‘we’ can be articulated. (Laboria Cuboniks, 2019)

I grew up in a suburban neighborhood, part of the first generation growing up in the modernistic concrete cube, creating our own traditions and ways of playing, searching the surroundings, making rules, telling stories. When there are no narratives of how things have always been or how they usually have been done, one needs to create them. Suburban environments, compared to old cities with different historical layers, are considered void of meaning. This makes them uncanny, as one gets the feeling of absence where there should be presence. Mark Fisher describe this eeriness as emerging from the lack of different periods and their traces. (*The Weird and the Eerie*, 2017)

## B. SANDSTORM

In July 2019 Porin kulttuurisäättö's *Sandstorm* exhibition opened on Yyteri dunes. The site-specific, group exhibition was based on collaboration with local partners and existing knowledge about the fragile and protected environment. The exhibition aimed both to question the concept of environmental and land art, as well as to create positive ecological impact on the already protected site. During the process we tried to reflect on our own practice and make this reflection visible while promoting the event;

Despite all of the well-meaning practices art doesn't only create aesthetic imprints but it often ends up producing excessive amounts of waste and other surplus material. In Sandstrom the collective continues its work in redefining art and its production, taking urgent ecological and environmental questions to the center of its practice and sustainable thinking into the creative process. While creating and mediating new knowledge art is a way of exploring possibilities for living among the new climate regime and the anxiety it causes. Through the project Porin kulttuurisäättö wants to make the unique Yyteri beach visible and accessible in a new way and suggest an alternative for how we use the fragile nature around us – while enjoying the beach! (Porin kulttuurisäättö *et al.*, 2019)

*Sandstorm* was a project emerging from different starting points and opening to many directions. Like many other Porin kulttuurisäättö's exhibitions, it was partly about play, partly about pleasure. When we started planning *Sandstorm* we had already spent quite a few summers producing exhibitions instead of enjoying holidays, and this seemed like the perfect way to combine a beach holiday and an art project. The birth of the project, aiming to consider both the fragile nature of the unique Yyteri dune area but also environmental issues more widely, was somewhat paradoxical. We were flying to Germany to see *documenta 14* in Kassel and *Skulptur Projekte* in Münster and admired the dune beaches of Denmark below the plane. We started wondering why there are so few exhibitions organized on beaches. We initiated a project aiming to address sustainability, or the lack thereof, in the art world and how art can be used as a



tool in increasing environmental awareness. And what would be a more fitting and obvious choice for the name than *Sandstorm*, the name of a catchy edm song known all over the world by Finnish musician Darude, who is born in Eura, just next to Pori.

Later, while realizing the project, we did come to understand why there is not more art on beaches. A protected dune in a cold and windy country like Finland does make one miss the white cube, its walls, warmth, running water, doors that protect the artworks and overall safeness of environment. The project came to highlight many issues concerning working in public places and with environmental art. While we considered ourselves prepared for the artworks to be damaged by the weather conditions or the public, it did not stop us from worrying. Another issue was mediating the project for those who could not visit Yyteri. Working in remote areas means that not many people from faraway places make. At the same time, mediating and documenting site-specific projects always seems to leave holes. The gap between physicality and spirituality remains unsolved.

“It is through paying attention, in the present, to its concrete singularity and its sensible qualities, without substituting a name for them, that the perception of a thing, above all of a living being, can lead us from a merely physical stage to a spiritual stage of our concern.” (Irigaray and Michael, 2016, p. 47) Luce Irigaray reflects on how I see the possibilities and responsibilities of art when it comes to nature and the environment around us, especially while working immersed in it. Ideas cannot be forced, neither can they be fully explained or emptied out, but we can attempt to direct attention and pay respect. We can do this by paying attention to decisions made about exhibition locations, about the installation of artworks, routes taken to get to the exhibition destination, how we guide our guests through the experience, and how we contextualize and explain it. Another way to ensure ethical practice is to consider who we work with – do we want to work with marketing companies, whose aim is to transform certain areas into coveted locations, or with municipalities who want to enhance the brand of the city, or with the environmental department who know the environment, its plants and beings and are invested in working toward sustainable futures. For the *Sandstorm* project the artists were chosen based on multiple aspects. Because we wanted to revisit and reconstruct ideas of environmental and land art, we chose artists we believed have a unique and

interesting practice in the context of contemporary art, but who would also be able to work site-specifically and collectively, exploring issues together with the group. We wanted at least some of them to be able to commit to the project for a longer term, so that they were able to visit the sites along with the environmentalists from the city, and plan works that could have an impact in fragile nature.

Through the exhibition, we wanted to make the fragile environment visible as more than just a sandy beach. We wanted to support the initiative of protecting dunes and installing art so that it could guide visitors to use the safest routes and raise environmental awareness. This strategy could be defined by what Lucy R. Lippard calls “framing”;

How can art activate local activities and local values? With adequate funding resources, public artists might set up social and political spaces in which energies could come together, dialogue and alternatives or oppositions could be concretized. These might be seen in relation to the familiar ‘framing’ strategy, in which what is already there is put in sharp relief by the addition of an art of calling attention. ‘Parasitic’ art forms, like corrected billboards, can ride the dominant culture physically while challenging it politically, creating openly contested terrains that expose the true identities of existing places and spaces and their function in social control. Another set of possibilities is art that activates the consciousness of a place by subtle markings without disturbing it - a booklet guide, walking tours, or directional signs captioning the history of a house or a family, suggesting the depths of a landscape, the character of a community. (Lippard, 1995, p. 129)

In *Sandstrom* Porin kulttuurisäätiö and the artists used many of the proposed examples, without consciously thinking about the Lippard’s text. We used already existing structures and resources, created terrains for exploring identities. We organized guided tours that did not only present the artworks but also the environment, its past and future plans. However, even if we spent time in the area half a year before the exhibition and explained the aims of the project when we invited the artists to join, during the installation it became obvious that our goals were not fully understood or accepted by everyone. One of the

reasons could be the premise of the show. We wanted to challenge the concept of land art and environmental art, both being often understood as old-fashioned ways to use nature as a frame for half-heartedly constructed exhibitions. Instead of inviting artists usually working with environmental projects, we focused on artists we thought were dealing with interesting issues and forms in their practice and were somehow exceptional in the context of contemporary art in general. Even after all the long discussions, after introducing the conservation program and our conditions, it was hard to the point of impossible for some of the artists to compromise their artistic visions.

In the end, the final form was not a compromise, but very much what we were planning from the beginning. The exhibition was accessible for people coming to the beach to enjoy summer. It introduced these visitors to a whole different side of the area and took them also to the nearby forest and artificial lakes. We invited visitors for walks through all the works presenting a diversity of working methods and approaches. From the dunes were Timo Aho's sculptures made of sand. There was Laura Könönen's large stone piece and Akuliina Niemi's minimalistic sound piece. The exhibition continued to the forest walk with Sauli Sirviö's found objects and to an artificial lake with Antti Turikko's sculpture installation, a layout for a swallow's nest, and then back to the beach to experience Erno-Erik Raitanen's chiming installation. Hetta Kiiski's work extended from the beach to the Hotel. Linda Tedsdotter's *Apocalypse Insurance Raft* on the beach attracted sunbathers throughout the exhibition period to use it as a landmark, bench, or shelf. For me, the exhibition was one of the highlights of my career. I was able to hike in the forest, up and down the dunes, from the seaside to the lakes, and present the audience not only the artworks that I consider perfectly served the area and its purposes, but also to the atmosphere, the smells and the feel of the dune. While the process provided us with an opportunity to work with the environmentalist specializing in fragile dune environments, learn from their work and use and share this knowledge, it was also a perfect situation to think about how we work. Together with others, we tried to track the blind spots and practices that could be developed further. The project was also a place to practice our communication. How do we communicate our goals for the artists and other partners and how do we present our practice to the public? How does the social nature of our practice make the ethical and ecological questions approachable through aesthetic experience?

## C. CLIMATE CRISIS

Art is often ahead of its time when it comes to new ideas, ideologies and world views, but when it comes to the climate crisis, the art world has been hopelessly and embarrassingly late. Means and actions that have been used to correct this failure have been even more embarrassing. Mountains of plastic waste have been utilized in artworks aiming to critique the use of plastic. Thousands of curators fly around the world to participate in discussions on the climate crisis and environmental issues. They debate how to reduce the load the art industry puts on the environment. It seems like we are blind to our actions, still believing in the sanctity of art that credits the means, or just stubbornly wanting to keep going as we always have.

Action should have been taken on the climate crisis decades ago. As the famous quote says, “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.” And, without reconsidering capitalism, environmental issues are going to be hard to solve:

The significance of Green critiques is that they suggest that, far from being the only viable political-economic system, capitalism is in fact primed to destroy the entire human environment. The relationship between capitalism and eco-disaster is neither coincidental nor accidental: capital’s ‘need of constantly expanding market’, its ‘growth fetish’, mean that capitalism is by its very nature opposed to any notion of sustainability. (Fisher, 2009, pp. 18–19).

We use way more resources than the world can provide, doomsday seems close and unavoidable. Besides theorizing and pointing out problems, theory must be put into practice. As Bruno Latour writes about melting glaciers, disappearing species and the universe not being everlasting, “Sublime or tragic, I don’t know, but one thing is sure: it is no longer a spectacle that we can appreciate from a distance. We are part of it.” (Latour, 2017, p. 109). There is no escaping nor distancing ourselves any longer. We are involved in the new climate regime. But still, we are not completely aimless, but must become conscious of our actions – what we do and how do we do it. When using materials and creating waste, are we doing it for the greater good, or just because we did not pay attention

to what we are doing and how? While the previous generations have been worried about the legacy they are leaving, what worries us is the legacy we are not leaving, that after us there is nothing left. This means that there needs to be a turn taken from singular beings with a focus on self-care to a globally inflected model of care – what are we going to with the time and resources we have? How do we make the best out of it?

Latour's answer is a response, rather than a perpetuation of the endless cycles of guilt and confession, "This does not mean that humans have to feel guilty - guilt would paralyze them, and that would be futile - but they have to learn to become capable of *responding*." (Latour, 2017, p. 281) Responding is also what art, artists and curators can more readily do. In the context of art, a response might involve making the world around us visible – not only the plastic waste and the catastrophe we have created, but the beauty and the complexity we want to protect. It seems then, that paying attention to the world and its complexity is a crucial part of art's purpose, responding with careful attention is a strategy of resistance in and of itself. As Anna Tsing writes in the introduction to *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, "Living in a time of planetary catastrophe thus begins with a practice at once humble and difficult: noticing the world around us." (Tsing *et al.*, 2017, p. 7)

Slightly less definitive than Latour's approach, but nonetheless comparable, is the orientation of Haraway, Tsing and Plumwood, all of whom place emphasis on hope and storytelling over emotions such as guilt and doomsday thinking. At the end of her book, Plumwood argues for the life-affirming power of storytelling, "If we are to survive into a liveable future, we must take into our own hands the power to create, restore and explore different stories, with new main characters, better plots, and at least the possibility of some happy endings." (Plumwood, 2003, p. 196) And, if we are not to survive, at least we can think of the end as a new beginning:

Ghosts, too, are weeds that whisper tales of the many pasts and yet-to-comes that surround us. Considering through ghosts and weeds, worlds have ended many times before. Endings come with the death of a leaf, the death of a city, the death of a friendship, the death of small promises and small stories. The landscapes grown from such endings are our disasters as well as our weedy hope. (Tsing *et al.*, 2017, p. 7)



Antti Turkko: *Hirundo cinerea, gula abdomineque albis\**(2019)

This is a detail shot from the installation *Hirundo cinerea, gula abdomineque albis\** (Turkko, 2019) in the Sandstorm exhibition. The artwork was created with the artist, Porin kulttuurisäätiö and the city of Pori. The goal was to find a location and design for an artificial nest for sand martins, a threatened bird species. In the 2000's, the sand martin population in Finland declined for multiple reasons. In many countries, these human constructed nests have become popular. The work was installed in a spot that was a bit distant from the main beach. It was beautiful but dirty and badly managed because of the remote location that made it possible to organize parties without cleaning up afterwards. We wanted more people to see the beauty of this area and we hoped, through this exposure, that visitors would be encouraged to take better care of it.

Not all the works, or the entirety of the *Sandstorm* exhibition, was meant to be as straightforward as these examples. We aimed to make it possible for a diversity of people to discover the Yteri natural landscape in a unique and sustainable way, and to develop and maintain ecological and sustainable practices together with the experts and artists. Again this project proved how blind we often are to our own practice, how difficult this blind spot makes it to mediate the goals and ideas behind a project.

# EMPATHY

Still, there is scope here for a different account of universalisation which is not based on devaluation of the personal and particular. It would make wider concern a question not of transcending or detaching the self from particular, personal moral commitments, but in part at least of understanding or coming to see the relationship between these particular commitments and local situations and those of distant others. You can come to understand the relationship between your own loss and that of others, the degradation of your own local ecosystem and that of the global ecosystem, the impoverishment of social and natural life-forms and that of your own life and the lives of those you know. Such wider forms of care can be expressed in political consciousness and social action with as much force and validity as in personal relationships. The implication of this form of empathic generalisation, in contrast to Kantian universalisation, is that the more strongly you feel about your own commitments and attachments the more basis you should have for expanding concern to others. (Plumwood, 2003, p. 187)

Instead of using concepts like compassion and sympathy, in the context of contemporary art empathy is maybe the most common way to refer to the affective, embodied capacity of care. Art is often considered to foster empathy, but what does this actually mean and how does it happen? Empathy became a buzzword in the early 2000s, from politics to business to art. What does this tell about both the concept and society? Has its use increased care, compassion, and understanding, or, as some critics have argued, has it perpetuated individualistic ways of thinking and being? Paul Bloom, the author of the book *Against Empathy*, argues that is actually often best not to rely on empathy, as it has some poor features, like being restricted, narrow-minded and ignorant. Bloom is a critic heavily reliant on dualistic ways of thinking, placing sense, intelligence, and moral reasoning above empathy. (Bloom, 2013) Bloom considers empathy

as directed towards those closest to us, and hence it is deemed a useless tool in making moral judgments or political decisions. I, however, understand empathy as a way of being able to understand the shared nature of our being and the world around us, a willingness to feel compassion for those others we exist with. This, I believe, is also how art can, by enabling the experience of alternative worlds and lives, help to increase empathy.

There are many different ways in which humans differ from other beings and entities. The ability to empathize is one such defining feature of human beings. Compassion and care are qualities needed in order to survive and live as communities. They are also qualities that have been largely underestimated and judged somewhat secondary, feminine, and thus, less worthy. Market liberalism has valued production, profit, and competitive markets over empathy, and global investment capitalism has increased distance between private owners and wage-laborers, which decreases understanding and empathy (Kantola and Kuusela, 2019). A banal interpretation could lean on Hegel's Master-slave dialectic. If the recognition that is the result of the dialectic situation leads to self-consciousness, can the lack of recognition lead to the loss of meaning? If you are not seen, your work is not recognized and your life is not valued, then how to arrive at a position not only as a significant being, but also as a significant part of a community? How, then, to diminish this distance and create meaning? This is probably a naïve question, but in a segregated world, how can visibility and understanding be increased?

Curator Yvette Mutumba proposes that producing and consuming different forms of art teaches us empathy, and that empathy can be used as a methodology;

As an art historian, editor, and curator, I consciously regard empathy as a methodology to approach projects and processes. Empathy can be an important instrument to acknowledge the existence of the most varied narratives, emotions, and experiences of creators as well as audiences. Empathy can be a tool for curating exhibitions, writing texts, and editing magazines that not only offer answers but also raise questions. The result is a continuous flow between remediation, research, emotional response, and positioning oneself within a broader discourse and practice. (Mutumba, 2017)

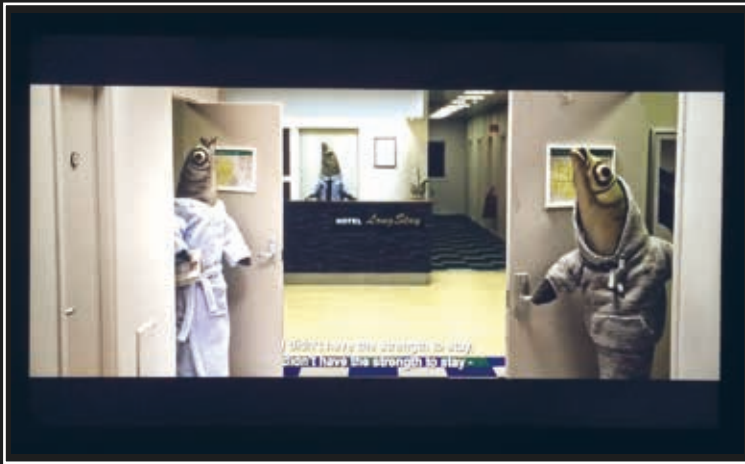


I agree with the idea of using empathy as a methodology and believe that art can act as a platform for creating empathy by making it possible to seek different perspectives, to try on different skins, to learn different environments and ways of being. But when empathy is taken as a methodology, it should not only affect the outcome but penetrate the whole practice. It is not only empathy towards the potentially unknown other that is needed, but empathy towards our co-workers, and what is most often forgotten, ourselves. Considering empathy as a method also requires reflecting its collective possibilities. How to surpass the idea of empathy as an individual feeling we have for the other? I suggest that this happens by putting these feelings into action. Empathy is not only a methodology in the context of art, it is also activism, "Empathy begins with the self reaching out to another self, an underlying dynamic of feeling that becomes the source of activism." (Lacy, 1995a, p. 36)

Empathy is related to experience and its social implications. Experience is the sphere where art can increase empathy. Empathy is service that an artist offers to the world. Suzanne Lacy suggests this in *Mapping the Terrain*, referring to how the experience was, before feminist activism promoted the personal as political, considered non-political, but also as weaponized in the service of advertising and politics;

Private experience has lost an authenticity in the public sector that art may, at least symbolically, return to us. To make of oneself a conduit for expression of a whole social group can be an act of profound social empathy. When there is no quick fix for some of the most pressing social problems, there may be only our ability to feel and witness the reality taking place around us. This empathy is a service artists offer to the world. (Lacy, 1995b, pp. 174-175)

Empathy is a form of solidarity that art can increase, both by pointing out things, presenting alternative lives, narratives, stories, and beings, but also through the act of sharing itself. To share is to recognize the other, to care for their existence in a shared reality. Every exhibition and public project, text, talk, or artwork is always an act of sharing, caring, and recognizing.



Niki Lindroth von Bahr: *Hotel Longstay*, 2017

This is an image from the video *Hotel Longstay* (Lindroth von Bahr, 2017), part of a longer piece called *The Burden*. In the video, the Baltic herrings perform an operatic play about the hotel long stay, a place for those who are lonely, have no one to stay with, or can't live with anyone. Even if it may seem hard to identify with a herring, to feel empathy towards them, the feelings they are going through are relatable, as is the staging in the generic hotel lobby. The singing herrings have a variety of reasons for staying in the hotel, from bad skin to wishing for some peace.

The uncanny valley hypothesis is based on the idea that the more something or someone resembles us, the more empathy we feel towards it. A baltic herring does not resemble me, but I can relate to its feelings in the video, the skin problems, the need to be alone from time to time. While the video evidently appropriates the singularity of a baltic herring by humanizing it, it also creates a common platform for shared feelings. Our individual lives with our unique experiences might not, after all, be all that unique.

# EERIE

I have freaked out during a museum visit on a couple of occasions, for example, at the installation of *Kursk* by Markus Copper, which almost stirred me into a panic. Thankfully, I was calmed down by the company I was viewing it with. There has, however, also been a situation where me panicking caused alarm. In *Skulptur Projekte 2017* there was a long queue to one of the works. Gregor Schneider's *N. Schmidt Pferdegasse 19 48143 Münster*<sup>41</sup> was divergent in the context as it was placed in a museum instead of public space, even if it wasn't using the ordinary exhibition spaces but was installed to the attic. Only one person at a time was allowed in, and already this made me feel a bit uneasy. The only sign of the work was a doorbell and a peephole with the name N. Schmidt. On entering the work, the spectator came upon the empty flat of N. Schmidt. The emptiness, the calmness of the atmosphere produced by way of the lights, colors and minimalist furniture design, was disturbed only by the sound of water running in the bathroom. This created an eerie feeling of absent presence, or someone or something being there who should not be there. The eeriness of the experience continued after one left the apartment, only to enter the same apartment again. But the apartment was not quite the same – the structure was the same, as was the furniture, but some quality had changed. Instead of the sound of tap running, one could hear shower. At this point, one starts to question their own memory and experience. Was it really the tap one could hear in the first apartment? Is it that I misremembered, or has the flat and its atmosphere altered in some way? Perhaps, this is, after all, the very same flat?

41 “N. SCHMIDT already made an appearance at the exhibition *ur 54*, N. SCHMIDT (Bremerhaven, 2001). The title refers to N. SCHMIDT's origins in Room 54 of *Haus ur*. The flat in Münster gave visitors the opportunity to start unravelling the persona of N. SCHMIDT. A separate entrance in the west wing of the museum's new building lead up a stairway to the first floor and to an anteroom where the flat branches off. By walking through the entrance hall, the living room, the bedroom, and the bathroom, the visitor came to an anteroom and another mirror-symmetrical flat whose room sequence and interiors are architecturally identical to the first unit. By following a circular route through the flat, the visitors once again reached the first anteroom. This offered an iterative experience, which, now modified by memories, opened up a new space. The principle of duplication and discrepancy was continued in virtual space: what happened in one flat seemed to be relayed synchronously to screens in the other flat. The title of Schneider's work triggered the expectation of an encounter that allows the individual to emerge from the collective presence—an individual who finally appears to have been given an answer to the question: Who is N. SCHMIDT? All the while, the museum is masked out by this scenario, both as an institutional and an architectural framework; the work is stripped of any museum-style presentation, thus *killing it* from the artist's point of view.” (Schneider, 2017)

At least, this is how the experience should have gone. For me, things turned out a bit differently, as the invigilators let a new person into the apartment a little too soon, resulting in our walking into each other in the hallway. This unexpected encounter meant I lost my bearings and sense of direction. It seemed too, that all the locks on the doors were fastened. Either way, I was unable to enter any of the rooms nor was I able to exit the artwork. I pushed one of the door handles that was not supposed to be pushed, setting off an alarm. Finally, I was let out by the guard. Instead of disrupting the viewing experience, the sound of the alarm, the panic of it all, the hall with its row of locked doors opening out into multiple directions, only enhanced my panic and the eeriness of the work. It was not only this moment of panic that generated the eerie feeling in the apartment, but the also the unexplainable calm emptiness of the flat.

Emptiness is eerie. This is something I learned as a child growing up in a large suburban neighborhood where busy streets always felt safer, while empty streets were always charged, like a stage on which something bad was bound to happen. No wonder the void of the suburban neighborhood has been much used in popular culture as a stage for weird, strange, and creepy events. It is the site of the everyday, but is, simultaneously, a place where frictions and tensions play out, a place where the structured and controlled starts to fracture and give way to the unstructured and the multiple.

Mark Fisher compares the weird and eerie with the strange. What the weird and the eerie have in common is a preoccupation with the strange. "The strange - not the horrific, and explains their allurements with our fascination with the outside: with what lies beyond standard perception, cognition, and experience. What is "beyond" is that, according to Fisher, *unheimlich* has "crowded out the other two modes." (Fisher, 2016, p. 8) Weird and eerie, and maybe uncanny too, do not fascinate us because they are horrifying or scary. They fascinate us because they are situated outside ordinary perception and experience. Eerie is the "anonymity lurking within the homely," like Dylan Trigg explains, without using the concept of eerie and following Merleau-Ponty's figuration, the "wavering balance between everyday attention and a disinterested attention in things, in which the human subject is decentered." (Trigg, 2012, p. 61)

According to Fisher, the weird, the eerie and the *unheimlich* are all affects and modes. The *unheimlich* is always the strange within the familiar, making the familiar strange or returning the strange to familiar - it processes the outside. By contrast, the weird and the eerie are about seeing the inside from the outside. Fisher suggests that *unheimlich* should be translated to "unhomely,"

and that “the weird is that *which does not belong*.” (Fisher, 2016, 9) The weird, eerie and unheimlich are all spatial phenomena. Spatiality, inside and outside, can here be understood both as straightforwardly empirical spaces, rooms, sites, and places, as well as more abstract mental or transcendental spaces. In addition, the eerie, the weird and the uncanny share a relation to the unnamable – something that is on the threshold of existence and non-existence. This becomes especially evident in Fisher’s description of the eerie, “Why is there something when there should be nothing?” Why is there nothing where there should be something?” (Fisher, 2016, p. 12)

This renders eerie simultaneously concrete and metaphysical. For Fisher, eeriness can be most readily understood in relation to empty landscapes and sceneries bearing only traces of humans. Instead of offering tangible answers, these eerie locations propose questions that are necessarily left open-ended, like the haunting story of the mystery of Mary Celeste, the deserted ghost ship. Fisher also references the films of David Lynch in order to illustrate and explain the concept of the eerie– a recurring feature of the films being that they evoke more questions than answers. In empty spaces, reality and dreams are indistinguishable. Lynch utilizes many classic manifestations of the *unheimlich*: doubles, recognizable neighborhoods and features, body parts, dreamlike scenarios, and loved ones turning into strangers. The idea of something homelike and formerly known turning into something unknown and frightening lies at the center of Lynch’s filmic project. Still, this does not entirely explain the eeriness of many of his films. Eeriness originates from emptiness. In Lynch’s films, long opening shots depict a highway, a living room, a forest, void of figures in the space. The spectator, accustomed to causal narratives in which one event follows another, feels anxiety when confronted with a narrative that refuses this causality. (Fisher, 2016)

This out-of-placeness is usually something that we have inside us, the sense of *Thrownness* that Heidegger describes as the state of *Dasein*, a person being thrown to the world of profane obligations while being depressed with all the weight of being-toward-death. This phenomenon of anxiety is, according to Heidegger, “a fundamental attunement” and connected to the uncanniness of the everyday: “We called the phenomenon of anxiety a fundamental attunement. It brings Dasein before its ownmost thrownness and reveals the uncanniness of everyday, familiar being-in-the-world.” (Heidegger, 2010, p. 327) As these examples demonstrate, art is a way of reaching toward both these aspects of being at once: the material conditions that judge our being in the world and the uncanniness, the arbitrary nature of how we are thrown and what it creates.



Corris, Wales, 2018

This image is from Corris, taken on the morning I was leaving the residency and traveling back home. The small old village was eerie in feeling, but especially in the evenings when it was getting dark and in mornings, when a heavy mist cloaked the town. The funny, and or eerie thing was that when we arrived at the residency and asked the locals if there is often mist in the evening or mornings, they denied it, saying that it hardly ever happened. Nonetheless, it did happen and almost every day.

# ENCHANTMENT/ DISENCHANTMENT

If eerie is the uncanny feeling of unnamable fear, then enchantment is its sister, also escaping complete conceptualization, but instead of paralyzing with anxiety it charms and fascinates. If eerie is the absence, enchantment is presence and participation, “*enchantment* entails a state of wonder, and one of the distinctions of this state is the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement. To be enchanted, then, is to participate in a momentarily immobilizing encounter; it is to be transfixed, spellbound.” (Bennett, 2001, p. 5) Because enchantment includes elements of surprise, acute sensory activity, and intensity, even fear, it can be both pleasurable and disconcerting. It can stir a feeling of unheimlich and uncanny, creating disruption. Enchantment is something that we have, according to a common belief, lost in modern times, but something that we immediately recognize as a feeling that can be caused by natural or cultural sites, fellow beings (human and non-human), art, and so on. Enchantment is the sense of wonder, delight, attraction to something interesting, fascinating, magical and charming. Again, the conception of “tactical re-enchantment” could be used in the context of not using enchantment as an instrument but a possibility to spellbind, open up new perspectives, to create meaning. To approach life in a meaningful way, and to do it consciously. Enchantment is not an anti-thesis of reason but another way of reasoning or reconstructing reason: “The expulsion of the master identity from the western construction of reason requires not the abandonment of reason itself, but an effort to install another, less hierarchical, more democratic and plural identity in its place” (Plumwood, 2003, p. 189)

If eeriness can be explored through art, so can enchantment. Perhaps, enchantment is what art is about. To be enchanted or to be able to share a moment of enchantment. To me, art and enchantment are inseparable. I vividly remem-

ber the first time I was enchanted by an artwork, and how this enchantment created a sense of larger understanding and meaningfulness. My granddad was a painter, and till the end, he was working on a piece titled *Carnival of Life* (this might have been a working title, and even something I just came up with). The large painting, covering a whole wall in the flat in which my grandfather was living with his partner, presented in bright colors, a lifespan of a person from childhood to old age to death. It was earth-shattering to comprehend this all at once - it made me understand, even if it took time and many questions to my mother, that all these events are part of a singular human life, that they will happen to everyone, and that they happen as the world keeps going around us. There is no uniqueness in living or dying, our lives are remarkable while they happens, but, in the long run, it is a small story that can be fitted onto a single canvas. The fact that life is not unique does not mean that it is not meaningful, even if sometimes uniqueness is prized – life not being unique makes it shareable.

Being enchanted motivates me as a curator and an artist. I want to share places that enchant me with artists, and in the projects I present, I hope these places, together with thematic premises, take forms that allow the audience to experience enchantment, helping them to narrate and explore this experience. The project *How to Life* is about the experience itself, not so much about mediating enchantment, or studying it, but marking sites where it happens. It is about trying to remain open to the experience of enchantment without enclosing it with articulation. This method, I believe, helps to fight the unwanted nostalgia that often comes with enchantment.

This is especially the case with the common idea of the disenchantment of the modern age which is almost impossible to explore without becoming entangled with the concept of nostalgia. The disenchantment tale is a story of loss, echoing the fall from Eden (see i.e. *Primate Visions* (Haraway, 1989) & *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (Bennett, 2001), sustaining a longing for the old days. And even then, there seems to be a consensus that the present is disenchanted;

...disenchantment is sometimes decried as the destruction of a golden age when the world was a home, sometimes celebrated as the end of a dark age and the dawn of a world of human freedom and rational agency, and sometimes presented as a mixed blessing. But, in each of



these cases, it is agreed that disenchantment describes the contemporary condition. (Bennett, 2001, p. 33)

We have been convinced that artificial culture has separated us from enchanted nature. However, writers like Bennet and Latour prove that neither nature nor culture exists in pure form and that enchantment, "as an uneasy combination of charm and disturbance" is not something eternally lost. (Bennett, 2001, p. 104) This story of modernity as disenchanted offers an image of the world as a cold and desperate place. Bennet proposes that the problem of disenchantment is related to the question of ethics, so she questions the idea of modernity as a disenchanted

...place of dearth and alienation (when compared to a golden age of community and cosmological coherency) or a place of reason, freedom, and control (when compared to a dark and confused premodernity). For me the question is not whether disenchantment is regrettable or a progressive historical development. It is, rather, whether the very characterization of the world as disenchanted ignores and then discourages affective attachment to that world. The question is important because the mood of enchantment may be valuable for ethical life. (Bennett, 2001, p. 3)

Enchantment occurs between material and immaterial conditions, between control and the uncontrollable, and it can increase a sense of attachment to the world. *Touristes Tristes* is an artist duo comprised of Océane Bruel and Dylan Ray Arnold. They create atmospheric installations from objects that are found, sculpted and collected. The works are about travelling, exploring, finding, and sharing – attaching our being to places with small gestures and objects. The corporeality of travelling and embodied longing and belonging are in continuous dialogue (Bruel and Arnold, 2016). The installations are serious, but they are also funny (like the official looking sticker stating that "Life is best under your seat"). In the works, enchantment becomes a fundamentally shared experience. Their work can be used as an example of how art can strengthen the feeling of ethical responsibility. Combining different elements of experience – spatiality, materiality, immateriality in addition to sensual dimensions, art has the capac-

ity to enchant and can also guide our perception. One needs time to become enchanted. Enchantment can happen by accident, very suddenly, but it can also be fostered, used as a strategy, “Enchantment is something that we encounter, that hits us, but it is also a comportment that can be fostered through deliberate strategies.” (Bennett, 2001, p. 4) Art punctures the ordinary flow of time and allows us to stop for a moment and become enchanted. As a phenomenon this resembles the Aboriginal conception of shimmer, or brilliance, a term that can be used in the context of art but is not limited to it. Shimmer is motion and, according to Deborah Bird Rose, “allows you, or brings you, into the experience of being part of a vibrant and vibrating world.” This experience is not only about aesthetics or visual joy, but about how “one becomes more knowledgeable.” (Rose, 2017, pp. 53–54)

Art can also combine components of enchantment and disenchantment. In the first *Pori Biennial* in 2014 (Porin kulttuurisäätiö et al., 2014) the theme was utopia, dystopia, and urban space. Cities and urban spaces are often considered thoroughly modern, and hence lacking the possibility of enchantment. However, this is often not the case, and art can help to mark and point out possibly (re)enchanting characters: odd, beautiful, sublime elements and experiences in our everyday environments. They are not always the most obvious ones but can be found in the weirdest of places. Two works in the biennial explored this collision of atmospheres and places. Photographer Emma Suominen's video *Lilli in a Swimming Pool* (Suominen, 2007) presented a dreamlike image in which a young woman is floating in turquoise water. The video was installed in in the city bureau in Porina, where it offered a surprising break among the official workers, papers, and Kafkaesque decision making processes. Artist duo Nabb + Teeri's work *The Drowned Giant* (nabb+teeri, 2014) was a site-specific installation taking over a giant ship in a scrapyard, combining multiple elements of modern times: efficient machinery, waste, work, left-over materiality. Entering the ship and one felt as if one were entering childhood games and plays. The work allowed viewers to explore an old ship and artwork, but also implied what had taken place on the ship, what might have occurred on the ship. Viewers might also imagine life as a captain, or perhaps even a pirate or marine biologist. The work opened up an endless amount of options, windows to different realities.



Shimmering Corris woods and being lost

I got lost in Corris, ended up in this forest and encountered these trees. I experienced them as so remarkable that I found it hard to believe they were real. Modern times have sometimes been said to be a time of disenchantment, a time when rationalism has made magic disappear. It is also believed that art can bring magic back. This was very concretely proven to be true in 2020 when many of the projects in process were realized online instead of as material events. It seemed like some essential element of art was lost. Magic. And with magic, perhaps hope was lost too. Art can enchant. In my experience, the moment when art is first initiated and planned collectively before coming into being is magical. But art can also direct attention to things found magical, built urban environments or natural landscapes, small items and large entities. It can make us see the magic around us that might be otherwise missed or considered ordinary.

# ENLIGHTENMENT

The second reason has to do with some of the very worst things about the term's Enlightenment legacy. The term appeals to a false universal of homogeneous "Man," which was created with a white, Christian, heterosexual male person as the basis for the universal. Paying attention to that legacy can help us to figure out what's happening on the planet. It allows us to ask, for example, why so many landscape modification projects were made without thinking at all about what their effects might be on the people who live around them as well as local ecologies. That problematic legacy can help us focus in on the uneven, unequal features of planetary environmental issues. (Mitman, 2019)

The enlightenment is often understood to have resulted in unbalanced power relations, human-centric worldviews and the overall disenchantment of the modern era. The enlightenment was a historical period spanning between the 17th and 18th centuries, marked by the predominance of rationality and instrumental reason. Enlightenment thought is intimately related to the control and categorization of the world. All that is eerie, unexplainable and enchanted is deemed irrational and therefore lacking. Enlightenment, progress and rationalization have made the (white, western) world as it is today. In many ways, this progress orientated world order has its benefits. We live longer, there is less suffering, less starvation, more knowledge (depending on how you measure it, indigenous knowledges have been lost due to violent processes of colonialization). Nonetheless, the long singular life can be an alienating one. As Val Plumwood contends, referring to Susan Bordo's analysis of Cartesian philosophy and the idea that "mechanism must be understood as a flight from a female cosmos"

While Bordo's thesis of the birth of a separate human identity with the Enlightenment need not be entirely abandoned, it requires, I

shall argue, major modification. The Enlightenment period does involve a major intensification of the domination of nature, just as our own period involves a major intensification of the instrumentalisation of biological life, but the essential ingredients of alienated identity are already present in a major way and as major themes in pre-Enlightenment thought. (Plumwood, 2003, pp. 74–75)

The Enlightenment has been much criticized for the disenchanting effect it has had on human life and society at large. This disenchantment is intimately connected to processes of alienation and whether life is perceived as meaningful or not. While alienation is emptiness, enchantment is about fullness and connectedness;

Enchantment is a feeling of being connected in an affirmative way to existence; it is to be under the momentary impression that the natural and cultural worlds *offer gifts* and, on so doing, remind us that it is good to be alive. The sense of fullness – what the Epicureans talked about in terms of ataraxy (contentment with existence) – encourages the finite human animal, in turn, to give away some of its own time and effort on behalf of other creatures. (Bennett, 2001, p. 156)

Even if Enlightenment and rationalism are not the same thing, they do share similar attributes and determinations. The Enlightenment's valorization of rationalism and reason meant that the unknown was perceived as threatening to this order. At the helm of the enlightenment project was a well-educated and reasonable individual. That which was deemed obscure and indeterminate was effectively banished. In the process, relationality was severely compromised, especially with the unmeasured appreciation of individual autonomy and accompanying relentless competition. In this process, relationality, its entanglements and symbioses, were stripped of their value. Only recently has the extent of this project and order been reckoned with. As the enlightenment in Europe tried to banish "irrational and archaic" monsters, it created even worse beasts;

But the forms of progress and rationalization that the Enlightenment and Reformation sparked have proved far scarier than the

beasts they sought to banish. For later thinkers, rationalization meant individualization, the creation of distinct and alienated individuals, human and nonhuman. The landscape-making practices that followed from these new figures imagined the world as a space filled with autonomous entities and separable kinds, ones that could be easily aligned with capitalist fantasies of endless growth from alienated labor. (Tsing *et al.*, 2017, p. M6)

In *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (2017), writers from various fields list harmful phenomena caused by humans, often catalyzed by rationalism and Enlightenment thought – and not only causes but cures. How can we live on this damaged planet? What does it take? Perhaps, art can attend to this dire situation by simply noticing and paying attention, “Living in time of planetary catastrophe thus begins with a practice at once humble and difficult: noticing the world around us.” (Tsing *et al.*, 2017, pp. 4–8) And, as the text continues: “The rigid segregation of the humanities and natural sciences was an ideology for modern man’s conquest, but it is a poor tool for collaborative survival. Co-species survival requires the art of imagination as much as scientific specification. (Tsing *et al.*, 2017, pp. 4–8) The hierarchical, dualistic structure of dominant western thinking leads to oppression and discrimination, but also to the denial of continuity and the dependent nature of our being. Even if the history of dualistic thinking is long, Plumwood dates the shift in how human-nature relationships have been considered to the modern, post-enlightenment era: “Thus dualisms such as reason/nature may be ancient, but others such as human/nature and subject/object are associated especially with modern, post-enlightenment consciousness.” (Plumwood, 2003, p. 42)

Art cannot force us to pay attention to the world. It is not a remedy or a cure for the current global situation, but it can help us begin to take notice of the conditions under which we live. Art can guide our perception and reorient us, it can encourage us to notice the world around us. In the essay “What is Enlightenment” (2003), Foucault studies Kant’s impact on philosophical thought and the relationship between the Enlightenment, authority and reason. He defines enlightenment by a modification to the preexisting relation which links “will, authority, and the use of reason.” (Foucault, 2003, p. 45) The problem with the process is, not so much the possible disenchantment of the world, or the

proposed mechanistic worldview, but how the ideas the enlightenment included from happiness to sovereignty of reason and the systematization of knowledge was also a process of segregation, producing hierarchical categories, and universalization of knowledge. The result is, as Plumwood argues, the western model where the concept of a human is based on exclusion, “a model of domination and transcendence of nature, in which freedom and virtue are construed in terms of control over, and distance from, the sphere of nature, necessity and the feminine.” (Plumwood, 2003, p. 23) The taxonomic classification system is not only exclusive, but also impossible. In her book *Symbiotic Planet* (1998), Lynn Margulis presents all life as symbiotic interaction and living organisms as escaping precise classification: “Living beings defy neat definition. They fight, they feed, they dance, they mate, they die. At the base of the creativity of all large familiar forms of life, symbiosis generates novelty.” (Margulis, 1998, p. 9)

The aim here is not to create a comprehensive review of enlightenment thought, nor simply a critique of it, but rather, to contemplate its effects in the context of enchantment, eco feminism and contemporary art. According to Bennet, ultimately, the enlightenment did not succeed in destroying our capacity to be enchanted. Modern enchantment can be found in different places and moments that we find enlivening and meaningful. Art can help to find and create these moments, or what Bennett calls “minor experiences of wonder.” (Bennett, 2001, p. 172) Also noteworthy when exploring the relationship between art and enlightenment thinking, is how the instrumentalization of art continues the process initiated by the Age of Enlightenment. This relationship is related to authority, especially, for example, in some of the art projects realized in “bad neighborhoods” or with underprivileged demographics. In these dynamics, artists and curators often harbor only half-hidden intentions of cultivating a particular sensibility, which is itself often a conduit for order and discipline, even when the articulated goal is something else entirely.



Hasnan Habib: *I Will Not*, 2016

Above picture is from *Space Invaders IV – Heterotopia* and presents Hasnan Habib in the process of making his piece *I Will Not* (Habib, 2016). In the work, created on the chalkboard in an old classroom, the artist considers cultural norms and established pedagogy, especially rote learning, a technique that has been widely used in the mastery of foundational knowledge. In the work description he states that “In “*I Will Not*”, the artist attempts to use this method to learn certain things (despite claims of ineffectiveness).”

The relationship between art and enlightenment can be defined as dichotomous: art has been used as a tool for enlightenment and education, a way of disseminating the virtues of rational thinking, but it can also act as antithetical to this rational impulse. It can function as a sphere of enchantment and magic.



# EXHIBITION

If art as a concept refers to a large diversity of different even disturbing things (objects, acts, gestures), and artworks can be confusing and not even recognized as art, the exhibition as a framework could be understood as the rationalized form of art. Especially in an institutional context the setting of an exhibition is understood when entering it. The possibly eerie and/or enchanting event of art formalized and conceptualized into a form that can be easily understood and used for multiple purposes: aesthetic, financial and educational for example. Exhibition is a name given to a certain convention, and through naming it has been organized, controlled, and tamed. This educational aspect is especially important, and even somewhat problematic, considering the contemporary discussion. The exhibition has been a place for cultivating a population, increasing spirits with aesthetic awareness and distributing knowledge. In this process, collections often based on colonization and exploitation, have played a major role in the pedagogical process. Exhibitions have played a role in creating national identities and celebrating nations and their virtues. At the same time, the exhibition has become a tradition where art exists for its own sake, not for religious purposes, and is clearly separated from crafts.

When it comes to modern visual arts it is difficult to think about the concept of “art” without the concept of “the exhibition.” Publicly presented, manufactured and/or collected art objects have served as the definition of art, as, for example, Arthur Danto and George Dickie have suggested in their institutional theory of art. Art becomes art when it is presented in the context of art and therefore, perceived as art. The artworld plays a crucial role in this establishment. Essentially, Warhol’s *Brillo boxes* are art because the work has an audience which understands it via a certain theory (to use Danto’s term) of what art can be. The artworld (comprised of critics, curators, collectors, dealers) plays a part in which theories are embraced or snubbed. As Danto surmises, “To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld.” This idea, later

expanded upon by the philosopher George Dickie, is also popularly known as the institutional theory of art. The question lingering in the background is how and why these so-called theories change and develop over time.” (Morgan and Purje, 2015) The exhibition is a convention, but it has potential to be more than that. As curator Gabi Ngcobo contends in the 10th Berlin Biennale catalog;

But I think it’s something we always have to think about - how to disrupt what we ‘know.’ I think we can treat the word ‘exhibition’ as a convenience. It’s an exhibition because we do it within the convenience of the term ‘exhibition.’ But I think the question of how to disrupt the form of an exhibition, how to make it unfamiliar, should never leave us. (Ngcobo *et al.*, 2018)

When I started working in the field of art, I was a young painter and quite unaware of other forms of practicing art, other than holding an annual exhibition where I would present what I had produced under a title referring to my interests or what I was studying that time - even if ‘studying’ back then was probably not in my vocabulary when describing my practice. I could not really think of artistic practice outside of exhibiting. I considered a career as an artist as defined by moving from smaller galleries to bigger ones, and then finally one day, to museums. After a couple of shows, I decided that this was not how I was going to work for the rest of my life, being exploited by gallerists, overly dependent on market sensibilities and stuck in a dysfunctional system. I wanted my practice to be more than just hanging pictures on white walls. This is not to imply that there is no value in gallery exhibitions and white walls with pictures, just that I started questioning the conventions that felt exclusive, hierarchical, and discriminating. While my personal relationship with the concept of the exhibition has changed so has general understandings of the form shifted. Already in 1971, Wim Beeren wrote that, “It is evident that the term exhibition is only partly relevant. We have turned to the word ‘manifestation’ and subsequently to ‘activity.’ – the turn from product to process had begun.” (Beeren, 2009, p. 193) However, the question is not as straightforward as one might think. An exhibition still has virtues that events, talks and other encounters, perhaps looser in form, do not:

...how the feminist strategies that the programme explored might pose challenges to traditional curatorial practice. One of the most obvious ways it might do this is to put the stress on relational and durational events, like the ones that comprised the programme. Though I sometimes worry about the trend in curatorial practice towards curators who don't curate exhibitions any more, but organize events in the gallery instead... Absolutely. I sometimes worry about the politics of this so-called discursive or pedagogical turn in curating. As much as I find these temporary events rich and meaningful spaces for conversation, they don't always produce the same historical records that traditional exhibitions do. Exhibitions leave behind more substantial traces, such as catalogues, that can be vital for transmitting feminist practices and modes of thinking across generations and audiences. As problematic as the "blockbuster" survey exhibitions of feminism oft en are, such as *elles@pompidou* in Paris or the touring *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, these shows produce lasting documents. If we want to build a lineage of feminist research and citation, these public exhibitions would seem to play an important role in making that possible. (Moser and Reckitt, 2016, pp. 45–46)

From the outset, Porin kulttuurisäätiö have tried to utilize the exhibition as a platform to study things and to enable public discourse, to search for alternative ways of working and mediating our practice. The exhibition is still the most visible form of how we work. Of course, how we consider "exhibitions," how we make and offer them varies. We have also, from the beginning, considered documentation and mediation, the notion of leaving a mark and historical record as important, even in the context of durational events. We have, instead of month-long installation of works in an already existing art venues, emphasized the importance of compelling locations, durational works, and short-term events. The shorter period allows us to be present throughout the exhibition, which provides us with valuable information about visitors and their perceptions, in addition to information about the site and its history. The long-term work often happens before the event, when we collect materials, write texts and create the catalogues. The timespan also makes it possible for us to stay excited about the event and encounters with the public until the end of it. The exhibi-

tion is not the end of a project but the beginning, or a turning point. The works and the themes continue their lives in the minds of the visitors. The encounters might lead to new projects, as well as ideas and thinking developed during the event. How I understand the very concept of “the exhibition” has changed. I no longer assume that the exhibition is a point of completion. Rather, I understand it as just one part of the process of thinking, exploring and discovering. To act is to think, and even within a process-based practice, the exhibition is a way of formulating these thoughts, a way of sharing them. The exhibition is a turning point where ideas and thoughts are shared and where they will begin a new life in the mind’s of spectators. It is clear, then, that what happens in the white cube is not the only relevant and shareable part of the art practice.

#### A. EVENT

In my practice and thinking, instead of an exhibition, event often feels like a more appropriate term. 'Event' seems a suitable concept for process-based practice, but is also closer to how I see art in process, as something that happens in time – it happens when it is created, it occurs in a certain time and space and it happens when perceived, between the event of the artwork and the spectator. Event refers to the exhibition as a work of art, instead of thinking about exhibition as a platform for exhibiting artworks. Especially in short-term projects, the ephemeral nature of the event is emphasized. The exhibition is no longer something that permanently or semi-permanently exists in a single place where one can visit and revisit. The temporality, the knowledge that it is about here and now and is soon forever gone affects the experience. It becomes a unique event, something that cannot be recreated, which can also create a slight sense of nostalgia, a sense of losing something that was just found.

The term 'exhibition' is historically loaded and can be considered problematic. As Suzi Gablik writes in *Mapping the Terrain*, “Many artists now refuse the notion of a completely narcissistic exhibition practice as the desirable goal for art.” (Gablik, 1995, p. 75) Even if there is still value in the concept of an exhibition, not all consider it as a completely redundant format, it is, however, a form that can be reconsidered and has much to offer, both for those making exhibitions and those visiting them. Sansi notes how, in the classical conception of art, the artist would “produce distinct works (paintings, etc.), the collection

of work would constitute his or her oeuvre – the ‘body’ of his/her work”, but how today many, instead of finished objects artists have or produce “projects”, events and performances, that remain open and produce documents, archives, and material for future projects.” (Sansi, 2015, p. 119)

The concept of the ‘event’ also carries with it a romantic connotation. Unlike an exhibition, which involves a certain amount of permanence, an event implies its own disappearance. An event is a shared moment soon to be gone, a meaningful moment to be remembered. An event sounds like something worth waiting for, a party, a festival, art happening or a gig – a moment of joy and madness, intoxication of transience. An event can be a platform for subversive acts, an interruption or a trap, which can be observed as a feminist method. *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* presents tools for reconfiguring gender potential and reimagining emancipatory potential of feminism. XF discusses possible tools and possibilities for engineered platforms that aim for social emancipation and endeavors: “Xenofeminism endeavours to face up to these obligations as collective agents capable of transitioning between multiple levels of political, material and conceptual organization.” (Laboria Cuboniks, 2019)

## B. BIENNIAL

For me, the Venice Biennale is sort of like what Stonehenge might have been—a cult centre to playtest emerging forms of oppression, excess, and hierarchy; a cult of the accursed share. In Stonehenge you might find pig bones—in Venice you will find plastic sticks to impale olives for spritzes. This kind of applied ritual is more important than the superficial pagan gloss that artworks might display. It's the infrastructure itself that is partly occult. (Zefkili and Steyerl, 2019)

A biennial is an event or exhibition that takes place every second year. It is generally large-scale (even if it is smaller in scale, the title itself implies grandiosity) and comprises of a series of international group shows. The curator's role is critical in its organization, management and presentation.

Typically, the format of the biennial produces a dialogue between the local and the global. For example, The Venice Biennial, mother of all biennials, presents national pavilions with national representatives, all in the context of

the hyper locality of Venice. The international art world. artists, tourists, curators and spectators come together from all over the world to the small, sinking island where the global cultural industry jostles up against the consequences of globalization and the environmental crisis. In addition, locals often harbor mixed feelings towards the biennial. Lisa Rosendahl, who presents contemporary biennials as polyvocal, non-linear and mobile, in opposition of the immobile and timeless museums, writes:

Although the contemporary art biennial's global outlook could be compared to the ambition of nineteenth and twentieth century museums and world fair exhibitions to 'make the whole world available' – and indeed the first art biennial, in Venice, whose history goes back to 1895, still maintains such ambitions – it does not order its diverse content under one totalizing frame, at least not spatially. And even though the logic of the biennial still hinges, like the archeological and ethnographic museum, on the representation of otherness – the otherness of art, the otherness of art from elsewhere, the otherness of alternative histories, the otherness of subjects not usually represented in public space, and so on – this otherness is not framed as subordinate to the hegemonic gaze, but rather as a potential form of resistance to it. (Rosendahl, Lisa, 2022, p. 21–22)

From these mega exhibitions a biennial can be a small event in a small town, an experimental artwork itself, or even a set of practices happening under one title, like *OSLOBIENNALEN FIRST EDITION 2019–2024* proved. The time span, 2019–2024, changed the time assumption of a biennial: instead of a two-year cycle, the biennial was cyclical through its duration. It was changed and installed periodically, so it played with the expected coherence of a biennial as the public coming to Oslo during different periods experienced all different biennials. The set of works were changing in order for the biennial to develop and evolve;

*OSLOBIENNALEN* is launching a second set of projects on Friday October 18 2019, another manifestation of its policy of stretching the conventional biennial timeframe to allow projects to unfold over-time. New works will appear, while others presented at the opening

in May continue, evolve, relocate and develop. Some works will pause momentarily pending the next phase or episode. Works that have been completed are documented and some are being re-released in book form. Others might remain indefinitely. In this way, works of art can pass through different stages of development, evolution and display within a single framework. (*October 2019. osloBIENNALEN first edition 2019-2024*, 2019, p. 7)

In Oslo, the idea was to emphasize the local and instead of exhibiting works that had already toured half the world and been seen by most of the biennial audiences, the works were site-specific and positioned in relation to the place, even emerging from it. The biennial reconsidered not only the idea of a biennial but also public art, and it was launched by the city's Agency for Cultural Affairs. Instead of the usual international art audience, the biennial was aimed for locals, passers-by, regional spectators, accidental encounters. Many of the biennials today use the city as an active part of the exhibition, instead of it just being the stage or the platform upon which it unfolds. They also often take their public to unexpected locations. *OsloBIENNALEN* took this method even further, to a degree where it was difficult to see where the biennial ended and the city started, both in terms of time and space. This does challenge the audience, though not always in rewarding ways. At times, the biennial seemed like an ungraspable entity, slipping through one's fingers and leaving only sentiments of deconstruction behind.

"Biennial," as both a name and a concept evokes certain kinds of hopes, fears and expectations. These presuppositions can be used to play with the idea, and form of the biennial to question, but not meeting them can produce frustration, anger, or off-kilter interpretations. When Porin kulttuurisäätiö launched its first Pori Biennale in 2014, it was meant to be a total work of art that would study the concept and nature of biennials and mega exhibitions. We wanted to explore if it was possible to create a sense of a large-scale show with little resources. We considered the elements that made an exhibition or event feel convincing and impressive. With €4000 we created a biennial spread around the city. We included a large, international group of artists, showed spectacular works of art, such as an old shipwreck that Nabb+Teeri used in their installation. We printed a biennial map, and perhaps most of all importantly,

we produced t-shirts and other merchandise. The biennial became more credible than we ever imagined it to be, and we started to consider it to be too useful of a platform not to be used in the future.

Through the concept of the biennial, we have been able to explore tensions between local and global, center and periphery – themes I consider to be in the core of artistic practice today but also relevant, considering the challenges of living in common being in a globalized world. Questions of inclusion and exclusion come to the fore too, as critic and writer Jan Verwoert shows in his article “Forget the National: Perform the International in the Key of the Local (and vice versa)” (2007). Verwoert suggests shifting emphasis from the question of what a biennial represents to how it represents;

Symptomatically, most local conflicts over biennials do erupt around issues of representation, that is, around the question of how and by whom the cultural scene of the local host city is represented in the exhibition, and if this representation is adequate. There is no denying that the promise of international recognition which a biennial automatically generates puts the question of inclusion and exclusion onto the agenda. No matter then how respectful curators may proceed; the universal promise of representation which any biennial generates by itself can never be universally fulfilled and is therefore bound to provoke mixed feelings or animosities somewhere along the way. (Verwoert, Jan, 2007, pp. 216–217)

These questions of inclusion and exclusion puncture the whole phenomena of an exhibition, from decisions made by artists to the artworks to the venues. The curator’s responsibility to manage this process is unavoidable. A biennial, or any other exhibition, is a social space with multiple social relations and power structures.

### C. “LOW THRESHOLD ART”

While studying in Pori, the aim, both for me and the program, was to combine art and theory. This occurred through interventions in both public and semi-public places. These acts, events, and disruptions were often short-lived



and executed with finite resources, and with little planning beforehand. Our professor Harri Laakso started calling this kind of practice “matalankynnyksen taiteeksi”, “low-threshold art”. I still don't know if it was a joke or not, if it meant low threshold for the makers or the public, but it has proven to be a useful concept. Art and particularly exhibitions have an aura of nobleness. Art is serious business, for the artist, the gallerist, the theorist and the audience. This expectation for an exalted experience through art risks restricting that very experience, and also who is it considered to be for. What are the terms for making art? It was astonishing to realize that art can be made without a studio, without a gallery, and without a gallerist who makes you feel worthless. It was striking to realize how people reacted to things happening in their everyday lives. Low threshold art does not at all mean that the art was simple, or that it was aimed at everyone to understand or accept. Quite the opposite, low threshold means freedom to experience, but this experiencing requires courage and trust in one's own doing, but also in those around you. Low threshold art is not meant to decorate the city or to please its inhabitants. Rather, it is meant to bring about change, so that this change can provide knowledge, however unconventional that knowledge might be.

The low threshold approach has constituted our practice. Being able to make things happen in variable locations with little, or no money, using existing resources, and collaborative methods has been one of the cornerstones of what we do. This way of working is, however, all consuming, and years have shown us the negative sides of this independent and flexible mode of working. When *ANTI – Contemporary Art Festival* announced their theme for their 20th anniversary festival, I could not help but find it a bit ironic. The festival, organized in a smallish town like Pori, is also largely based on collaborations, aiming to create new platforms for art and encounters, making art available for new publics and produce committed and meaningful temporary or permanent collectives. Knowing the challenges in this kind of practice then, the theme, “gifts and giving,” made me smile for multiple reasons. Art, especially art in public places, and particularly these kinds of low threshold initiatives, are a gift to the community. Often the giver of the gift receives a great deal, but at times, the act of giving seems more consuming than rewarding.

In Pori, a small town with close-knit circles, the artist community is small and strong-willed. Many excellent things have emerged from the unique collab-

orations between different genres and from the alternative, non-hierarchical approach. Unfortunately, the lack of resources and funding means that the continuity of collectives or initiatives is always at stake and, in the long run, this erodes the motivation to produce projects. There is an inside joke, that is hardly a joke after people have been working in the field for years, that your work is paid with debt of honor. Not everyone is willing to work for this which leads to the small circle becoming even smaller. The smaller the circles become the less new blood with new ideas there is. This is also related to regional politics and decreasing art education in the area, but the working culture does have an impact. In our collectives, we have aimed at paying the artist and combining open and independent low threshold art with sustainable work culture. Still, without unpaid labor, our work wouldn't exist, and we would have never been able to create the initial events that marked the beginning of our practice.

#### D. SAATANAN KESÄNÄYTTELY/ THE BLOODY SUMMER EXHIBITION

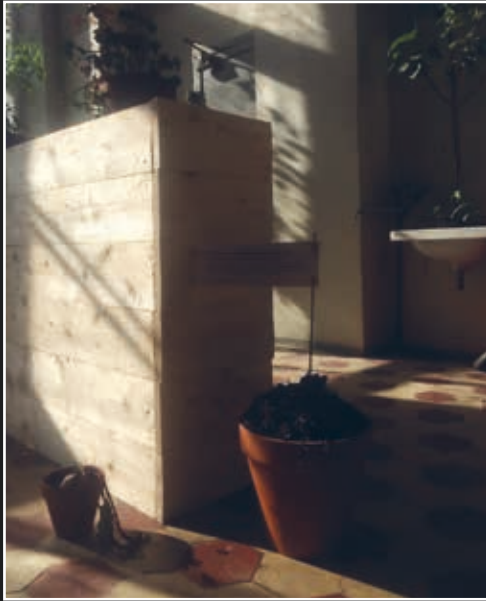
As *Pori World Expo* (2015) had its origin in the first *Pori Biennial* (2014), the idea for second Pori Biennial was created in the opening of the Pori World Expo. Porin kulttuurisäättö collective, today an association, started as a comment and counter-movement to a culture of summer exhibitions in Finland. Instead of easily approachable, nice, pretty, and most of all, sellable art, we wanted to make research-based, challenging, and new contemporary art visible. After three shows like this, we decided that we should do our own “bloody summer exhibition”, “saatanan kesänäyttely” that would imitate the traditional formula of a smaller town rural art exhibition. Later I have been thinking if the name jinxed the project, or if some projects are just more difficult than others. (Porin kulttuurisäättö *et al.*, 2016)

Nothing in the process for this particular exhibition seemed to flow, as it had so far with the collective. Eliisa Suvanto, Anni Venäläinen, and I all had full-time jobs and multiple other projects on the go. The exhibition plan we were working on was too large in scale, considering the situation. We were aiming to build, once again, a *gesamtkunstwerk* that would form a combination of an amusement park – a nostalgic image of the Finnish summer and an exaggerated version of a traditional summer exhibition.

We were searching for a location that would resonate with the summer exhibition tradition and resemble those sites traditionally used for summer exhibitions – we were looking for a site with a rural aesthetic, perhaps a picturesque wooden house. Nearby to the University Consortium in Pori is an empty, wooden factory building owned by Sampo-Rosenlew, a large company that owns most of the area and its buildings. The old two-floored wooden factory was surrounded by a beautiful yard and was next to Kokemäki river. Even though it was in a dilapidated condition, we started discussing the possibility to using it for the exhibition. The idea was that the deal would benefit both us and the company: we would get to use the space and they would get more visibility for it and hopefully find a long-term use for the beautiful building, now on the verge of collapse. After months of discussion, the company withdrew from the deal, and the factory is still standing on the riverbank, sad and empty.

The group of artists we had curated was competent, but many were going through personal difficulty in their lives or collectives that we could not have foreseen. As always, ideas kept evolving and changing, but this time to the degree where we invested time, money and resources on goods that were eventually not needed. We waited for artists who did not show up to install their works as decided. On top of this, our own collective was going through a rough patch with issues of mistrust and differing interests.

The show did not turn out as the *gesamtkunstwerk* we had hoped. We needed to adjust many of the expectations and hopes along the way, but it did become a beautiful exhibition with excellent works. It was also a turning point in our practice, as it got more media attention and visitors who came, especially for the show, not only accidentally but because they happened to be there. For me, the show still operates as a learning process: how to adjust one's expectations, ideas, ambitions, and hopes to the prevailing situation? And how to appreciate the outcome that is obviously good and valid, but not what was aimed for? I am still struggling with acceptance, even if the process was exactly what our practice is about, maybe in the purest possible way: to begin with a research question and then let the process guide you. Openness, mistakes, failures and not being able to control everything are much easier to handle on paper than in practice.



Erno-Erik Raitanen: *The Garden of Death*  
at *The Bloody Summer Exhibition* (2016). Detail.

This is a detail from Erno-Erik Raitanen's work, *The Garden of Death at The Bloody Summer Exhibition* (Raitanen, 2016). The work perfectly captures the temporal and site-specific nature of our practice. The piece was created for this exhibition and for this specific place, old generator room, and it was not meant to last. The work, like the exhibition, and like all the Porin kulttuurisäättö and Space Invaders events, could actually be interpreted as a practice between an exhibition and live art. They are stages of events that can be artworks as objects or sounds but also performances, or the combination of the works, the site and theme, creating a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The event-like nature of the practice establishes requirements for the mediations, promotion and documentation of the process, but it also creates freedom in a way that surpasses the limitations of a traditional exhibition.

# EVERYDAY

The everyday refers to the commonplace, continuation, and the repetitive nature of our ordinary life. There is an embedded expectation of repetition and lack of surprising elements in the concept of the everyday.

The repetitive nature of the everyday can be interrupted in a number of ways. We have traditions, rituals, and festivals to break the flow. Even the concept of an exhibition can, albeit a question of a professional artist or museum worker who works with art daily, be understood as opposite to everyday. The everyday passes without one paying much attention. It necessarily goes by unnoticed in a flow of routines, familiar places and tasks. An exhibition is a pause in this flow, it is encountered with respect, or sometimes suspicion, a solemn event with its own expectations and rituals, often taking place in a sacred space dedicated to this specific purpose. But what if the everyday and the exhibition, or maybe more likely, art as an event, become entangled? We often ask the question, “*is it art or if it is life?*” But are they indeed opposite spheres? Can the everyday be art, or art the everydayness, as the *How to Life* (Coyotzi Borja and Jensen, 2018) project ponders?

As a concept, the everyday bears similarities to the suburb – both evoke strong feelings of recognition, vivid images of familiarity, and yet they mean very different things to different people. The everyday is ordinary, but the ordinariness is haunted with strangeness, it is spatial and relative, even repetitive, which makes it vulnerable to changes and transitions. These attributes are present in Michel de Certeau’s study where the everyday is a complex network of ordinariness and strangeness, visible elements and blindness, experience and knowledge, created by walkers “whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it.” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 93) Everyone is involved in the production of the everyday but the structures, methods, and outcomes often remain invisible. What is meant by everyday can be studied by disrupting its normal flow. In the context of art, this can be done with interventions, “unexpected collisions of art and everyday life” (Jensen,

Rajanti and Ziegler, 2018, p. 11), as we demonstrated in the *Intervention to Urban Space* book;

In the context of art, intervention means a site and time-specific act or artwork that breaks from the traditional framework of displaying art. At the same time, it addresses existing space or situation and possibly some other existing work of art. An intervention thus simultaneously poses questions concerning the making of art and its authorship and the space or situation at which the intervention itself is aimed. While interacting with architecture, activism and urbanism, intervention also has an active and challenging relationship with the history of art and its different genres such as performance and conceptual art. Artistic intervention also challenges spectators by injecting something new and surprising into the familiar and existing. Intervention is a challenge to confront the unknown. (Jensen, Rajanti and Ziegler, 2018, p. 27).

Confronting the unknown and the strange can allow us to see the homelike and the common and how they are produced and maintained.

The image of everyday life does not emerge naturally, it is produced through a project of naturalizing. We quite carelessly use the concept of the everyday without even considering what it means, especially what it makes and what it is made of. Everyday life is a set of repetitive networks of practices, from work to human relations to care, and involves a constant demarcation of what is strange and what is familiar. And even the most familiar home is just a domesticated and appropriated version of a strange and always interdependent concept. Ahmed, who examines how bodies and orientations are formed through space and time, writes;

If we rethink domestic space as an effect of the histories of domestication, we can begin to understand how 'the home' depends on the appropriation of matter as way of making what is not already familiar or reachable. In other words, the familiar is 'extended' by differentiating itself from the strange, by making what seems strange 'just about' familiar, or by transforming 'what is strange' into an instrument. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 117)

It is sometimes hard to keep in mind that neither the everyday, nor the homelike, nor strange mean the same for different people. Rather, bodies are formed differently and should be expected to adopt different orientations.

## A. HOW TO LIFE BELOW AVERAGE

*How to Life – Lowering your expectations below average* is a project combining art and artistic research by Anna Jensen and Andrea Coyotzi Borja. The project is an ongoing site-specific practice in a constant state of becoming. The project places an opportunity to be present, and be involved with practices, research, and experiences taking diverse forms and mediums within a context focusing on the process, the in-between, and not in an end product. *How To Life Below Average* is about engaging, even before knowing, or defining, what you are engaged to. It is a space allowing thinking without the expectation of a result, without the confinement of the framework which some platforms seem to set upon the practice. *How to Life* is about walking, smoke bombs, T-shirts, avocados and writing and thinking together in different spatial conditions.<sup>42</sup>

The project *How to Life Below Average* is a collaboration between Andrea Coyotzi Borja and I. We have been exploring the everyday together for years, concentrating on the uncanny and infra-ordinary. Our project *How to Life - Lowering Your Expectations Below Average* is an ongoing process, without expectation of an outcome. It is based on the most ordinary everyday practices: walking, mak-

<sup>42</sup>*How to Life - Lowering your expectations below average* is a project started with Andrea Coyotzi Borja while we were working together in Aalto University's Pori Live. Pori Live - innovative collaborative inquiry as a resource for sustainable development of urban space was a multidisciplinary project aiming to build an innovation platform for urban development by gathering, combining and sharing knowledge and information in new ways. The city of Pori was used as a "Living Lab" for the innovation platform. In the joint project by Aalto University, The University of Turku and the City of Pori, information was gathered by research, cultural mapping and artistic projects that happened in the middle of the city and its inhabitants. The project was EU funded and had a lot of regulations and requirements that came to reporting and results. Working within artistic research and concepts like infraordinary and uncanny we were often struggling with these demands: when you work with the uncanny and non conceptualized in the urban space, how do you measure it? What kind of results can you present? We spent hours walking, talking and making guacamole trying to find answers, and this led to *How to Life* starting to formulate. (Coyotzi Borja and Jensen, 2018)

ing guacamole, swimming, writing, toasting bread, all the time being aware of the uncontrollable nature of our being. The project creates an opportunity to be present, to be involved with practices, research, and experiences taking diverse forms and mediums within a context focusing on the process, the in-between, and not on an end product. *How To Life Below Average* is about engaging, even before knowing or defining, what you are engaged to. It is a space allowing thinking without the expectation of a result, without the confinement of the framework which some platforms seem to set upon the practice.

In this sense, *How to Life* is also an act of hospitality, an act of inviting the other into our daily lives: eating, walking, cooking, shopping. It is also a research on the everyday and the uncanniness of it: how we go through the days, weeks, and years in this strange gap between normalcy and the complete lack of understanding our lives, that is shadowed by the idea of having control over them, self-improvement and bettering oneself. We are hampered by this expectation that there is a right and wrong way of living one's life and even making meaning from one's life, but there are very few hints of what the meaning might be. We witness people trying to make everything right, but failing enormously, losing their loved ones or their own lives. We see people doing horrible things and sailing through life like champions. We are expected to play by the rules, even if we know that there is no right or wrong. Everybody around you is cheating, and in the end, you will anyway lose as death comes to everyone.

*How to Life - Lowering our Expectations* is a paradox. We do not know how to live, and when experimenting, we can't really have expectations, so how to lower them? It is, however, about admitting that even when trying to create new, experimental approaches, and being aware that the outcome is out of control, one is always afraid of failure. Failure is present in how we experience the everyday: normalcy feels strange but the strangeness eventually becomes an essential element of the everyday. The choreography of our days, waking up, brushing teeth, boiling water, making coffee, eating breakfast, walking the same routes day after day after day.

The everyday happens in a peculiar crossing of public and private. There is an expectation to do it properly, sleep during the night, wake up in the morning, eat fruit and vegetables. But at the same time, there is a lack of transparency. We are not supposed to stare at other people's shopping baskets. What someone does behind closed curtains is none of our business. Only the doctor is



allowed to ask about our bodily functions. Yet we exist next to each other, living the everyday next to our neighbor, everyday we expect our day to be similar to their day but it's likely that they are completely different. The everyday is a difficult concept as the "every" in it can give an impression that all of us interpret it in the same way, that we all have the same conception of the things that happen regularly such as waking up in the morning, brushing our teeth, having breakfast, going to school or work, then groceries, hobbies, supper, tv, bed. The everyday is normative and exclusive and burdening. All of us working in precarious positions struggle not only with precariousness but also with expectations. The everyday is also a disguise, we hardly ever see what makes up our idea of everyday or, perhaps, what makes up the everyday is so ubiquitous so as to make it invisible. This makes the everyday uncanny: the expected repetitiveness that goes without further contemplation. When something changes and makes us feel uncomfortable, we often have little idea of what has changed.

*How to Life* uses disorientation as a method, which is probably related to the fact that we don't really believe in method. *How to Life* is an antithesis of a method. Sara Ahmed writes about disorientation: "Moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground." ... "Sometimes, disorientation is an ordinary feeling, or even a feeling that comes and goes as we move around during the day. I think we can learn from such ordinary moments." (Ahmed, 2006, p. 157) Ahmed also asks what does it mean to be disoriented, and *How to Life* is an attempt to find out.

*How to Life* is also a joke, but a serious one. It is about laughing in the face of the unknown. It is about the conundrum of knowing how to live life, of mastering it in ways that eventually turn out to be impossible. It reflects on the contemporary neoliberal practice of measuring, improving and controlling the self. It is about capturing moments of failure, but also moments of sublime and uncanny, marking them in intuitively suitable ways that are maybe not rationally explicable. Or even if they were, do we want to rationalize them? The question is how to approach the unknown and how to share, mediate and discuss the unknown if there are no words for it, "Bataille would have called this sovereignty, meaning the mastery of nonmastery, an in this he followed Nietzsche who complained that we don't think sufficiently about the fact that when we explain the unknown we reduce it too quickly to the known." (Taussig, 2006, p. viii). This question concerns art in general: art is (often) thought to be about creating the

new, but the completely new also means that we cannot understand it, which, in turn, means that trying to create the new one always fails. Either, one fails in making the new or one fails in mediating the new. In *How to Life* we emphasize the importance of failing, yet we do not want to fail. *How to Life* has also proven our insurmountable nerdiness. We want to explore chaos and entropy. The craziest thing we can think of doing is making popcorn without the lid (which is, in fact, a good example of entropy and everyday chaos). Still, we haven't even dared to do this. Maybe this is a good example of failure.

## B. NOT-EVERYDAY, NON-KNOWLEDGE

In 2019, while planning a performative presentation at the *Slow Academy* event with *How to Life*, we started to consider the everyday as a marginalizing practice (Coyotzi Borja and Jensen, 2019b). As an artist and as a researcher, one lives a precarious and non-conventional life, where the everyday does not correspond to the expectations of everyday. The book *Queer Phenomenology* (Ahmed, 2006) carefully explains how the world expects certain kinds of orientations and how these orientations are also negotiable.

Orientation is related to intuition, and intuition can be understood as artists' knowledge. This is evident Falke Pisano's statement which contemplates not knowing, making room for intuition and incompleteness;

I think that this probably has something to do with a comfort with incompleteness, with not knowing but being aware that not-knowing can be valuable or present somehow. I think that these gaps - this not knowing - plays a big role in the specificity of artistic research: How to research when you're not knowing, when you're not going to know, when you are going to know a little bit, or when you know just enough to make a work? (Cotter, 2019, p. 64)

In *How to Life*, we want to change the patterns of orientation, or at least observe them carefully. In this sense, *How to Life* is also an invitation - when we are giving presentations we invite the audience to recognize the struggle and confusion of life, art and research, instead of proposing solid solutions. Giving a *How to life* presentation is always a bit scary: it is like jumping headfirst into

potentially shallow water. How to life embraces nonsense as a legitimate kind of sense. We often display memes in the background when we present, so that the audience has corresponding visual material to engage with. There are risks, however. Memes must be selected carefully so that you do not accidentally end up strengthening and maintaining the structures you are trying to deconstruct. My favorite meme is one in which a large snail is glued to a man's glasses. The man has the title Dr. Brian Fisher, California Academy of Science. The caption reads, "DOCTOR FISHER GET OFF THAT MANS FACE YOU'RE A SCIENTIST NOW ACT LIKE ONE."



“How to Life” in *Slow Academy*, 2019

How to Life can be thought of as a “reorientation device” as Sara Ahmed calls it (*Queer Phenomenology*, 2006). In a system of possible actions, we are testing impossible actions. This notion takes us to the everyday, which is one of our main interests, how it is organized, structured and filled with expectations, and how these expectations tend to fail and open gaps that make us feel uncanny. How does the everyday happen, how are we confronted, and how do we approach it? Orientation is related to how we feel at home in the world, and what happens when we don’t feel at home. Where does the notion and idea of belonging falls in with this?

Within the concept of the everyday many factors and outcomes become visible, such as routines and the way in which they form the everyday, an everyday that is supposed to be more or less similar to everyone else. The concept of the everyday can act, at times, as a marginalizing structure. As Ahmed writes: “Objects, as well as spaces, are made for some kinds of bodies more than others” and also “The work of repetition is not neutral work; it orients the body in some ways rather than others.” (2006, p. 51)

Everydayness also considers the nontraditional nature of the work of an artist, or a researcher. Work, family, relationships, living, traveling, routines: wake up, brush your teeth, put on makeup, eat breakfast, go to work.. Reserving “everyday” to able bodies that fill the societal expectations. Working outside the normative/ expectations, one ends up working double shifts: doing one’s work but also explaining it all the time, both to others and often to oneself.

And it is not only the everyday that becomes a problem, but also discussing and mediating it. When your everyday is abnormal and it does not fill the requirement of the concept then there is no vocabulary to discuss this phenomena. All these topics are related to what we study in our research: the uncanny and the infraordinary, both referring to a phenomena of something being out of place.

(Coyotzi Borja and Jensen, 2019b)

# FEMINISM

Feminism is a movement, a riot, an ideology, a discipline and a revolution. It has been with me always, even before I could name it. Before learning to write, I made a punk-inspired song complaining about the fact that all astronauts seemed to be male. I questioned why girls were not allowed to travel space? Of course, female astronauts did exist at this time but my response attests to the importance of representations. When a hero is represented, a white male is presented. That is why “we need more people dedicating their writing, their curating, and their scholarship to feminism, not just once, but as a whole life project/mission every day and in every way. We need more curators living the feminist revolution, not just paying lip service to it.” (Reilly and Perry, 2016, pp. 51–52)

When feminism is regarded in the context of art, it is sometimes simplified and reduced to rethinking the discriminating canon, all-female exhibitions, or other straight-forwardly political acts that often maintain gender essentialism instead of questioning or deconstructing it. *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* claims that “The excess of modesty in feminist agendas of recent decades is not proportionate to the monstrous complexity of our reality”, and demands that not only feminism must be rationalism, but “Rationalism must itself be a feminism.” (Laboria Cuboniks, 2019) The intersectional approach aims to correspond to the complexity of the world. Intersectional feminism, a term first used by American lawyer and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw, regards inequality as a more complex phenomenon, considering not only gender but also class, sexuality, race, abilities and inabilities, among other features affecting one's privileges and/or discrimination. One of the important notions is that we are all privileged compared to some others, while maybe being discriminated against in another situation. Bearing this in mind, feminist work in the art field is much more than just exhibiting more female artists or practices considered “feminine” or even “feminist”.

Prior to and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, feminism has been an oscillating trend in art and much has changed during that time. It has

only been a bit more than over ten years since the canonical feminist exhibitions like *Global Feminisms* (2007 Brooklyn Museum) and *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (a pioneering exhibition on women's art organized in 1976 by Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin shown in multiple venues between 2007 and 2009) but questions of inclusivity and diversity have become much more widely discussed since then. Already then, the focus was no longer on white, western feminism. Maura Reilly highlights this in her essay "Toward Transnational Feminisms" (2007). She writes;

Unlike *Women Artists*, which had the specific goal of reclaiming women lost from the Western historical canon, *Global Feminisms* aims to present a multitude of feminist voices from across cultures. In so doing, the exhibition challenges the, often exclusionary, discourse of contemporary art, which continues to assume that the West is the center and relegates all else to the periphery. Instead, *Global Feminisms* imagines a more inclusive counter-discourse that accounts for, and indeed encourages, cross-cultural differences. (Reilly and Nochlin, 2007, pp. 15–16)

Today the feminist movement within the field of art takes multiple forms, from feminist curating to feminist collectives. Instead of merely representing female art, the focus is on cultivating feminist practice. Also, intersectional feminism does not only focus on gender equality but all aspects of social and political identities and inequalities, from disability to class. This is reflected in art events such as in the exhibition, *Global Feminisms*. The catalog states, "Global Feminisms is a curatorial project that takes transnational feminisms as its main subject. The linking of the two terms – transnational and feminisms – is meant to complicate the hierarchy of racial, class, sexual, and gender-based struggles, underlining instead the intersectionality of all the axes of stratification." (Reilly and Nochlin, 2007, p. 16). However, the curators seemed unprepared to expand on the concept of feminism, beyond women and the gender dichotomy;

Although there have been shows of women artists and, indeed, feminist shows before, there have not been such shows with the ambition to include art from all areas of the world, not just the West. By

making feminism a plural noun, we mean to imply that there is not a single, unitary feminism any more than there is timeless, universal “woman”, but rather, that there are varied, multiple, unstable constructions of female subjects and their predicaments and situations. (Reilly and Nochlin, 2007, p. 119)

Still, the show was ambitious and presented an extensive array of artworks and events addressing the theme. It marked therefore an important step towards intersectional feminism and a type of inclusivity that considers the non-feminine, such as non-binary and trans people.

In my own practice, feminism is a starting point and a perspective. It defines the position from where I work, perceive things, in addition to the methods I use. Not only has the feminist movement and its activism grounded my position. My studies in gender and queer theory at the Helsinki University have further complexified my understanding and particular approach. Even when it is not always articulated in practice, this is my academic framework and the starting point for my practice. Intersectional feminism is an analytic tool I use and deploy while working and taking part in the social debate. Considering social and political identities such as race, class and ability is not a separate sphere but should be taken into account in all processes and discourses. There has been a time and place for burning bras, screaming for gender equality, and demanding the prohibition of porn, we do not need to leave the past behind or try to resign from the tradition, but rather to learn from it. Traditions and disciplines are about development and progress. Intersectional feminism can be used as an instrument that penetrates all practice in all fields. It begins from recognizing one’s own privileges, and particularly, that most of us do have them.

## A. FEMINIST CURATING

In the beginning, feminist curating meant adopting an art historical approach while producing exhibitions focusing on female artists or traditionally feminine materials or practices. From the beginning of the decade, exhibition making has become more intersectional and more of a method, more of an attitude than a theme. It is a (self)-critical and (self)-reflexive way to practice, often based on ideas of friendship, horizontality, and inclusivity. The focus has changed from



representations to curatorial practice, from curating exhibitions to curatorial work with art. This has also been explored in research. For example, I had the honor of supervising Eeva Holkeri's MA Thesis *Kysyä, kuunnella, toimia – haastatteluja feministisestä kuratoinnista* ("To ask, to listen, to act – interviews on feminist curating) on curating at the Academy of Fine Art (Holkeri, 2019). In her PhD thesis about feminist curating, Elina Suoyrjö explores how the feminist approach can be embedded in curatorial practice, how this practice can deconstruct hierarchies and power relations;

I was interested in the questions: how can a feminist approach be embedded in a curatorial practice and its methods, and how have curators worked with deconstructing gendered hierarchies and power relations as part of their practices. Instead of looking at themes in exhibitions or artworks, I was from the very start thinking about the process and practice of curating: the ways of working with artists, artworks, audiences, spaces and institutions, and how feminist thought could manifest in this work. (Suoyrjö, 2019, p. 5)

Still, the way Suoyrjö approaches feminism in her thesis is often traditional in the way that conception of feminism in the context of art is often tied to material choices. Thread and textile, for example, has feminine connotations and histories. But, our departure point is shared with Suoyrjö who is "focusing primarily on how to work with art", and hence positioning herself into the context of recent writings on curating, in the short history of more analytical theory on what curating is. (Suoyrjö, 2019, p. 15)

Digging into the history of feminine/feminist art or focusing on feminine narratives and materiality are not the only ways of practicing feminist curating. Feminist curating is about practicing equality, inclusivity. It is about listening instead of taking space and talking. Feminist curating is not so much about one's authorship and agency, but about learning, sharing, and creating safe working environments. As a practice, feminist curating means questioning existing structures and increasing justice. It also allows an examination of expectations concerning female or male work. A female curator not only works with the exhibition but also with the embodied subjects involved. Paul B. Preciado writes about gendered labor division;

one thing is clear: the work of taking care of bodies in our society has fallen to women. They take care of men's bodies as well as those of other heterosexual women. That is what is hidden behind the Marxist notion of the 'sexual division of labor.' It's not just about women being assigned to the sphere of reproduction and men to that of production. It seems a lot more complex than that. The women carry out a fundamental task without which the eroticopolitical equilibrium of heterosexuality would crumble: bodies to which female gender has been assigned take responsibility for a generalized political dermatology. They take care of the skin of the world. (Preciado, 2013, p. 323)

Feminist curating is difficult to separate from institutional critique. According to Dorothee Richter, this means that;

...from a feminist-political perspective, all behaviour patterns are in question as well, all conventions and structures... To take into account the structural and material side of curating means—again—to think of feminist curating as involved in and part of political and economic struggles. In thinking of curating as a form of producing knowledge or, in other words, of interpellations, means consciously taking up a position in an ideologically contested space. (Richter, 2016, p. 67)

Feminist curating entails admitting that curatorial work is always entangled with the world and its structures. It is about responding to the responsibilities this position entails.



F!, the Finnish Feminist Party,  
election campaign 2019

This photograph is from the 2019 municipal election campaign. I am holding a poster saying #gopink referring to voting pink, the Feminist party, and wearing a t-shirt from 2018 Space Invaders which reads “imagine \_\_\_\_\_ total destruction”. In my practice, I often emphasize the importance of constructive approaches. This means that if one is only and always critical without offering alternatives, it does not usually lead to productive outcomes. However, I do believe that at times total destruction is necessary in order to eliminate toxic, oppressive and exclusive structures.

Feminism is important as an example and method of combining theory and practice and using them to consider all aspects of being: the embodied being in the world. The body and how I am perceived because of it, makes all the difference. I believe there can be white cis male feminists but I also think that the experience of the world is different for them. When someone is gendered non-male it means a world with fewer opportunities, more fear and frequent dismissal. It means embodied otherness that cannot be explained to those who do not experience it, precisely because the language of othering is created by them.

# FRIENDSHIP

Feminism and friendship are both about solidarity. The precarious art fields needs more solidarity. Consequently, I mostly work with friends. Some have been my friends before, some became my friends after working together, some are yet to become my friends. I believe that the better the working process is, the better the outcome, as there have been projects where friendship has, instead of becoming warmer, cooled down. The sense of the project being disappointing becomes entangled with the feeling of being let down as a friend. To remedy this, it is important to try and create a working dynamic that is as comfortable as possible. Still, in every project there will always be unavoidably uncomfortable situations. The quality of the process is something I, of course, cannot fully control, but I see it as a method and that I also want to be transparent about. To be able to do my best I need to believe the people I work with. I want to share this trust and the pleasure of working in good company. I see this process of sharing as an essential part of my practice. This demand for trust and confidence creates fragility. It is easier to be fragile among friends. Working with friends also makes you more fragile, as you want to protect not only the project but also the friendship.

I think of friendships not only as relations to those near you, but also as networks of mutual interests, understandings, and solidarity. I consider many theorists as my friends, even some of those who are long gone. They give me support and I learn from them. These are aspects I see as vital elements of any friendship. In a global world, geographical distances do not define the distances between people. International practice has changed radically in the twenty-first century. It does not mean exchange between countries and it does not even mean traveling, but interests, ideologies, and working cultures that bring people from different parts of the world together. The global network I feel as my home base is spread all over the world.

In her MA thesis *Ystämö* (2020), Curator Aleksandra Kiskonen argues that friendship and feminist curating are inseparable. A curatorial strategy based

on friendship in essentially entwined with feministic strategies, themes, and methods: respect, care, transparency, and power. Kiskonen asks whether a curator uses power solitarily or in company. The question of power is critical in the context of feminism and friendship, and Kiskonen seems to be especially concerned about the possibility of friendship as a method when it comes to larger institutions, stating that power relations and economic structures make relations complex. (Kiskonen, 2020, pp. 50–51) However, these cannot be avoided even in the independent field, and when people are taking financial risks and working within precarious working conditions, it can be challenging for friendships.

In *Strange Encounters* (2000) Ahmed writes about friendship and the possibility of misusing the bond created in the context of ethnography, addressing issues of equality, knowledge production and appropriation. She fears that friendship and trust can be used as a tool for gaining access to the so-called strange cultures, and that friendship becomes a technique of knowledge (Ahmed, 2000, p. 66). I agree with her that there are risks, but I also believe that friendship can be a foundation and an outcome of a project, not just an instrument. Intimacy can hardly be avoided when working closely together. What it takes and what is done with it is another question.

Friendship can take many forms within in the field and practice of art. Who you work with, who you quote, who you invite to your projects. This means that a working method based on friendship is already somewhat in collision with the traditional idea of universal, objective taste. Does one make decisions based on taste and quality, or personal preferences? Are these two so completely opposite? And, in the end, would you really want to work with someone just because they are a nice person, even if their practice is uninteresting? I would not, but then again, if someone is a great artist I would probably also consider them to have qualities I like, qualities I desire, at least to some degree.

Friendship as a curatorial method focuses on the process, not the outcome, as Kiskonen proposes. How something happens is as important as what happens. The keyword in curating based on friendship is trust. (Kiskonen, 2020, p. 38) I believe that the smoother the process is, the more compelling the project and result. This also includes feelings, paying attention to how people are and feel during these processes is important. Both Porin kulttuurisäätiö and Space Invaders originate from friendship, but were also premises for friendships.

Kiskonen mostly grapples with the positive aspects of friendship and curating. Collaborating with friends is, however, often more complex than simply positive. Apart from if it is a question about the curator partner or the romantic relationship between the curator and an artist, there are always elements that are close to friendship: mutual understanding, trust, and care that are needed. However, there are also elements that risk threatening a friendship such as money issues, power relations, misunderstandings, risk of abuse or appropriation of others' work. The complex state of the art field where everyone is always, whether willing or not, competing with each other can be demanding for friendships, but it also makes them so important. Kiskonen's thesis provided Eliisa Suvanto and I the chance to contemplate our practice and our friendship in the form of an informal dialogue. We realized how a friendship is not something one often thinks about, how it is in both private and public conversations subordinated to discourses about romantic relationships or familial relations. It was also a valuable opportunity to think about our practice and how meaningful the element friendship is, not only between us but also with others. In the precarious field this is, however, something that needs ongoing attention and improvement. At best, the entangled nature of work and friendship is like a perfect, harmonious flow, and things proceed intuitively with very little struggle, almost like you were not working at all. But when there are difficulties, they can be harder to express and solve with close friends. Also, there might be elements in your practice that prove impossible to verbalize, perhaps you forget to verbalize them, if the friendship fools you to believe that everyone is already on the same page.

## A. LOVE

“Without love, our efforts to liberate ourselves and our world community from oppression and exploitation are doomed.” (hooks, 1994, p. 289)

There is much love in the world, and it comes in many different shapes and forms. We love art, food, animals, our friends, our homes, traveling, books, cities, and objects, like Erika Eiffel, who got married to the Eiffel Tower and had a romantic relationship with a guillotine named Fressie. Still, there is very little diversity in how love is represented. Love, potentially subversive force, is often and especially in popular culture, reduced to romantic love and bound

to reproduction. Sophia Coppola's film *Lost in Translation* (2003), follows the lives of two protagonists. The elderly male actor and much younger female are stuck in Park Hyatt Tokyo, suffering from jetlag and insomnia, before they begin spending time together. They are, obviously, attracted to and drawn to one another, but does this automatically entail romantic attraction? The film is labeled a "romantic comedy" but, as I interpret it, it is not romantic and it is not a comedy. Rather, it is a film about intimate friendship that blossoms in a bubble created by strange circumstances. I viewed the film as a romance after reading about it as such. I believe that this interpretation is a result of the shallowness of representations when it comes to popular culture.

Like bell hooks, I believe in love as a radical and revolutionary power. Love increases our capacity to understand other beings and allows us to care for the other. Love can be understood as a place for reconsidering traditional lingual structures and myths around the other. This, however, means that we need to redefine love and understand it more as a creative power than a romantic sense; it needs to be understood as something with radical capacity (Jensen, 2017, pp. 14–15) How, then, to talk about love without falling into the trap of romantic love and its representations?

From the act of falling in love, represented in Hollywood films and romantic literature, leading to the patriarchal ideal of heteronormative families and family values, to love that is true compassion towards those we live with. Both being and community are often seen as existing only in relation to death. But as it is the death of the other that touches us, there must be something that makes us share it. It is not only the individual similar to us who is dying, not only a sign of our future death, but also someone significant who dies. We mourn because we care. We care because we love. Jean-Luc Nancy explores love in the context of community and being. In love, Nancy suggests, "the subject finds itself beyond itself," when drawn to the singularity of the other. It is where "the subject is exposed (affected) by other and opening to the other," a place of "trembling on the edge of being." It is where the subject is at home, but the home is the strangeness of the other, and where the subject is exposing its unknown otherness to another being. Love is "coming and going" as Nancy describes it, a place to realize the unstable nature of our places and being. (Nancy, 1991 xviii)

Instead of simplifying love or reducing it to romance, Nancy comprehends love as a complex phenomenon, possible, impossible, and necessary;

Its poetics, its drama, its pathos, its mystique, from the Grand Rhetoricians to Baudelaire, from the troubadours to Wagner or Strauss, from Saint John of the Cross to Strindberg, and moving through Racine or Kleist, Marivaux or Maturin, Monteverdi or Freud. For all of them, love is double, conflictual, or ambivalent: necessary and impossible, sweet and bitter, free and chained, spiritual and sensual, enlivening and mortal, lucid and blind, altruistic and egoistic. (Nancy, 1991, p. 87)

For Nancy, thinking is love. When questioning the conventional representations and understandings of love, Nancy's notion that romantic love is not all is relevant: the understanding of "the essence of being being something like a heart, that a being is someone who is capable of love." (1991, 84, 88). If a singular being is only constituted through its communal nature, it must be capable of loving. And when it is not, the communities are doomed. Love is universal, or at least it should be universal. It is limitless, even if it occurs at the limit of one singular being. Love is a demand – even if we do not feel the will of doing something good for our neighbor, it is love that says we must.

The "love" that is being handled here is the radical love, power of caring for the other, and not only the human other but all the others we share our world with. We may not understand the other, but through love, we can feel empathy, compassion, and care. There would be no more time more appropriate to consider the radical potential of love than now, when the world teeters on the edge of environmental and social collapse.

It matters how love is represented. If it is presented as a normative practice, and always through heterosexual desire, it excludes. Still in 2020, culture hints that certain forms of love are acceptable and possible and others are not. When there are no mirrors and no possibilities for identification, it produces expectations that not everyone's desires are legitimate. As Butler has suggested, this can lead to double negation ("I have never loved"), melancholia, loss, the loss of the ability to love;

There are, of course, various ways of refusing to love, not all of which qualify as foreclosure. But what happens when a certain foreclosure of love becomes the condition of possibility for social existence? Does



this not produce a sociality afflicted by melancholia, a sociality in which loss cannot be grieved because it cannot be recognized as loss, because what is lost never had any entitlement to existence? (Butler, 1997, p. 24)

Recently, romanticism has again become prominent in art, and it has made me wonder what has love, in the end, got to do with the romanticism and artistic and intellectual movement? If love, and passion, are the motivations and emotion that drive us, how is this emotion created by the beauty of nature related to the nostalgia of history? And how this relates to the political currents of the time and the nationalist exploitation of nostalgia? Love is the opposite of neutral, often opposite of rational, it can be to bonding us to places or ideologies, it can be a powerful creative force but it can also make us blind and be a dangerous impulse.



Space Invaders curators in Raimo Saarinen's installation in Proceso Abierto

Above is a photograph of me and Eliisa Suvanto in Raimo Saarinen's installation in *Space Invaders VII – The Gift* in Cholula, 2019. The Space Invaders project in Mexico was a good example of how friendship and work are entangled in our practice. Working and living and traveling together requires some level of friendship but also creates them. We started collaborations in Cholula by first establishing friendships with the artists working, eating and drinking together, and then proceeding with the project. I believe that healthy relationships create engaging projects. I believe that thinking together develops when it is practiced.

# FORM/ FORMLESSNESS

A dictionary begins when it no longer gives meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus formless is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit. (Bataille, 1985, p. 31)

If science is about building and organizing the world through knowledge, and, according to philosopher Georges Bataille, philosophy is about giving a frock coat to what is, art can be considered to give a material form to things. This is, I propose, one of art's biggest strengths when it comes to producing and mediating knowledge, and especially non-knowledge, that is, the uncanny formlessness of our being. Things that have no form are uncanny in their resistance to the symbolic order. To be formless is also to be unnamable, and the unnamable is the one without salvation: "Just like Noah calling the roll of creation to fill up his arc. No species was going to survive the flood, hence reproduce, that did not answer to a name." (Hollier, 1989, p. 31) But the unnamable does not disappear. Rather, it appears under borrowed guises, within language itself. Professor and author Denis Hollier presents Bataille as philosopher who deals with heterogeneity and the unknown through wounds and flaws: "Through the intermediary of this article 'Formless', Bataille's language opens up onto an incomplete uni-

verse with which his interrupted dictionary communicates through this very wound, through this flaw in form that prevents it from folding back on itself.” (Hollier, 1989, p. 31)

At the same time, not even Bataille was able to avoid forming, structuring and naming: his surrealist magazine *Documents* (1929-1931) also included a set of dictionary entries, devoted to objects and concepts under philosophical observation. Naming is a verbal way of organizing and giving something a form. Still, languages are incomplete, as artist Falke Pisano states;

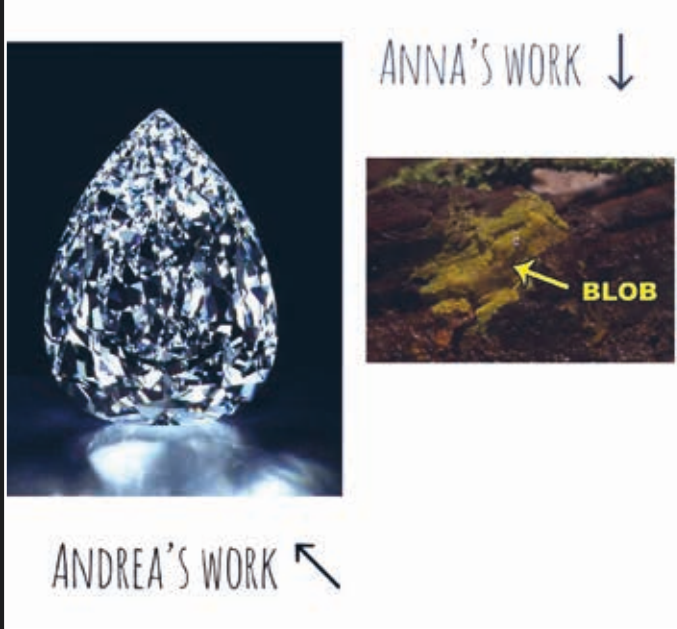
...both language and making are two incomplete languages somehow. My starting point was, and still is, language, and how to define a problem to think through in language. The aspect of art enters through bringing problems from a linguistic space into a space that is not necessarily formal or material at first, but that is at least not a space of pure language. (Cotter, 2019, p. 55)

Even if the juxtaposing “art” and “language”, or even considering them as separate spheres, can be problematic. Artist and “audio investigator,” Lawrence Abu Hamdan’s conception of the issue is similar to Pisano’s, “I have the romantic idea that art begins where language ends or at least tries to reconstitute a language that we do not yet speak.” (Cotter, 2019, p. 135) Even if we can’t completely separate art and language, art can help where language fails, where we do not yet have formulations of words, or the thing at hand hasn’t been named, maybe we do not even know what it is, but we can start carving it out with art, giving it gestures instead of names.

In the context of art, giving form to an idea is even more concrete and material: sculpting, designing, drawing lines. It is about formulating what does not have a form, exploring its essence and qualities. However, this is not always possible in the way that the issue at hand demands, often because of material or spatial limitations. In the *Pori World Expo* (Porin kulttuurisäätiö *et al.*, 2015), this was exactly the starting point for the show: to give form to some inescapable quality, to be able to realize an artwork that, due to different obstacles could not have been realized before. In addition, the idea was to do this in dialogue with the audience. Each time one of the works was described, it was given a form. For example, when Sauli Sirviö told the story of his trip, when Denise Ziegler

was giving instructions for an apple sculpture, or when Anna Estarriola took the audience to an event in another place and another city. Every time the listener told a story a different form was arrived at, depending on the listeners' mind. The idea was that this particular form would live with them, taking new forms should the work be narrated in the future and thus, passed on. I like this as an example of the non-knowledge art can create. Art can facilitate a shared experience, the form of that experience that which we do not yet know. Something (that we might not be able to name at this point or will never have access to) was made, something happened, but we have no access to the core that was the impulse behind that object or event, as every time it was a singular and unique thing happening between the artist and the spectator. The open-endedness of an artwork as such was highlighted in the project. The artwork was presented to the public in a way that was always incomplete. The experience and subsequent interpretations add layers, but never totally complete it. The form is never fixed.

There was also a certain amount of uneasiness in this. As a curator I want to control the event, but this also clearly presented how the happening of an art experience is out of my reach and control. There was a form that was clear for the visitor after the phone call but for others that specific form remained unclear, even if some formlessness remained. Formlessness make us uncomfortable. A formless blob is an abject non-object, fascinating but repugnant. Formlessness haunts us. Formlessness can also be a possibility. Every project starts without a form, and the process is about finding the right form for what is being handled, making sense of it. Using the most obvious forms may make them immediately understandable and hence approachable, but the simplest forms may not bring anything new to the discourse. They do not challenge our perception and thinking. Completely new forms can be unrecognizable and therefore illegible, as we lack the orientation towards them. Known and unknown forms are not stable and fixed categories but in constant transformation. How art shapes things is related to how things are seen. This is why the representations art creates matters.



Visualization of the differences of two dissertations  
and two ways of doing artistic research

This is a visualization I made for Andrea Coyotzi Borja that reflects on the differences between our works. Although it presents one text as clear and refined, and the other as formlessly expanding, it is important not to oversimplify this assumption. When working with non-knowledge, with notions of the uncanny and experimenting with art and research, there are very few distinct and evident forms available. One must learn to appreciate both the crystal clarity and the blob. One must learn to live with the blob. Formlessness is a political choice, a method, an unavoidable condition. To settle for already existing and immediately recognizable forms is almost like conceding to the given rules, accepting the norms and structures. However, some amount of legibility is needed to communicate a message. The completely new and formless results in illegibility: one does not see what one does not know. This relates to the definition of an eerie feeling: something that is not there. We sense that there is something but we do not know it, see it, or recognize it. There is also value in this haunting obscurity.

# FUTURE

Art is capable of predicting futures and it cannot avoid it's responsibility when it comes to the future. Art does not happen in isolation. When the possible impacts of art are at issue, it is often the immaterial effects that are focused on, despite the fact that the material ones are becoming more and more essential all the time and should increasingly be questioned more. (Porin kulttuurisäättö *et al.*, 2018)

Art has a strange relationship to the future. It creates it, observes it, tries to avoid it, and it often approaches it in a nostalgic way. Art is always already happening in the future, as the moment it happens is happening again and again when it is encountered and interpreted. In Porin kulttuurisäättö's *Centennial* project the starting point was two-pronged. The other premise was the wishes and hopes of the so-called wider public, the other was the timeline, the act of looking into the future. For the catalog Porin kulttuurisäättö invited dramatist-writer Johannes Ekholm to think about the future in the context of art and society. What he wrote captures the core of the horror and anxiety evoked by the uncontrollability of the world, our existence, and the future; "Take out your pencils and paper, draw a circle, write your name in the middle, now, draw another circle on the other side of the paper. How did you imagine getting there. The curator resists: "Thinking about the future creates anxiety. I'm being taken over by profound sadness and physical sickness. Whatever happens, happens regardless of me." (Porin kulttuurisäättö *et al.*, 2018)

Evident in Ekholm's text is the erosion of hope that art critic and philosopher Boris Groys also contemplates when writing about newness;

The quest for the new is generally associated with utopia as well as with hopes for a new beginning in history and a radical transformation of the conditions of human existence in the future. It is precisely this hope which seems, today, to have almost completely disap-

peared. The future no longer seems to promise anything fundamentally new; instead, we imagine endless variations on what already exists. (Groys, 2014, p. 1)

The old is always easier to imagine than the new, and hopelessness has been predicted throughout history. But there is always hope and there can be new beginnings. “An enchantment tale disrupts the apocalyptic tenor of the news and the despair of cynicism that it breeds. Because the news media cultivate a crisis mentality, it is important to heighten awareness of our profound – and empowering – attachment to life.” (Bennett, 2001, p. 160) Perhaps, hope today, with all the media and all the (bad) news looks different than it did in the past. Could it be that the loss of hope is related to how existing structures and privileges are questioned? At the moment, especially some of the white cis male authors and artists are succumbing to nihilistic and hopeless worldviews, at times using irony as a way to soften this perspective. However, alternative anticipations and new voices are increasingly present, and they talk about hope. Already the fact that there can be new kinds of visibility for groups that have been silenced and marginalized creates hope. New perspectives create new hope. Hope is a key element in speculative fiction, in which the authors create new ideas for new futures.

In the context of curating and contemporary art, one of the initiatives has been Christine Langinauer’s final project in CuratorLab called *Seventh-wave feminism* explored the future projected and perceived from our own time and the feminist perspective: “*Seventh-wave feminism* is an exploration of the future. Looking back to the year 2017 from a hundred years ahead, the project takes as its departure the political discussions in Finland today. How the things we do now shape our possible futures?” (Langinauer, 2017) *Seventh-wave feminism* was an optimistic project which took as a starting point the end of all forms of oppression, presenting the seventh wave of feminism as the last one. In the project, Langinauer invited a group of artists and writers to respond to the theme and to create possible scenarios. The project reminded us that in order to explore our actions and current time in history, we need to adopt alternative perspectives.



## A. AGNES DENES: RICE/TREE/BURIAL WITH TIME CAPSULE

The work of Agnes Denes relates to time in an unusual way. While the work as a gesture is already durational, it takes time for a wheatfield to grow or a tree mountain to become a mountain. The artist's perception is based on a longer duration. Denes creates works that are poetic, ritualistic, experiential, but also critical and analytical. She studies humanity's impact on the planet, combining art, science, philosophy and life. Even when critical, her works are about hope, hope that humankind will learn, hope that we will become better, and hope that there will be a "homo futurus" to read the time capsules she has buried. Denes' work is unique in the way in which it approaches future. Neither utopian nor dystopian, it expects that there will be a future, but resists create utopic visions. Instead, it offers practical guides for those living today, and also tomorrow.

*Agnes Denes' Rice/Tree/Burial with Time Capsule* (1969-1979) is among the first works considered an "ecological realization of public art" (Denes, 1969) and an act of eco philosophy. As she presents on her website;

I planted rice to represent life (initiation and growth), chained trees to indicate interference with life and natural processes (evolutionary mutation, variation, decay, death), and buried my Haiku poetry to symbolize the idea or concept (the abstract, the absolute, human intellectual powers, and creation itself). These three acts constituted the first transitional triangulation\* (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) and formed the Event. According to evolutionary theories, Event is the only reality, while the reality we perceive is forever changing and transforming in an expanding evolutionary universe in which time, space, mass, and energy are all interconnected and interdependent. (Denes, 1969)

The act of the event was a private ritual, symbolizing commitment, cyclical and interconnected being and the act of burying poetry, itself representing the "essence of invention." It was an act of giving to the soil and creating an intimate relationship with it.

The act of burial, or placing into the ground and receiving from it, a cause-and-effect process, marks our intimate relationship with the earth. On the one hand, it indicates passing, returning to the soil, disintegration, and transformation; on the other, generation and life-giving, placing in the ground for the purpose of planting. It is also a metaphor for human intelligence and transcendence through the communication of ideas – in this case, to future descendants. (Denes, 1969)

The time capsules vary in content. The capsule buried in Artpark (Lewiston, New York) addressed to “Dear Homo Futurus” includes microfilmed answers to a questionnaire composed of existential questions concerning human values, qualities of life and the future of humanity. As Denes says, “There are, still within the framework of this project, several time capsules planned on earth and in space, aimed at various time frames in the future.” (1969)

In his book *Knowledge Beside Itself* (2020), Tom Holert explores durational works in the context of current understandings of art as knowledge production and within post-Fordist economic structures. He states that a sustained ‘temporal turn’ in art can be observed that has brought questions of global contemporaneity, of duration, of chrono-resistance, of timeliness and anachronism to the fore. Holert uses Robert Smithson, also a pioneer land artist and Denes’ contemporary, as an example of the movement where temporality was taken into the core of artistic practice, writing that “Smithson launched an attack on the ideology of creativity as the cornerstone of dawning cultural capitalism” and that “sovereignty over time, for Smithson, is the ultimate precondition of being an artist.” (Holert, 2020, pp. 203–206) However, Holert concludes that, “it is precisely the time of the artist, their ‘mental process,’ that around the moment of Smithson’s writing was starting to become reified by a post-Fordist economy based on a new mode of extracting value. Labor is expanded far beyond the confines of the factory or the office into the spheres of social reproduction and free time.” (Holert, 2020, pp. 203–206) Even if Holert’s notion is interesting in the post-Fordian context in which art is embroiled in economy, I believe he omits something important here, that artists like Smithson and Denes were trying to interrogate in their work: artists work, especially this kind of practice, happens in the context of land and nature. It is not co-dimensional with the dualistic

conception of culture-nature or “cultural capitalism.” When Holert reduces artistic practice to mere *labor*, the ritualistic and entangled elements of Denes’ and Smithson’s work is dismissed. I believe this is at the core of their practice – not working for something or to present something but working *with* it.



Katharina Körner: *The future is new*, 2017

Above is an image of Katharina Körner's work *The future is new* from *Space Invaders V – Tolerance* in Hiedanranta, Tampere (Körner, 2017). The work plays with the language used by marketers when promoting new residential areas and innovations. Yes, the future is new, there is no denying that, but is it worth mentioning? Does it really provide new information. No. We can't know the future. "New" is often considered a positive quality but encountering new is often experienced as unpleasant and frightening. We do not know the new, so we cannot control it.

# GENEALOGY

“Genealogy is grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.”

(Foucault, 2003, p. 351)

Genealogy is a philosophical concept, here understood within the framework of Nietzschean and Foucauldian theory, where it is not used for searching for an absolute truth or origin, *ursprung*, but rather to explore how concepts are constituted within changing power relations throughout history, in addition to their sentimental and embodied impacts. Foucault explores how history is studied and narrated is everything but comprehensive, and how

(genealogy) must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history-in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles.

(Foucault, 2003, p. 351)

Thereby, genealogy is also related to knowledge, knowledge production and how knowledge is understood. Genealogy is research in the exact meaning of the word – to search and then to re-search, to learn, and, to unlearn. Genealogy, understood like this, tries to investigate the complexity and the often-contradictory issues in the past. The more common understanding of the concept might be understood as a family tree, or the evolutionary line of plants.

But, if we think of for example plant evolution, we come to see a materialization of what Foucault and Nietzsche might have meant. When plants are given names, families, features and ancestors, a process of defining but also dis-

tinguishing takes place. Plant classification is a process of producing fragmented knowledge that simplifies the complexity of plant lives and the intertwined nature of their being. An illusory idea of control and comprehensive knowledge is created by the act of categorizing. When plants are named, classified, and confined to their own category, we forget that plant genealogy is not only about plants, but related to political, economic, and cultural structures and shifts. Like curator Marjolein van der Loo writes, “Plants and art have carried ideas of modern/colonial imaginations. Botanical research was, in part, a result of orientalism and the Western imagination of an idealized landscape.” (van der Loo, 2021, p. 75)

In *Evergreen Inner Jungle* (Porin kulttuurisäättö, 2021) (2021) Porin kulttuurisäättö and the working group examined vegetal processes. We worked in the Botanical garden and studied the *Biodiversity Heritage Library*'s materials (Biodiversity Heritage Library, 2006). I browsed through endless amounts of carefully drawn pictures of plants and animals, named in detail with complex Latin names, organized in groups and species

The common objects of the sea shore: including hints for an aquarium”, “Joannis Raii Synopsis methodica avium & piscium: opus posthumum”, “The birds of Indiana: a descriptive catalog of the birds that have been observed within the state, with an account of their habits”, “An arrangement of British plants: according to the latest improvements of the Linnean system: with an easy introduction to the study of botany: illustrated by copper plates v.3 (1830)  
(Biodiversity Heritage Library, 2006)

We studied *The Tree of Life* in the Kaisaniemi garden, the timeline expanding my understanding of the amount of connections that plants have to each other. Maybe the most relevant findings of the project highlighted the connectedness of everything, the continuity, and the impossibility of the task of trying to draw coherent borders.

The project was also a good example of how art and science can work together. While science produces exact and fragmented knowledge, art can help to mediate it and compound knowledges. When we were working with the plant beings, we were also working with other beings. When we were working with

questions related to nature and environment, questions of culture and politics also emerged. *Touristes Tristes' International Pavilion* by Océane Bruel and Dylan Ray Arnold created a taxidermic system not only of plants but of other found objects, traces of humans in different environments, and what happens to plants when they are utilized by humans (Bruel and Arnold, 2016). Art can examine what has been accepted and valued in society, but also what has not been tolerated, what has been forbidden, or what is not presentable. Often, for example, when it comes to violence or sexuality, these issues have been explored in art, just not in public. What is not publicly presented is as important as what has been made visible.

Especially in site-specific practice, I do consider it a genealogy of a place. While planning the project I want to go through the whole family-tree of the place, instead of just accepting the evident narrative. Places have different histories and presents for different people. Listening these narratives helps to re-evaluate the existing expectations. When working in an old cotton factory that has been turned into an university consortium and a shopping mall, one works in a curious intersection of many historical powers, causes and consequences. Or, working with a popular beach area that is also a nature reserve where the locals have a strong sense of ownership and opinions about the uses of the space, there are no neutral positions or onlookers. Whatever is done in these places and environments is interpreted in the context of these multiple and often conflicting narrations.

Judith Butler describes genealogy as political investigation;

To expose the foundational categories of sex, gender, and desire as effects of specific formation of power requires a form of critical inquiry that Foucault, reformulating Nietzsche, designates as “genealogy”. A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view; rather, genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an origin and cause those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin.

(Butler, 1990 viii-ix)

Even if Butler has explored the imbrication of precariousness and gender, in how they are both produced and maintained, rather than original, ontological, authentic truths, I would argue that this notion of exposing foundational categories goes way beyond gender and precariousness: the whole concept of an authentic truth often comes with political intentions.

What Butler and Foucault, and Nietzsche, have in common is, in opposition to most of western philosophy that has historically been preoccupied with the mind, is that they take the human body seriously. Instead of focusing on words and reflections, the body is taken into account;

The body – and everything that touches it: diet, climate, and, soil – is the domain of the *Herkunft*. The body manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors. These elements may join in a body where they achieve a sudden expression, but as often, their encounter is an engagement in which they efface each other, where the body becomes the pretext of their insurmountable conflict. The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body. (Foucault, 2003, p. 356)

This understanding of embodied being changes how we understand knowledge, whether it is considered merely an act of cognition, or more as an embodied and spatial understanding and a product of different structures and power relations.





*Pori Biennale 2020 – Not to Sing Like a City Bird Sings*

This is the catalog for *Pori Biennale 2020 – Not To Sing Like a City Bird Sings* (Jensen, Suvanto and Porin kulttuurisäätiö, 2020). The catalog compiled the artworks created on and about Reposaari island during a period when Aalto University organized introduction courses there. Michel Foucault defines genealogy as “a form of history that can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, and so on”. (Foucault, 2003, p. 306). The event, like most of our events, can be considered a project of genealogy, exploring power relations, histories, stories, and narratives and how they impact the way we exist in a specific place at a specific moment. The 2020 biennale was probably the most apparent manifestation of this archeological method. The show presented works which dug deep into the essence of Reposaari, the people living there, and those visiting. Different authors created various narratives and this offered a diversity in perspectives. Genealogy is not only one, but many.

# THE GIFT

”The theory of the gift is a theory of human solidarity” (Mary Douglas, foreword in Mauss: *The Gift*, 1990, xiii)

In Chapter *Enlightenment* I referred to Bennet’s understandings of enchanted life as full and connected life. Bennet writes;

Enchantment is a feeling of being connected in an affirmative way to existence; it is to be under the momentary impression that the natural and cultural worlds offer *gifts* and, in so doing, remind us that it is good to be alive. The sense of fullness – what the Epicureans talked about in terms of ataraxy (contentment with existence) – encourages the finite human animal, in turn, to give away some of its own time and effort on behalf of other creatures. (Bennett, 2001, p. 156)

Enchanted life can be interpreted as a life that is a gifted one. And a gifted life is a connected life, as “it is not individuals but collectives that impose obligations of exchange”, as Mauss writes. (Mauss, 1990, p. 6) Gifts, like art, are collective by nature. The gift, in all its diversity, is a powerful and spiritual force. It can bring people, families, and groups together but also separate them. Gifts have been entrusted to bring good luck and blessing, but also harm, or even death.

I have suggested that art, especially art in public places, is like a gift (Jensen, 2022). Art, like a gift, is given and received, an act of kindness or an act of manipulation and direction. An agreement and a contract, or a surprise. As a gift, art is not always desired. When a spectator enters a gallery, there are already expectations that one will receive something: the gift art gives is more contractual. When art is presented in public space, it becomes more like a surprising gift. Crucially, not everyone likes to be surprised. A gift that is not wanted is sometimes called a *white elephant*. A white elephant is often expensive but has no value or use. It is a burden that one cannot easily get rid of. Art as a gift

to public place can be annoying and triggering, but it can also be something that the spectator takes with them and nurtures, something that gives pleasure and joy for a long time. The act of giving is not necessarily intended for humans alone. Like Denes' work shows, the gift can be for the earth and the soil, as a passing, ritual, or a sacrifice.

In his book *Art, Anthropology and the Gift* (2015), Roger Sansi presents three different ways in which art may be a gift. Art is implicit in the artist, given and natural, the artist being "a raw genius", the gift as an event that is given as an encounter, and the experience that is given to us, "we receive the experience of art for free. We don't need to buy an artwork to like it." (Sansi, 2015, pp. 94–95) He also presents different, yet related, theoretical frameworks for approaching the issue of art and the gift; the Maussian idea of the gift as a social contract that establishes relations that "do not simply renew existing social bonds but they create the very identity of the partners in exchange, Derrida's conception of pure gift, where "the gift is not the thing given, but the event of giving." (Sansi, 2015, pp. 99–104), and Bataille's proposition of the gift as an act of expenditure and "political economy based on abundance." (Sansi, 2015, pp. 99–104). Sansi approaches gifts in art as a method that opens up a field of possibilities. One of the most interesting ones is the idea of the gift as something, "a thing" that exceeds the strict division of subjects and objects, living and non-living. As Sansi asks, "Is it actually possible to think of an aesthetic, and a politics, beyond this strict division between subjects and objects?" (Sansi, 2015, p. 82)

As a curator, I have a special relationship with the artwork an artist creates for a project. Even if this is based on a contract, the artwork has, after all, been facilitated within a certain framework and concept, the final result is always a surprise that does not cease to amaze and enchant me. Every time an artwork is produced for a project, I feel privileged to be present, to be witnessing it, to be given this gift by the artist. What has been given to me is important; not unlike what Mauss proposes about the nature of exchange through gifts, "because to accept something from somebody is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, of his soul." (Mauss, 1990, p. 16) And because of this system of exchange, even knowing it is not a question of a zero-sum game. I hope for mutuality and hope that the artist receives something in return. Perhaps, the concept, the framework, and as I see it, even a location might be considered a gift.

However, it is not merely a question of systematic exchange. Bataille links art to the excessiveness of life – this excess of energy can be subversive. “Bataille was not so interested in the circular theory of the gift as social obligation as in the very act of giving as expense without return. The potlatch is central to his argument precisely because it turns expense into public spectacle.” (Sansi, 2015, p. 104)

And if we think of art as a gift that is not based on economic exchange nor on the expectations of social relation, we see the potential power in art and its excessiveness, how it is able to exceed the expected functions in a society and create its own sphere of giving. Because, even knowing all the possibly positive productive features of art – yes, it does increase wellbeing, it produces knowledge, it is enchanting and creates meaningfulness and beauty – it is also excessive. It takes time, energy, and material, and creates forms that can produce joy, ideas, changes, and, especially when observed later. During every project there are moments when, in the middle of the process, I pause to think if any of this makes sense. I can, as a professional, justify, rationalize, and contextualize my practice, but I also try to accept the intuitive not-knowing, the being on the verge of something that doesn’t yet have a form or concept but only seems loose and inordinate, a necessary part of each process. And this, I believe, is related to the meta-work artists are expected to do. They are not only expected to explain their work and the necessity of their work, to others, but also to themselves.

## **A. SPACE INVADERS VII - THE GIFT**

Understanding places, spaces, networks as a gift, became more evident than ever when the seventh Space Invaders project was realized in Cholula, Mexico in 2019. We chose the theme “The Gift” being aware of how the concept is used in philosophy by theorists from Derrida to Heidegger and from Mauss to Cixous. We were also aware of its focus on economical and symbolic relation. In this context, we wanted to concentrate on the very concrete: being given a gift for all the help we received in Mexico. We were receiving a gift. We received help in organizing the event in a foreign city in a faraway country, we were given spaces in which to hold the event and artworks to exhibit – in exchange our gift was to bring our long-term project and the resources we had to Cholula. This can, however, be interpreted as an exchange that would create recognition and

strengthen the social tie between us and our colleagues in Mexico. (Jensen and Suvanto, 2019)

In the foreword, *No Free Gifts* for Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* Mary Douglas writes about potlatch and the system of giving. A gift is something that bonds together with a cycle of exchange, creating solidarity and belonging. A free gift disturbs this system: "According to Marcel Mauss that is what is wrong with the free gift. A gift that does nothing to enhance solidarity is a contradiction." (Mauss, 1990 xi);

The system is quite simple; just the rule that every gift has to be returned in some specified way sets up a perpetual cycle of exchanges within and between generations. In some cases the specified return is of equal value, producing a stable system of statuses; in others it must exceed the value of the earlier gift, producing an escalating contest for honour. The whole society can be described by the catalogue of transfers that map all the obligations between its members. The cycling gift system is the society." (1990, xi)

The project in Cholula was based on this system of exchange, on solidarity that creates hospitality. We also wanted to increase transparency when it comes to these exchanges and solidarities that are often fundamental for independent art practices. We had worked together with Mexican artist Martinez when he was based in Finland, and we wanted to continue the collaboration when he moved back to Mexico. The collaboration was about exchange. He organized possible locations and local collaborative parties, while we brought in artists and funding. The project was planned for many years but when things finally started to move forward, everything happened fast. We were funded by foundations that had never funded us before and were able to bring three artists from Finland to join me and co-curator Eliisa Suvanto to Cholula. The plan was to exhibit both local and international artists there. The project also presented the possibility of reuniting with Mexican and other international artists we had previously worked with, but who had moved away from Finland.

We trusted Martinez. Still, the amount of hospitality surprised us. Douglas questions the idea of gifts as "pure" and points out the similarities of gifts and hospitality when it comes to inclusion and exclusion: "If we persist in thinking

that gifts ought to be free and pure, we will always fail to recognize our own grand cycles of exchanges, which categories get to be included and which get to be excluded from our hospitality. More profound insights into the nature of solidarity and trust can be expected from applying the theory of the gift to ourselves.” (Mauss, 1990, xx). We were given interesting spaces to use for free, openings were hosted and barbeque parties with book readings were held. It was not only about the physical and material spaces and resources, but also about the events and conditions that were created.

These kinds of gifts force one to think about the dynamics of giving and receiving, whether the given gifts are equal and reasonable. This is related to hierarchies and how they are interpreted. When one is in the position of making the decisions, one is also expected to be aware of how much is given and received. Giving gifts, as Mees van Hulzen argues, create gratitude and recognition, and recognition is connected to responsibility;

When a gift is given we respond to the gift by expressing our gratitude. In this way we receive the gift. By receiving the gift, we simultaneously recognize the giver and the special relation that the gift seeks to install or reestablish. By recognizing the other and the particular relation the other wishes to establish I commit myself to respond to the needs of the other and the obligations implied in the special relationship. Recognition creates responsibility, once I recognize someone, I make myself responsible for that person, in the sense that I commit myself to respond when that person is in need. (van Hulzen, 2021, p. 114)

Responsibilities becomes an issue when a great deal is received and given. This is also connected to the assigned roles in a project. We can consider art as handling the excessive and the surplus, but it is a question of material and practical forces too: giving time, space, objects, networks, and knowledge. Are we, as curators, the responsible parties, or is everyone included in the project responsible? Is a project an entity where someone is obliged in the system of exchange, while others are perhaps more entailed to the pureness of gifts?



Martinez, detail, 2019

This is a detail from Martinez's installation in *Space Invaders VII – The Gift* (Cholula, 2019). It was installed in his apartment, which we used as an exhibition venue. As a curator, I often consider the works created for an exhibition as gifts: a gift giving a form to our common thinking, a gift of time, a gift of creativity. But also the relationship between me and the artists is a gift. I am receiving time and attention. I, in turn, give the gift of an exhibition to the public and to the artist community. A gift is about giving and receiving and the bonds those acts create.

# GAIA, GLOBE; THE SHARED WORLD

When I write about living together and co-existing, there is already a presumption that this living together happens somewhere, that there is ground being shared. It can be in a town, city, country, on the internet (especially during the time of the pandemic and lockdowns), suburb, environment, neighborhood, but “the world” is the umbrella concept for what is shared and lived. For Heidegger, being-in-the-world is being-together-with, and this being is transfixed by anxiety, uncanniness and care. According to Heidegger, anxiety is what “discloses the world as world” (Heidegger, 2010, p. 181) In anxiety, having an uncanny feeling, the feeling of not-being-at-home emerges. As Heidegger states, the familiar being-in-the-world is a mode of the uncanniness, not the other way round, “And only because anxiety always already latently determines being-in-the-world, can being-in-the-world, as being together with the ‘world’ taking care of things and attuned, be afraid.” (Heidegger, 2010, p. 183) And, because of the shared nature of the world and being, being-in-the-world is framed with care and concern, “Being-together-with is taking care, because as a mode of being-in it is determined by its fundamental structure, care.” (Heidegger, 2010, p. 186) When being is understood as constantly shifting between feelings of being at home and unhomey, the uncanny is not an exception or state of emergency, but part of being, inseparably involved in the world and in the world of care.

This shared, uncanny, unhomey home of ours is also what is explored when art is creating knowledge of the world. We, however, quite carelessly use the word world to describe our lived environment, earth, or universe. For Jean-Luc Nancy it is neither, “It is the world becoming world, that is neither ‘nature’



nor 'universe' nor earth'. 'Nature', 'universe', and 'earth' (and 'sky') are names of given sets or totalities, names of significations that have been surveyed, tamed and appropriated." (Nancy, 1997, p. 41) But even if naming is appropriation and taming, we do have a world, a world that we experience every day, a world of events, happenings, fellow creatures, matter, even time in a very intangible way. How then to speak about this without reducing it to something other than it is? Naming can be an act of care and love, but it is also related to the attempt to control, to colonize, to take over, to own. Naming as mastering is a practice of patriarchal culture, a practice Plumwood describes as Platonic ordering of nature that needs to be controlled;

Platonic vision of the world-soul yields not a spiritualisation of nature but rather a colonisation model which points not to leaving things be in nature but to imposing human 'rational' design on them. Plato celebrates not nature but the structuring of the world to the needs and intentions of mastering logos, the eradication or rationalisation of superfluous qualities, kinds, tribes, which are seen from the perspective of the master as disorderly, unnecessary, useless, out(side) of control. (Plumwood, 2003, p. 96).

As such, naming is a practice of hierarchies – of naming subjects and passive objects. The world is in a constant state of becoming. Both Nancy and Latour see it as something not established, hence not easily named, as it is constantly in a mode of coming, appearing, on the threshold. Latour divides the phenomena of world and nature in the following way: "the world always exceeds nature, or, more exactly, world and nature are temporal reference points: nature is what is established; the world is what is coming." (Latour, 2017, p. 91)

However, we do need names, but names that respect their bearers. Naming is part of the organizing process, *the system*, that marks communities – naming is belonging. What is needed is naming without forced ownership or "cheating," as Latour calls it, stating that by avoiding the name *Gaia* we are only avoiding "the real myth";

I could easily escape the curse by claiming that the name of a theory is of no importance, and that, after all, serious scientists avoid the

name Gaia as much as possible, preferring the euphemism ‘sciences of the Earth System.’ But this would be cheating; it would amount to passing from one ambiguous character to another that is even harder to define. ‘System’? What weird animal is that? A Titan? A Cyclops? Some twisted divinity? By avoiding the real myth, we would land on a false one. (Latour, 2017, p. 85).

Thus, we can’t avoid the importance of names, but we must take seriously the practice of naming. And then there are things without names. A system that is the weird animal Latour names. And the system of the weird animal is what we can study in art, as it always escapes scientific classification.

#### A. BECOMING A WORLD: PORI WORLD EXPO

But this cosmos is not real. As Poe himself said, it is a *sulphurous* ideality, created by the dreamer with each new wave of his images. Man and the World, man and *his* world, are at their closest, it being in the power of the poet to designate them to us in their moments of greatest proximity. (Bachelard, 1994, p. 176)

Being an artist, or a curator, is about imagining worlds. This happens in multiple ways and is often hidden. Curatorial practice is about creating platforms for meetings, interactions, and contacts. It is about being present, both for the artist and for the audience, and it’s about sharing. Our world, our communities and societies, and art are inseparable spheres, even to the degree where Nancy suggests that world is the name for gathering created in art;

*World* is the name of gathering or being-together that arises from art – a *tekné* – and the sense of which is identical with the very exercise of this art (as when one speaks of the ‘world’ of an artist, but also of the ‘the world of the elite (*grand monde*)’). It is thus that a world is always a ‘creation’: a *tekné* with neither principle nor end nor material other than itself. (Nancy, 1997, p. 41)

This world as a creation and the artist's ability to create worlds were among the central questions posed when Porin kulttuurisäätiö started working on the *Pori World Expo* - how art as a practice both creates worlds and makes them visible. Even if the form of the exhibition was related to impossible modes of art, meaning ideas that were for material limitations or scale or some other reason not possible to realize in object form, and the relation between visual arts and performance art, the theme was to make the world appear. We wanted to explore the world coming into being through the works, the world that is "neither 'nature' nor 'universe' nor 'earth', but "a world becoming world." (Nancy, 1997, p. 41). We wanted to explore the act of creating worlds and make it visible.

Art, philosophy, and theory are often presented as something alien to the real world – material objects and "pure" existence. But the world comes into being in a process of formulation. Art, theory, and philosophy are all ways to formulate the world we live in. They are not merely representations, but involve active participation. Schelling explains this in a context of mythologies and how they impact the world-making process;

The theogonic process, through which mythology emerges, is a subjective one insofar as it takes place in consciousness and shows itself through the generating representations: but the causes and thus also the objects of these representations are the actually and in themselves theogonic powers, just those powers through which consciousness is originally the God-positing consciousness. The content of the process are not merely imagined potencies but rather the potencies themselves – which create consciousness and which create nature (because consciousness is only the end of nature) and for this reason are also actual powers. (Schelling, 2007, p. 144)

In the Pori World Expo we studied these imagined potencies, the ideas and initiatives the artists had already considered, but were not able to execute. We studied how they, through words, imagination and active participation, started creating natures and conceptions, visions and concrete acts and gestures. The works started to manifest themselves through the visitors, in continuation of narratives, filling up gaps in stories, and concrete material forms informed by the telephone conversations.

Imagined potencies were also the starting point for Harri Laakso in the text *Expo – as I Imagine It*. The text in the exhibition catalog describes the act of writing a catalog text as “not to describe anything, rather to imagine something within the worlds that the artworks open, somewhere close to them.” (Porin kulttuurisäätiö *et al.*, 2015, p. 8) The writer does not limit interpretations by controlling the works with words, but rather a companion to wonder with.

*From the first Pori Biennale to the Expo, from the material to the imagined immaterial*

Pori World Expo originated when we worked on the first Pori Biennale (Porin kulttuurisäätiö *et al.*, 2014). Ideas were constantly jostling up against reality. Interesting plans and works were proposed but when we tried to realize them, they turned out to be impossible to manifest. There was a planetarium that was too big for any of the locations available. There was a video-sculpture-combination that would have needed both light and darkness simultaneously. There was a skate park that did not receive sponsorship. In the 2015 exhibition, we wanted to exhibit these impossible artworks – pieces too difficult, too large, or too fragile to be realized, but that keep haunting their makers.

The first Pori Biennale also spread to (too) many locations and was almost too large to handle, as it was only three of us organizing the entire project. While our intention was to comment on the concept of a mega-exhibition, we accidentally ended up creating a monster exhibition with seven different locations, 28 artists and artist collectives, events happening all around the city, and one artwork that functioned as the curator’s text observing and reflecting the process by the curators, myself, Anni Venäläinen, Eliisa Suvanto.

With Pori World Expo we wanted to make an exhibition that was megalomaniac<sup>43</sup> and would comment and deconstruct the tradition of representing and exhibiting, but that would be immaterial. To mark the immaterial we needed material. We wanted to combine different approaches in our work, from

43 Megalomaniac here referring to the realization of the event: there are certain expectations in the scale when the question is about a small collective working in a small city – we have wanted to prove that one does not need to compromise, even if this sometimes has happened in the cost of our wellbeing – and create the event into something that stand outs in the cityscape. On the other hand, megalomaniac refers to the idea of a world expo itself, the goal of trying to present world in one place at one time, and to the forms these attempts take, like the Eiffel tower.

architectural elements to sculptural and to conceptual ones while using the classical world expo pavilion as inspiration. We too wanted the exhibition even with its minimal content to be spectacular, a *gesamtkunstwerk*: “it could be defined as a combination of the different art forms that have been important throughout the discourses of modernism from art and architecture to music and theater.” (Obrist, 2014, p. 17). We wanted it to mark the chosen location, raise awareness, and also to create visual pleasure and curiosity. Soon enough, we realized that this was not something we could convincingly make happen on our own and so in an early phase of the project we started working with others. The exhibition in the white cube construction was planned with the architectural student Laura Eerikäinen and in collaboration with visual artist Suvi Härkönen, who designed the black reflective pool around it.<sup>44</sup> Artists presented in the exhibition were only invited to the process later when we already had plans about the form and the pavilion to introduce. For the project, we chose artists we already knew plan a project and who hadn’t found ways of realizing them. The artists we chose were generally interested in the idea of working in-between visual and performing arts, material forms and objects and words.

The project aimed to be “an art piece, an exhibition that explores the theme of making the world appearing and the relation of visual and performing arts.” (Porin kulttuurisäätiö *et al.*, 2015) We asked artists to think about artworks they could not realize in material form, but which could become visible through words. The works would take forms, again and again, in each telephone conversation with the visitor, who would dial the artist from the exhibition space, where plates with information about the artwork and a phone number were displayed. The artworks had multiple starting points. Denise Ziegler had, for years, been thinking of a sculpture of an apple recently bitten into. Because the apple would soon start browning in an exhibition this was not possible to exhibit as such. Now Ziegler was able to tell a story of the work and instruct people to make their own version of it. Some visitors even came to the exhibition site with an apple to make their apple sculpture. In his work, the artist Sauli Sirviö invited visitors to take part in his story about a trip through Finland. Juuso Noronkoski’s work was about giving his voice completely to the project. During the exhibition, he would not speak unless spoken to. In the end, he became very

44 The idea of a reflective pool was later present in many of Härkönen’s works, one of them being part of the 2016 Saatanan kesänäyttely

talkative during the phone calls. Anna Estarriolla took the callers to a small town in Spain to witness a special event. It was interesting to see all the different approaches artists had to the theme, how it inspired them and challenged them to think about things differently. Maybe even more exciting was to witness how the public reacted to the work and to the calls they made, how thrilled they were, and how a diverse group of people were touched by this project.

When we first began work on the project, we could not predict how the public would react. We were aware that calling a stranger might be an obstacle. This was something the artists were prepared for. They promised to be available during opening hours, but I don't think anyone expected the popularity of the project. People were queuing up for the exhibition, to make the calls. Some were surprised that it really was the artist picking up the phone. The building itself, the pavilion, and the black reflecting pool around it was well-received by the public using the usually quiet square. Many wished it could remain there. People had all kinds of ideas about what it could be in the future and how, for example, the reflecting pool could be turned into an ice-skating ring during winter. Some were disappointed that we did not sell ice cream or beer. At the end of the project, the pavilion building was adopted by a local family, who turned it into a garden house.



Denise Ziegler: *Välipala*, 2015

For the Pori World Expo (Porin kulttuurisäättö *et al.*, 2015) the theme was becoming worlds. We examined how artworks are always becoming, are always creating worlds, and how this happens in a process between the maker, the object and the public. The artwork is not a closure but an opening. To go deeper and explore this phenomena, we wanted to present artworks that were in a state of becoming, works that artists had been planning but were not able to realize. We wanted to make these works public but in the most intimate way, through a telephone conversation between the artist and the spectator.

In her work “*Välipala*” (“Snack”), Denise Ziegler’s starting point was a recently bitten apple. Because of the nature of an apple this was a work that could never be realized as an art object in a gallery context, so Ziegler gave instructions of the work to the public who could then follow them and make their own little sculptures. The work became a participatory work, and a conceptual one. A world that happened again and again in every remake.

# GHOSTS

“Now, it’s my belief that houses, places, be it by chemical compound in the earth or the minerals in the stone, can retain impressions or a person that is no longer living.” (del Toro, 2015)

“But what do these creatures want?” (Fisher, 2016, p. 114)

The world is not only what it is today. It is also the past and the future. The world is full of traces of yesterday, those preserved and those appearing without invitation. Our memory is short, but history haunts us, it does not leave us alone. Ghosts are interventions that the past makes in the present. Ghosts are absent, but still they are present. Ghosts are barely visible spirits but they still do not leave us in peace. Ghosts do not leave this world because they have something to say. This quality makes them useful methods in art. If the spectator forgets the iniquities of the past, the ghost can act as a reminder of these.

In *The Hamlet Doctrine* philosopher Simon Critchley and psychoanalyst Jamieson Webster explore Shakespeare’s Hamlet and its sustained relevance when it comes to existential anxieties, the eerie nothingness;

In the opening lines of the play, Marcellus asks Barnardo if the ghost, ‘this thing’, has appeared again, and he replies, ‘I have seen nothing’. The ghost is nothing, of course, so Barnardo confesses that he has seen it, that is, not seen it. In matters ghostly, there is nothing to see. (Critchley and Webster, 2013, p. 26)

Ghosts are nothing. They are immaterial, but compellingly, extremely spatial. Ghost stories are often stories about houses. Ghosts don’t travel, they remind us of events that happened in a specific place. They are immaterial materializations of the soul of a place: its past, atmospheres, and events. “The Overlook



Hotel in *The Shining* is (...) a kind of recording system in which the violence, atrocity and misery that has happened in the building is stored up and played back by the sensitive psychic apparatuses..” (Fisher, 2016, p. 112) The buildings or the places, in some cases, *are* the ghosts.

As eerie reminders of the past, ghosts have been present in plays since Greek drama. In Shakespeare’s plays, ghosts are not unexpected characters. It is unclear if they present his belief in the supernatural, or if they are hallucinations, creations of feverish minds, homages to older plays, or just convenient carriers of the plot. Ghost present that which have no form, like intuition and conscience. Maybe formlessness is even more incomprehensible and frightening than ghosts. Ghosts are densified emptiness. When a ship is found without a living crew abroad, it is called a ghost ship, like the *Flying Dutchman* or *Mary Celeste*. However, even if they have existed as part of drama throughout its history, there is something quite modern about ghosts, unlike the herds of zombies and nesting vampires, ghosts are solitary beings. Their messages are personal, and they are usually encountered in private. They are almost like manifestations of neoliberal self-help culture, which often facilitates a reckoning with one’s past and helps oneself to be able to help others.

While ghosts bring the past to life, they also question the concept of time as linear and ordered. If ghosts exist, it means that time is layered. These layers can be penetrated and traversed. It would mean that we do not leave days and weeks and decades behind, but rather that time periods exist in an order we do not comprehend.

Ghosts, as wandering spirits, are supposed to present the everlasting soul and typify the mind-body-dualism, but usually ghosts have bodies, even if they are transparent. Representations of ghosts show their bodies as bearers of past horrors and injustices, such as the *Headless Horseman*. In his critic on Descartes’ mind-dualism British philosopher Gilbert Ryle uses the concept, “Ghost in the Machine”<sup>45</sup>, referring to the dogma of the human body as a machine that becomes a person because of the mind/soul: the physical entity of the body carries consciousness. Ryle claims that body and mind are not separate, but that the mind is dependent on the human brain (I would argue that it is also dependent on the rest of the human body) and that Descartes’ distinction is a categorical mistake and a myth (Ryle, 2009). Mark Fisher refers to the theory in *The Weird and the Eerie*:

45 Originally in Gilbert Ryle’s book *The Concept of Mind* (1949), see also Plumwood (2003, 112), Mark Fisher 82016, 109), and *Ghost in the machine* (Wikipedia, 2022b)

The condition of materialists such as Parkin (our condition in other words) is of knowing that all subjectivity is reducible to matter, that no subjectivity can survive the death of the body, but of nevertheless being unable to experience oneself as mere matter. Once the body is recognized as the substrate-precondition of experience, then one is immediately compelled to accept this phenomenological dualism, precisely because experience and its substrate can be separated. There are ghosts in the machine, and we are they, and they are we. (Fisher, 2016, p. 109)

We usually think about ghosts as belonging to the past, but as Pori World Expo and the haunting works from the Pori Biennial presented, the future can also haunt us – the future we wish for or the future we fear. These ghosts are what we are dealing with in art: something air-like and just a hint of what has been or is yet to come, that which we are unable to grasp. "How to recognize the unknown? We can't recognize things that we don't yet know," states Finnish choreographer Sonya Lindfors. She asks, "how are we to dream of futures, while also understanding that we are as yet unable to dream of them?" (Gustafsson and Haapoja, 2020, pp. 61–62)(Bud Book 2020, 61–62) Maybe we can listen to ghosts, to materializations of the past, movements between the body and the place, and the present and the future, as Trigg claims:

Our excursion into hauntings has discovered the life of a ghost, the proximity of which does not dwell in some foreign land, nor does it reside in derelict mansions or dilapidated factories, waiting to be conjured from dormancy by human intervention. Rather, the ghost expresses itself primarily through its native haunt, the human body.... The ghosts that frequent places do not consign themselves to abandoned asylums on the edge of the city, nor is their sole haunt lonely and rugged landscapes far from civilization. Rather, in the landscape of ghosts, revenants, and specters, it is the human body, still alive and yet to some extent already grieving in its death, that serves as the guide. (Trigg, 2012, p. 309, 321)

In contemporary horror stories, ghosts are far less popular than, for example,

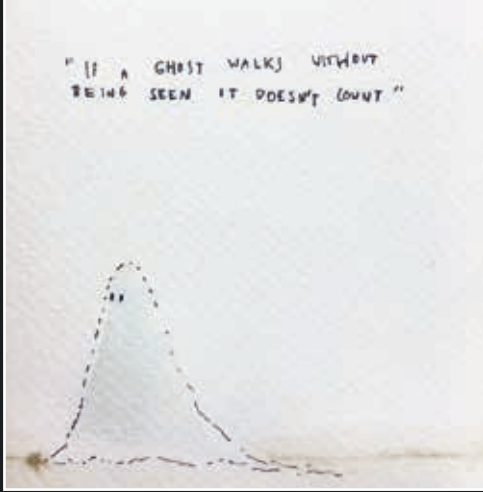
zombies and vampires. Ghosts do not do much, so maybe they are less exciting. It is more as if they are expecting others to do, to see, to listen. Ghosts are often presented as prophets relating unseen phenomena, events or evils forgotten, and what is to come. It is uncanny that they often come from the past, but perhaps this ability to undermine the linearity of time makes it possible to learn from the past and learn about the future. By proposing we listen to ghosts, I do not suggest a spiritualist meeting, but rather an openness to the complexity of different narratives from yesterday, today and tomorrow. I propose listening to even the most subdued voices.

*"I am waiting for someone."*

*"Who?"*

*"I can't remember"* (Lowery, 2017)

Ghosts can be scary, but there is often also pathos in their presence. The film *A Ghost Story* (Lowery, 2017) is a perfect example of this kind of representation. A couple lives in a house and are planning to move. One of the partners dies in a car crash. The dead partner wakes up in a hospital, covered with a white sheet. Wearing this classic ghost costume, he chooses not to step into the tunnel of light that streams down on him but rather, elects to return home, seen by no one. The white figure lurks in the rooms of the house, in the middle of the everyday environment. Presence, absence and the numbness of sorrow become entangled in the quietness of the film – it about seeing the other grieve and not to be able to touch and comfort. It is about seeing the other leave, day after day, and staying, seeing the other moving away and remaining. The slowness of the film underlines its queer relation with time. The ghost remains, observes new people moving in, observes the lives of others where his life was once lived. One day, the ghost observes another ghost in the next-door window. The ghost is waiting, but cannot recall who they are waiting for. Others leave, the house becomes increasingly dilapidated. The ghost remains. Houses are demolished, new ones are built, cities rise around the ghosts. When the ghost tries to escape, they only return to the beginning, when the first houses were built on the site. The film then, implies that ghosts are spatial. They wait and they witness. They wait, witness, and grieve. Ghosts have a mission, and when the mission is completed, they can leave. Ghosts are glitches in the system, and in the flow of linear time.



Drawing ghosts, 2018

Ghosts interest me as a concept, as something immaterial and obscure that haunts us, even if we cannot name what it is that is troubling us. However, the “proper” ghosts, ghosts as a phenomena, as the spook, the spirits that wander, are one of the reasons why I became curious about places and spaces in the first place. As a child we used to spend a lot of time in two different places that were said to be haunted. It doesn’t matter if they were haunted or not, or if it was the feel of the place or the stories that made me feel uneasy in these places. But the uncanny feeling I experienced made me pay more attention to the soul and the inner being of a place: how different places have different moods, and how the stories told, impact how places are sensed and perceived. I believe that the ghost counts, even if it isn’t seen. This is the case when the ghost is used as a vessel in a story, or a method, as curator Lisa Rosendahl did in Gibca 2021, *The Ghost Ship and the Sea Change*:

The title of The biennial, *The Ghost Ship and the Sea Change*, reflects a similar intention to simultaneously look backwards and forwards, using artworks to both honor ghosts from the past and to move beyond them, acknowledging historical violence while also contributing to processes of repair. (Rosendahl, 2022, p. 34)

# THE HETEROGENEOUS

Ghosts epitomize the possible disorder of time. By bringing the past into the present they imply to what would be a heterogeneous order, and this is one of the reasons we are frightened of them. The idea shatters our fundamental assumption of permanence and continuity, of homogeneity. The heterogeneous is, according to Georges Bataille, contrary to homogenous and thus requires further explanation. It challenges, interrupts and resists. In a homogeneous world, the heterogeneous is what disturbs, threatens, and resists. In his essay *The Psychological Structure of Fascism* (1885) Bataille defines the homogeneous part of society as follows;

Homogeneity signifies here the commensurability of elements and the awareness of this commensurability: human relations are sustained by a reduction to fixed rules based on the consciousness of the possible identity of delineable persons and situations; in principle, all violence is excluded from this course of existence.

He names production as the basis for homogeneous society, as the place where all the useless elements are excluded: "Homogeneous society is productive society, namely, useful society." (Bataille, 1985, p. 138) This argument deserves special attention in the context of art and the discourse around it. Art and artistic practice has been presented as a useful activity that aids productive society. This is especially the case when art is used as an instrument to increase health and wellbeing, or property value - but art can also be something surplus, disturbing, and even threatening.

Art can be interpreted as a potentially heterogeneous platform, creating possibilities for subversive acts in society, even if these subversive acts are often

rapidly tamed and taken over. This rapid change is apparent, for example, when observing the activist DIY movement and temporary use of space, a movement that *Space Invaders* was part of, that was about using practices aimed at creating anti-capitalist activities in “left-over” spaces with little to no commercial value. Inadvertently, this often became subject to a market logic in which artistic activities increased interest in neighborhoods and turned them from thrashy to trendy.

The heterogeneous, at its core, is what resists (state) order. The tension between the homogeneous and the heterogeneous shows that we need them both, that we cannot have one without the other. The order of the homogeneous, structured society, does not exist without the heterogeneous delimiting it. Likewise, the heterogeneous cannot be defined without the order it ruptures, “The very term heterogeneous indicates that it concerns elements which are impossible to assimilate” (Bataille, 1985, p. 140). Embedded in the nature of the homogeneous is its tendency, and capacity, to adapt and take over the heterogeneous elements.

This structure is relevant when we consider art as a possibility for heterogeneous and disruptive acts in a homogeneous society, and how often even the most revolutionary works are tamed, precisely by including them in the canon, their power reduced to merely aesthetic value. When art is considered as a heterogeneous and subversive power, the various aspects of art need to be taken into consideration. For some, art is a hobby. For example, they might like to paint. For others, it is an investment, a currency. Art can be both research and communication. It can be a tool to explore and change societal structures. Even if one is skeptical about the subversive power art may have, the ongoing discussion around it proves that there is something in it. Art is an object of observation. . Art is questioned and criticized, and art and culture need to justify their existence time and again. Everyone has opinions about art. And even if art is considered as currency and exchange value, it can be this in a more sustainable way, producing possibilities for consumption that are based on experience instead of objects. Art can create meaningfulness beyond consumption, which already is a subversive act. The “self-reflective” and “critical voices” in art like to produce juxtaposing voices by stating that art is merely an elite practice, impossible to reach beyond the bubble and actually change anything. But would we be working in the field if this was what we truly believed?

The subversive potential is not the only thing concerning art in how Bataille outlines heterogeneity-homogeneity. When it comes to societies, the homogeneous is based on the idea of productivity, on each member being useful: “Social homogeneity fundamentally depends upon the homogeneity (in the general sense of the word) of the productive system.” (Bataille, 1985, p. 140) That which is not useful is considered heterogeneous and necessitates exclusion from functional society. The weird, strange, unproductive, useless, rebellious, and also art, can be categorized as heterogeneous. As in homogeneous society, productivity is measured with money. Artistic practice that is not motivated by financial gain, is believed to be suspicious. Art becomes ‘productive’ when it is taken over by the homogeneous and its value can be measured; when it is sold and bought, or when it increases wellbeing and therefore makes those feeling well more productive— art that has been stripped of its potential to disrupt, disturb, shake and deconstruct. However, art can be used to create knowledge, resist ideology and in the service of activism. Throughout its history, art has been used to educate, to share information, to pass knowledge on, to tell stories, to bring people together, to communicate with gods, and to create and imagine parallel universes. But considering the heterogeneous, the question is if art is used to strengthen the power of those who are in power, or as a counterpower.

The assimilation of art diminishes its power as a tool for exploring that which scientific discourse and conceptualization preclude;

The object of science is to establish the homogeneity of phenomena; that is, in a sense, one of the eminent functions of homogeneity.

Thus, the heterogeneous elements excluded from the latter are excluded as well from the field of scientific consideration: as a rule, science cannot know heterogeneous elements as such.

(Bataille, 1985, p. 141)

This leads to a state where heterogeneous elements are considered taboo, censored, or not even recognized. Their resistant nature produces intense affective feelings that we might not be able to verbally explore. How to approach these unknown and affective elements then?

Bataille refers to the potential of poetry when it comes to examining the unknown and heterogeneity, without invalidating and simplifying: heteroge-

neity having positive value as affective experience, represented as something other, incommensurate. (Bataille, 1985, p. 143). I would suggest that it is not only poetry, but all arts, that can be utilized in this complex task of handling something that cannot be fully formulated or structured. Art can render new languages that instead of the known and formulated system of symbols can also exercise through affect and experience. Thereby these new languages can enable approaching and exploring heterogeneity without assimilating, exposing and bringing it into the sphere of homogeneity, known and structured. (Jensen, 2017, pp. 24–25)

And even when the homogeneous parts of society attempt to adapt and integrate heterogeneous elements, it is hardly possible, as part of the essence of heterogeneity is resistance. This does not necessarily mean acts that are immediately recognized as subversive, quite the opposite. When art imitates a revolution, it is often directly recognized as carnivalesque representation. For example, the performance by the *Diverse Universe group in Space Invaders II* (Jensen and Suvanto, 2014) comprised of a large show with fire, nudity, loud noises, potential violence, that disturbed us as organizers. However, the audience loved it. It was perceived as an act of art, a temporary event that entailed no long-term changes. Instead, the *Space Invaders IV* that was meant to be a pleasant event for the neighborhood spectators distressed them, as they could not instantly name and recognize what it was that they experienced as unsettling. Even minor changes in the everyday flow can redirect thoughts and thinking and spark change.

## A. SPACE INVADERS II–THE REVOLUTION

Imagine a house, a building. It is large, it has a history, or actually multiple histories. It used to be a garage and a shop. It has hosted studios and an art school for children. It is obvious that someone has lived there. That many parties and afterparties have taken place there. In one of the rooms, upstairs, there is a car. The house has been listed for demolition. When you walk into the house, you can feel the past, but you cannot really imagine the future, as the future for this particular building does not exist. Imagining a revolution is similar to this: you aim for a change, a complete destruction of the old, but imagining or controlling the future and what will and must be, is different.



The second Space Invaders held in 2014 was titled "Revolution" (Jensen and Suvanto, 2014). The title did not primarily refer to political coup d'état, but to a fundamental change, a change from a non-human perspective, a radical dreaming of new things to come. There were two main reasons for the theme: the event was held in a house that used to be a studio space for many of us working within the exhibition, but was during that time doomed for demolition because of its condition (in 2019 it was still standing there) and it was held during a time period when Aalto University's department was leaving Pori and moving to Otaniemi to be part of the main campus. In the open call for the artists, we wanted to emphasize not only the farewell, but the transition and new possibilities;

Inevitably this means some heavy hearts and goodbyes, but more importantly it is also the time to celebrate our creative, challenging and perhaps even life-changing years spent in Pori. It is also a time to find new ways of collaboration, as well as cherish the community already built. We also asked what a revolution can mean: What does a revolution mean in our modern society? How can one influence the course of events, participate and take action? How does the space involve as we enter, occupy and then leave it behind? Aalto University's Pori department has taught, enabled and encouraged experimental approaches both in practice and thinking. Our aim is to create a well reflected event mainly based on that ideology, combine visual arts, performance and music in multidisciplinary way that should not only challenge the audience but the participants as well. (Space Invaders II – The Revolution open call, 2014).

We wanted to think of revolution as something more than just a violent process of substituting old ideologies and systems of power relations with new ones – more as a re-evolution than a change in the social order. We wished to have traces of the past visible among current things, works, events, and ideas. The exhibition took place in a building that was previously used as a studio space, even though it was to be demolished in the future. The large two story house was located on the borders of the city center, close to the police and fire stations. This location was both a curse and a blessing as the event almost turned to total chaos while we had failed to apply for official license.

The event brought together artists from Finland and abroad, past and present students who had, for many years been working in the building. The process was very typical of Pori in the sense that it was in constant transformation and involved low threshold artworks. People kept joining even though the exhibition was already running. One of these late participants was the international performance group Diverse Universe who was in Pori and took over the whole event with a loud and demanding performance including a number of performers, potential violence, nudity, and open fire. Even if the happening was visually intriguing it was also very stressful for us as organizers. The other latecomers were less unnerving, including both dancers in the park, gigs, and smaller performances. Ultimately, the event went well, even though from then on we have obtained greater control of our events, from the beginning to the end. This makes things easier, but in a way also less surprising for ourselves. Now, after the years have eased my heartbeat after the immoderate performance, I think that it did fit the location and event. I also see some discrepancy in a way I often consider our events, that is, as more or less open platforms where a diversity of happenings can take place. Simultaneously, the will to control the flow of events and outcomes makes it impossible for spontaneity and surprise to flourish. While I believe that art can be a heterogeneous power that questions and deconstructs hegemonic structures and relations, in many ways, I have become the homogenic power that curtails its radicality.



Diverse Universe performing in *Space Invaders II – The Revolution*, 2014.  
(Photo: Eetu Henttonen)

Art can be a place of disorder and chaos, a heterogeneous entity disturbing the homogeneous order of society. However, the homogeneous part of society is phenomenal in taking over things that may shake its establishment, which means that even the radical and subversive acts of art are often rapidly institutionalized and tamed. Another problem with these heterogeneous acts of art is the possibility to abuse the expected autonomy of art: the fact that art allows one to do things that can elsewhere be considered unacceptable does not mean these things should be done, especially as long as the possibilities are not equal for everyone.

# HETEROTOPIA

*Heterotopia* is a concept presented in the famous essay *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* (Foucault, 1986). In the essay, Foucault refers to places including elements of all places as *heterotopias*. Foucault argues that even if history is the great obsession of our time, the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of *space*:

A period in which, in my view, the world is putting itself to the test, not so much as a great way of life destined to grow in time but as a net that links points together and creates its own muddle. It might be said that certain ideological conflicts which underlie the controversies of our day take place between pious descendants of time and tenacious inhabitants of space. (Foucault, 1986/1997 pp.330–336)

According to Foucault, attention turned from time to space. Space was about networks and arrangements, presenting itself “in the form of patterns of ordering. (Foucault, 1986/1997 pp.330–336)

Georges Perec’s *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (1997) examines those spaces around and inside of the void. He writes of spaces, “There are spaces today of every kind and every size, for every use and function. To live is to pass from one space to another, while doing your very best not to bump yourself.” (Perec, 1997, p. 6) Foucault describes space as a set of relations and sites that are irreducible to one another, describing space as heterogeneous. In his essay, he approaches the question of space, especially spaces he calls heterotopias, and examines spaces that are outside of all “real spaces” but at the same time representing all other spaces, through what he calls “heterotopology”. Space is not only a theoretical conception we are obsessed with today, but a material and concrete entity with multiple aspects: ownership, rootedness, power, accessibility – space is rarely neutral, and therefore we need heterotopias that make it possible to explore other spaces while being inside and outside of them.

As examples of heterotopias, Foucault names museums, libraries, cemeteries, Scandinavian saunas, and, as an example par excellence, ships.

An exhibition, or an event, is a possibility to create spaces that can be either interpreted as non-places or all-places. They have no histories as such. At the same time, they carry both the history of art and event and the history of the place they are organized in, be it a museum, a gallery, or public space. And there is a narrative, a way an exhibition or an event comes to be. An exhibition is a possibility to explore multiple places at once. They are like ships in the sense that they can travel, they are not attached to one place, time, or context. They are "elsewhere", like Trigg defines the appearance of Foucauldian Heterotopias:

Foucault is fundamentally describing an "elsewhere" where certain rituals and rites are practiced. Furthermore, this elsewhere emerges between the residue of space and the production of culture, developing a polarized space, in which the reality of place proper is shown to depend upon heterotopias for its identity. (Trigg, 2012, p. 130)

Heterotopias are places where the heterogeneous nature of life can be encountered: they are places among homogeneous structured society where the structured nature of things becomes visible or temporarily demarcated. The archives and collections in libraries and museums visualize how history constructs the present, and the intimacy of saunas and cemeteries force us to face the materiality of our being in all its brutality.

## A. SPACE INVADERS IV – HETEROTOPIA

*Heterotopia* was also the theme of the 2016 Space Invaders, organized in Matinkylä (Jensen and Suvanto, 2016b). The location itself was very much Foucauldian: empty, and probably poisonous because of the cheap and bad construction, a space that had been previously used for educational purposes, first as a kindergarten, then, due to its condition, as a school for immigrant children following which it was abandoned for years. Heterotopia was chosen for the topic of an exhibition, a system of opening and closing, penetrable but isolated. It resonates with what Foucault writes: "Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable..."

they have a function in relation to all the space that remains.” (Foucault, 1986 / 1997 pp.330-336)

Before this project, the reception of our events had been surprisingly positive. Even the 2014 *Space Invaders II – Revolution* that was organized in a house doomed for demolition and that contained three days of bands, performances, people, loud noises, nudity, and open fire – all this in the middle of a very orderly neighborhood – was loved by the residents. The event in Matinkylä was the first time we were actually taking the neighbors into consideration with the working group, actively aiming to create an event that would invite them to participate. We wanted to produce an event for the whole area and its residents. Unfortunately, we failed monumentally.

In 2015 *Space Invaders Aesthetically Tolerable – Taking Over Otaniemi* was organized in collaboration with the city of Espoo, and the process, being slow, demanding, and painful, was a good example of the utopian and dystopian elements at work in city planning procedures. It was also a project that taught us that there is no way to control how our projects are received, nor is it ever guaranteed that the art will be well-received by residents.

The 2016 event took place in an apartment building, in the middle of a busy and dense neighborhood. Matinkylä has a bit of a reputation for being one of the problematic suburbs in Espoo. Still, it is pleasant, green, multicultural, and populated by people who have lived there for decades. We noticed that the feeling of ownership at play in Matinkylä was strong, even to the degree of possessiveness. Resistance to change is a common phenomenon, but in this case, even the temporary alteration of the neighborhood was experienced as very upsetting. We tried to promote the event for the neighborhood with posters, but they were torn down. Instead of coming inside to the exhibition the residents looked at it through the windows and told us that it was not art. They wanted to complain about the noise, but the event did not last long enough for them to complain. Residents, in one of the most multicultural areas in Finland, complained about “strange foreigners” hanging around. They complained about the city letting us “girls” (Eliisa Suvanto and I) take over this space that had not been used for years. They told us that they were not on the lease but owned their apartments, which apparently was supposed to make a difference in terms of controlling the space around an apartment. When in Pori especially the children in the neighborhood enjoyed the exhibition and came to visit

every day and to spend time with the art. However, in Matinkylä not a single child from the neighborhood visited. There were visitors from other suburban neighborhoods in Espoo visiting and stating that they hoped that something like this would happen more often, but the neighbors from Matinkylä fiercely hated everything about the event.

What made them so upset? The event, as mentioned, was designed to be enjoyed by everyone, so there was nothing purposely disturbing or provoking. Instead of loud bands and performances, we had a short film premiere and singer-songwriter acts. There was a sound piece based on research done in urban geography on the specific area, installations, and video works. Nothing we thought to be offensive. The feedback was far from pleasant, but we did learn a great deal. I think the biggest discovery is that you can never foretell what the reception will be nor can you know how your project will be interpreted. You either do exactly what you consider is interesting and best in a certain place, time, and situation, or, if you want to do a participatory project that takes the residents and their wishes seriously, their hopes, and ideas into account, you need to work with them for a long time. This entails the strong possibility that the project will not be anything like you planned.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> This was thoroughly studied in the Democracy in Finnish Suburbs (*Demokratia suomalaisessa lähiössä*, 2017) by Eeva Luhtakallio and Maria Mustarinta, who were aiming to create an ambitious interdisciplinary project in one of the suburbs in Helsinki, but came to realize that what the residents valued the most was casual get togethers and dinner parties. (Luhtakallio and Mustaranta, 2018)



Lauri Linna: *PORK KANA*, 2018

This is from *Space Invaders IV-Heterotopia*. It is a detail from Lauri Linna's research *PORK KANA/CAR ROT* which explored how carrots have been cultivated to be the vegetable we know today. The event was about the exhibition as a heterotopia, a space including all the other spaces. But a work of art can also be a heterotopia, in the way it creates a space where multiple aspects of that space can be studied. The work was about carrots, about the cultural history of a carrot, about the power humans use over other species and nature. It studied the visual form of the carrot but also that form in the space where it was exhibited. A single work contains an endless amount of other works and entering points. (Linna, 2018)



# HISTORY

As a curator and a feminist, one tries to think of history beyond his-story: the story of great victories of great men. The practice is deconstructing this history and creating new histories: who we are making visible and including in the canon informs the history of tomorrow. The past is stored in artworks and objects, but not all of them are considered as valuable as others. Some of the stories these objects contain are more exclusive and more horrendous than others, so how the story is told matters. The past cannot be canceled, but it can be critically revisited. To talk about history is to talk about the future, and vice versa.

In writing this dissertation, I am writing against a monolithic conception of history. But as a product of a certain historical time and place, I cannot escape this conception of history either. I am writing together or against everyone who has ever touched a pen, scrawled letters on empty pages and imagined their thoughts as worth the waste of paper and ink. I am writing in the company of all the art that is ever been made, with all the artists who have ever lived, with every spectator who has ever walked into an exhibition and carried the experience with them. History is not a light burden to carry, especially considering that we are all the time only adding to that burden. Would it be possible to lighten it, to reconsider its weight?

History creates unavoidable structures we cannot shake. Our time is not a void but we live and work in a continuum of things. This became obvious when we were working on the *Truth About Finland* project. We invited a group of artists, curators and a historian to work together to deconstruct what a similar group of people created when, one hundred years ago, they started building the Finnish national identity and ended up being trapped in the structures of that identity: we cannot escape them, we cannot substitute them with new ones, and most of all: we are so used to them that it is impossible to even recognize them. As Sara Ahmed asks “can we hear a voice that is not speaking?” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 136) – how can we hear those who are not given a voice? This is related to Sonya Lindfors' question of radical dreaming: how to recognize the unknown,

how to dream of futures, how to dream inside and outside the struggle and structures simultaneously;

If every word, and with those words thought, carries historical baggage with it, for example, violent binarism, then how can we dream of futures that are not limited to the history borne by those words. You can't get direct access to dreaming about such futures. You have to make some kind of leap: to dream of those futures. (Gustafsson and Haapoja, 2020, pp. 60–62)

History is embodied and takes material forms in physical spaces. This relates to the spatial nature of ghosts. Ghosts return to remind us of the past or warn of the future. It is not accidental where they appear. Art presents these ghosts, but it is also a ghost itself: a collective memory that is a perfect, and more often imperfect, example of the subjectivity of history. Dylan Trigg considers history as something that “appears to objectify and render the individual aspect of memory external.” (Trigg, 2012, p. 73) He divides individual memory from the public past:

By employing the phrase ‘public past’, I am proposing to make a distinction between a past that exists independently of the subject, and a historical, cultural, and social context in which the subject is located, spatially and temporally. The distinction between a past that is embedded within a social matrix and a past objectively present within the world is neither absolute nor autonomous. Both the publicness of history – the objective occurrence of events – and the cultural conditions that determine how that representation materializes are thus entwined. (Trigg, 2012, p. 73)

What is included and what is excluded in the canon shows how history is often a highly selective collection of stories that are chosen to be told. Thankfully, history is not fixed, but, as Derrida writes, it must remain open as a problem, never to be resolved: “The moment the problem were resolved that very totalizing closure would determine the end of history: it would bring in the verdict of nonhistoricity itself.” (Derrida, 1999, p. 7)

History is a place of demarcation and it must be rethought repeatedly. History, and canon, make us believe that some things are “natural” and some are not. It is important to notice this and work on it. Maura Reilly writes that we must unlearn both racism and sexism. (Reilly, 2018, p. 218) New ways of approaching the canon, collections, public art and contemporary exhibitions need to be learned. Art happens in the context of historical understanding, and this historical understanding must be constantly reconsidered, namely for the art itself to develop.



Miika Tervonen: *Puhdas valkoinen*, 2017

In the above image, historian Miika Tervonen is installing his piece *Puhdas valkoinen* (“Pure white”) in *The Truth About Finland* (Porin kulttuurisäätiö et al., 2017) in Kallio Kunsthalle. The work included an installation with models, printed images and a performative reading revolving around nationalism, the air force, the swastika and the author’s personal history. Throughout the process, we had discussed suitable forms for handling cultural traumas and wounds. In this performance, Tervonen solved these questions by taking his own family and life as a starting point for reflecting on how these conflicts and past crises still impact our lives. History is not simply left behind. Rather, we encounter it every day.

# HOME

“We protect ourselves, we barricade ourselves in. Doors stop and separate. The door breaks space in two, splits it, prevents osmosis, imposes a partition. On one side, me and *my place*, the private, the domestic (a space overfilled with my possessions: my bed, my carpet, my table, my typewriter, my books, my odd copies of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*); on the other side, other people, the world, the public politics” (Perec, 1997, p. 37)

The home draws a line between the public and the private. The question of home is a question of the individual and identity, of public and private, of history and narratives, of private and political, of precariousness and of ownership. It is a physical place, a mental place, and a non-place. A home is a place of belonging, even to the extent of immersion. As Sara Ahmed writes: “The lived experience of being-at-home hence involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them: being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, inhabit each other.” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 89). The locality is bodily familiarity, sensed smells, hears, touches, feelings. My own belonging and locality are concretely drawn under my skin as a tattoo presenting the ice hockey teams from both of the places I consider home. Neither of the cities is where I was born.

A home is a place where you can leave the world on the other side of the door. It is a private area, and depending on the situation, this privacy can be comforting or even life-threatening. Home is where no other eyes see you, and at times, this intimacy is romanticized. And even if it is not, the idea of home as your own is a myth: homes, too, are socially controlled and structured, from architectural solutions to furniture. Your home is not yours. Curator Serubiri Moses points out how it is “important to understand how emotional and psychological labor is tied to the notion of home”, and asks

But what does that “home” actually mean, when the idea of being at home here is disputed for many? And of course, I know that I am not explaining properly because this is just occurring to me, but I think the idea that one can be in perfect harmony with those around them is a fantasy, a complete fantasy. Home is a place where people fight. If you are home, you have to fight. (Ngcobo *et al.*, 2018, p. 40)

Western homes are built for non-queer, nuclear families and anything beyond this is more or less considered as passing phases; student apartments and rent homes. Home and how you are perceived as a person are connected. Maybe this is why opening your home to alien eyes is a radical act. The everyday in this context can be seen as a regulatory system, and your home can embody either obedience or resistance. Therefore, if we want change, this shift needs to expand to our homes. As *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* declares:

From the street to the home, domestic space too must not escape our tentacles. So profoundly ingrained, domestic space has been deemed impossible to disembed, where the home as norm has been conflated with home as fact, as an un-remarkable given. Stultifying ‘domestic realism’ has no home on our horizon. Let us set sights on augmented homes of shared laboratories, of communal media and technical facilities. The home is ripe for spatial transformation as an integral component in any process of feminist futurity. But this cannot stop at the garden gates. We see too well that reinventions of family structure and domestic life are currently only possible at the cost of either withdrawing from the economic sphere—the way of the commune—or bearing its burdens manyfold—the way of the single parent. If we want to break the inertia that has kept the moribund figure of the nuclear family unit in place, which has stubbornly worked to isolate women from the public sphere, and men from the lives of their children, while penalizing those who stray from it, we must overhaul the material infrastructure and break the economic cycles that lock it in place. (Laboria Cuboniks, 2019)

It is not only the social norms and structures that threaten our being-at-home, but also the unhomeliness, the unheimlich that emerges from the known and the homelike. Maybe this is why Kaelen Wilson-Goldie writes “artists and writers often joke that their home is a language or a field” as (Wilson-Goldie, 2017, p. 74) – home is a place we think we know, but like language or a field, it escapes and expands to a platform full of diverse meanings. Some homes are more private than others, and some seep more readily, have more interaction with the outside world, while others contain layers of buried secrets. Homes usually hold objects that have meaning only to their owners, as well as objects almost everyone has or understands. These things in relation to the space and their collector form a collection. In the first Porin kulttuurisäättö project, the main exhibition was located in my apartment at the time, and among other things (the exhibition had multiple starting points, from the public-private division to art funding to collaborating to curating). It explored the idea of a personal life as a permanent collection. The exhibition extended from the apartment to public space.

## A. SPONSOR

Porin kulttuurisäättö started as an art project and was meant to be a critical commentary on the current situation and exhibition tradition in Pori during the famous Jazz Festival. The collective, during that time including Anni Venäläinen, Eliisa Suvanto, Eetu Henttonen, Niilo Rinne, and I, all of whom had studied in Aalto University’s Visual Culture MA program, started by outlining the differences between how things were compared to our understanding of how they should be, based on our experiences and education in the program.

We wanted to do something obverse to the commercial traditional art that was usually exhibited, hopefully challenging, site-specific, accessible but surprising. When we got a small grant from the city we started thinking about art and funding. How to run an initiative that is not based on selling artworks, but where the practice and project would be based on collaboration, existing structures and would not exploit participating artists.

Instead of renting a gallery space and using the money on production, we came up with an idea of a foundation as an artwork or an artistic act in itself. Porin kulttuurisäättö, which later became a stable agency and association, was

created as an imaginary trust fund that would give 20€ grants to the selected artists, who would then create works worth this amount. These works would be presented in the exhibition. The project, “Sponsori” (Porin kulttuurisäätiö, 2013b), explored the funding system and the possibilities for new kinds of collaboration and funding structures. We wanted to increase transparency about financing and possible sponsors and so, contacted many of the local and international companies for support. Many of the local companies were positive about this and gave us funding or materials, while international companies were not as enthusiastic. Eliisa Suvanto contacted Campari about sponsoring our opening drinks. When they replied with an almost hostile response advising that their drink, or probably any drink, would not suit this kind of event, this reply turned into an artwork.

One of the works exhibited was a sound piece based on the discussion we had had in a messenger chat throughout the whole process. We wanted to increase transparency when it comes to curating (even if we did not call it curating back then, or were aware that what we did was curating, or that we were going to become curators at some point as we continued with these projects) and not only funding, but also artistic practice. We knew how many so-called boring practicalities were involved. The work was hilarious already back then, but today I find it even funnier. It includes so many simple and stupid details that are hardly worth mentioning, but which we have been repeatedly discussing ever since, in every project, every year. Some things you learn, some obviously not. The sound work is still available on YouTube (Porin kulttuurisäätiö, 2013a).

Organizing our first-ever exhibition together in a private apartment was a good start in the sense that a private apartment is a difficult place for the public to readily enter into. After this, all locations seem easy and approachable. It positioned our practice at the intersection of private and public. This has probably given us more freedom than a more traditional exhibition would have been given. It has also made me consider “home” differently, and the projects that I have seen organized in different homes after this. Would I have opened my home to strangers if it wasn't an apartment I had rented for the duration of my studies in Pori, and considered more or less as a temporary solution? And when people organize events and exhibitions in their homes, is this also the case? And when it is not about temporary spaces, it is about class. Home exhibitions that do not happen in student apartments often take place in elegant premises with light,



space and beautiful furniture. They imply that by buying one of the works you might also be able to buy the lifestyle. A small apartment in a distant suburb with dirty windows, a broken sink, and piles of laundry would have different connotations, but these apartments are rarely opened up for the public, and if they are, it's more about an immersive experience than exhibiting artworks.

Exhibitions have been organized in private homes before and after our show, from large-scale museum shows like *Chambres d'amis* (1986), organized by Jan Hoet, the founder of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, Belgium where about fifty American and European artists installed their works in rooms in private apartments, to the *Glasgow Open House Art Festival* that wants to remove art from conventional exhibition spaces and use domestic and public spaces, to small-scale Livingroom projects. Like Anna C. Cline argues;

The primary exhibition space today remains the museum or gallery, often taking on the style of the sparse White Cube, which offers a neutral space where art can be objectively viewed. While numerous exhibitions take place in spaces like this, the art exhibition also has the unique ability to occur in a multiplicity of places and forms due to its temporality and its ability to often act independently from established artistic institutions. (Cline, 2012, p. 31)

Also, the idea of artists creating communities, imaginary foundations or organizations, or even micro-nations is not new. However, we were not so much reacting to art history but to the current situation, not looking back but to the present or forward to the future. We wanted to create affordable and sustainable ways of exhibiting art. At that time, this meant using public space and a private apartment in addition to a fictional foundation as the platform.



Valeria Nekhaeva: *Kyläsaarekatu 8 J*,  
00580 Helsinki, 2018

This is Valeria Nekhaeva's installation *Kyläsaarekatu 8 J*, 00580 Helsinki from *Space Invaders VI—Living Together* (Jensen and Suvanto, 2018). The name was the address of the place where the event took place: a combination of a recycling center and a rehabilitation center for the long-term unemployed. In her work Nekhaeva asked, "What makes a home look like or feel like a home?" and in her work description wrote that;

A recycling centre is a place that contains objects that once made an interior. By choosing some of these objects and arranging them together in a small house situated within the recycling centre, I have attempted – like an Ikea sample room – to imitate a living environment. The separation between home and work is becoming blurred today, with more people working from home and some companies trying to make employees feel at home by changing the workplace. The recycling centre is a workplace despite not having its usual characteristics, and the decoration of the house attempts to reflect that. (Jensen and Suvanto, 2018)

Home is a feeling, a state of mind, a place, and a structure. Home is a public distinction but still it is also a place with normative dimensions. It does matter how and where you live, especially if you don't have a home. How homes are built and perceived changes according to societal changes. Home is a nest and a resting place but often also where you end up working. The home is intimate but especially during project periods, shared with friends and colleagues. When working in different places you start to feel like home in them, nesting in exhibitions and events. Residencies are temporary homes shared with strangers. Home is what connects you to a place, home-like is familiarity, what you know. Unheimlich is what you used to know but which became strange and unfamiliar. It is worse than just plain horror because heimlich is something you want to be able to trust, feel at home in, where you feel comfortable and safe. What shakes this trust and security shakes the foundations of our being.

# HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is about opening one's home to a stranger, inviting the other in. Publicly exhibiting art, giving a talk, or publishing text is also an invitation to a stranger to join in in something that is personal and intimate. This is probably why eating, serving food, and cooking together are such widely used actions in contemporary art. Sharing food with strangers is a par excellence act of hospitality. Chopping up food in front of people I don't know well always makes me self-aware, as does eating in front of strangers. Some of my strongest memories of art projects are related to food. What we used to eat during each project often signals how and where the project took place, how closely we worked with the people involved, as well as the ambience during meals.

The word "hospitality" derives from the Latin word *hospes*: "host", "guest" or "stranger" and usually refers to the relationship between a guest and a host, but also more generally to caring for friends, strangers, or even, at a more planetary scale, for the whole universe. As a concept, it is linked to virtues like empathy, sympathy, respect, and care. According to program director of Liverpool biennial, Paul Domela, hospitality appears in several forms; as the most valued welcome to strangers; as an attitude and code of conduct; and as a metaphor that regulates the stability of notions such as the body, territory, politics, or the circulation of data. (Tallant and Domela, 2012, p. 7) If, and when, we think of art as knowledge production and a place for sharing this produced knowledge, especially the last stated form becomes particularly interesting.

Art is an invitation and a gift. The gift is passed on from one person to another, from the beginning of time and beginning of art. Like a gift, or hospitality, it is in-between the one giving and the other receiving, even if these roles are not unchangeable. Art has been a way of passing knowledge and impressions forward, and this is how the circulation of data is created.<sup>47</sup> This passing on, however, is not only the responsibility of the host but also the guest. The circulation of knowledge demands listening, active and inclusive listening.

<sup>47</sup> Thank you Thorbjørn Andersen for tolerating my intensive early morning discussions in Ebeltoft residency 2020!

Sally Tallant writes that “Art ‘hosts’ the values and ideas that are at the heart of how we articulate contemporary urgencies and possibilities, how we express our fears and our hopes.” (Tallant and Domela, 2012, p. 4) She states that art enables us to ask questions about who we are and where we are, and continues;

In order to think about how artists, writers, architects and curators construct sites where art is possible, it is important to understand the value of the relationship between host and guest. Cities are defined, and changed, by the people who occupy them. Those occupations can be momentary or last months, years, decades or generations. As we move through the world at great speed and find little time for intimacy, hospitality becomes a crucial issue. (Tallant and Domela, 2012, p. 4)

In my practice, I have come to think of art more as an act of hospitality and less as a product. This is related to the process-based nature of my practice, but also to how I see art in general: more as platforms for encounters and thought and ideas to emerge, than as discrete objects. And just as gifts are not always appreciated neither does hospitality always lead to joyful parties and encounters. These encounters can be disturbing, confusing, irritating. Nonetheless, they are experiences and moments of contact.

As suggested above, hospitality is not only about opening one’s arms to strangers, about warmth and welcomes. It is a far more complex concept than this. Hospitality is about inclusion, exclusion, decisions, power relations, rules, social codes, hierarchies, uncomfortable feelings when one does not know if shoes should be taken off or kept on, what should one bring, and can one refuse the food that is served.

## A. RESIDENCY

One of the most concrete forms of hospitality in the art world is the artists' residency tradition. Artist-in-residence programs invite artists, curators, and writers to live and work away from everyday obligations. This often means working and living with other residency artists. It is also an invitation to be part of the

community, the institution. Sometimes the individual organizing the residency is sited. The residency format is also a perfect example of the circulation of data in the global art world. The artist-in-residence is given space, time, and information about the local habits and practices at the residency, while the artist in their turn often presents their work to the fellow residency artists, shares their life and everyday habits. Inviting artists from all over the world is a way of making even distant places and practices visible and known. This is how hospitality is connected to intellectual capital. Through this given and received knowledge, residencies increase their possibilities for funding. Especially in smaller places this can be a relevant income for the whole community.

A residency is also a perfect example of the concrete impact hospitality has on art. A residency period is a unique opportunity for an artist to immerse themselves in their work, to avoid all the everyday distractions and demands. A residency is also an interesting concept, considering the relationship between a place, artistic practice and thinking.

This dissertation has been partly written during three different residency periods. In 2018 at *Stiwdio Maelor* in Corris, a small village in the middle of a nature reserve in Wales; in 2020 at *Maltfabrikken* FREE SPACE residency in a small town in Denmark, near to a nature reserve; and in 2021 in TUO TUO residency in Joutsa, a rural residency focusing on ecological art and thought. Working at the intersection of global and local, center and periphery, I find the element of nature and the scale of the places helpful. I find the quietness combined with the close connections with colleagues fruitful. The closeness of nature and the endless possibilities for hiking provide a perfect mind state for thinking. All the empty space around you seems to create more space for the mind to travel freely and for thoughts to evolve organically. Instead of offering an overwhelming number of different stimulations, the environment provides an atmosphere that makes it possible to turn inward, to contemplate, to create new from the already existing.

It is not only, however, the non-existing everyday irritations that make residencies fruitful but also what can be learned from other cultures, practices, and organizations. Corris was a perfect opportunity to test our *How to Life* methods in practice: how to use walking, mapping, smoke bombs and drawings as techniques to connect to a place and mediate the atmosphere (that in Corris was quite special with its Welsh folklore eeriness). *Maltfabrikken* turned out to

be an interesting example of how to enliven a small town with culture, how to reconstruct an old industrial area and an empty factory building into an active culture hub, and how it is possible to create a working collaboration with the residents, municipality, and the cultural industry. Instead of remaining ideas, like these kinds of initiatives sometimes tend to do, the old factory area evolved into a lively meeting point for people of different ages, providing a platform for a diversity of activities from library to brewery, from skatepark to gallery. The residency was located in a separate building, so there was no need to interact with the other activities, unless one wanted to. Yet, for example, the open studios day was surprisingly busy and proved that the programme was interesting to many. TUO TUO as a non-profit cultural space not only inspiring because of the hospitality and the working conditions provided for the visitors, but also because of their own practice:

TUO TUO aims to function as an incubator for expression and new ideas, a place where solitary breeds solidarity. We support radical thinking across disciplines by providing space, proximity to nature, and a platform to exchange ideas that are free and open to all. TUO TUO prioritizes projects and proposals in the field of Environmental Humanities: Ecological art and research, Ecopsychology and healing, Permaculture, and interactive public works are some examples. We believe art functions as a mirror of the wider society; its reverberations are felt beyond the creative community. (Tuo Tuo, 2020)

The exhibitions organized in TUO TUO were still visible in the surrounding nature, some of the works more visible than others. The decaying works created their own ecosystems with plants and mushrooms growing around them, proposing new and alternative ways to approach art and questions that have always been considered to be central: artwork as eternal or temporal, art belonging to the sphere of culture instead of nature, artwork as a treasured object that requires handling with care and which should remain the same. Now the works were transforming and continued their lives not only in human encounters and in how the exhibitions are narrated, but also with non-human beings, the materials turning into moss and mold, or being eaten by moths and mushrooms.

Residencies open their homes to strangers and take care of them. The caring acts are often very concrete: offering food and shelter, warming up the sauna, driving the artists around. And these acts make all the difference – they constitute a period of freedom from everyday practicalities combined with new places, people, and experiences, together with distance – physical distant to what normally constitutes daily life, is crucial in creating the mental distance needed for new perspectives to thrive. This kind of space is needed for the flourishing of new thoughts and ideas. Or even old ones.





Porin kulttuurisäättö: *Sponsori*, 2013

This picture is from the first ever Porin kulttuurisäättö exhibition, 'Sponsori', the main exhibition venue being my studio apartment. Opening a private home for the public is an act of hospitality but so is opening any exhibition and welcoming strangers to have a look at your thoughts, ideas, hopes, wishes, fears, desires. Opening channels for dialogue is always an act of hospitality, and it is an act of seeing the other, recognizing its being.

To host is an active process that has multiple definitions: as a noun a host is "a person who receives or entertains other people as guests" or, for example, an animal or plant on or in which a parasite or commensal organism lives" (Oxford Languages). As both of these meanings imply, hosting is an act of giving and something that can be consuming.

# IDENTITY

Identities are created by the repetitions of gestures, how our bodies occupy spaces. When artist Artor Jesus Inkerö was working on the 'holistic bodily project', as they call it, turning their non-binary body into a hyper-masculine hockey player, they said that manspreading was the most difficult thing to learn – taking space with bodily acts in public places. In the process, Inkerö reproduces a fantasy of a sporty young male, wearing a cap and a short haircut, but also wearing a physical appearance. In *Justin* (Inkerö, 2016), the artist poses like Justin Bieber did in a Calvin Klein advertisement from 2015, dressed in similar boxer shorts. Diet, body-building, gestures, clothes are all part of how we appear and how we are interpreted, they are signs and signals of our identity, and, like in Inkerö's project, pieces of the complex construction that is regarded as our "identity." In Inkerö's work, identity is presented as a fantasy, as something one can play with, but the work also comments on how different bodies and presences are perceived. Manspreading is such an essential and common part of a certain type of identity that even if it is annoying it wasn't even commented upon when Inkerö was testing it out - it is a resented but accepted part of male identity and behavior in public places, as it was a admitted fact that (straight) male legs just deserve more space. (Frilander, 2017) Like Inkerö states in an interview;

We are all categorized and made into stereotypes. We need to learn to read how our society is structured, and then unlearn those structures. For me to be non-binary and queer is also connected to as what I pass as in life: I enjoy the privilege of being white and of passing as male; it's definitely advantageous in terms of safety, control, and access. So, to see what your body represents, and what privileges you have, is the kind of moment to be taken out of this day. (Kyllönen, 2019)

Posing as celebrities, imitating gestures, and testing how one passes as someone else is also part of a play where identities are created and recreated in social media. Social media is like a twisted version of Hegel's master-slave dialectic where the recognition by the other constitutes self-consciousness. New identities are created and tested until recognition is gained. The internet provides new places and communities for creating, deconstructing and constructing identities. Techniques for perfecting self-image vary from different filters to online activism being deployed. Identity has, in the neo-liberal world, become part of the project of a subject that constantly seeks self-improvement and development. Meditation, balance, well-being, and workout are framed as self-care, but they also make us stronger, more resilient, and eventually, more productive and better workers. When we want to question this evil cycle, we say that we refuse to talk about how busy we are, or our burnouts, anxiousness, and depression, neither do we want to talk about the self-care practices. This requires active denial of the precarious situation we live in, in the competitive art world and within the social structures that create these symptoms and cures.

The etymology of identity borrows from the Latin word *idēntitas*, *same-ness*. Identity, to identify with something, is feeling sameness. It is always spatial, always communal. Political, social, national, and professional identities all refer to a relationship with a group, and a place. Identity is created through everyday practices, as identities become instituted through encounters with others;

Identity itself is constituted in the 'more than one' of the encounter: the designation of an 'I' or 'we' requires an encounter with others. These others cannot be simply relegated to the outside: given that the subject comes into existence as an entity only through encounters with others, then the subject's existence cannot be separated from the others who are encountered. As such, the encounter itself is ontologically prior to the question of ontology. (Ahmed, 2000, p. 7)

We are nothing without others. As beings, we are interdependent.

Identity is connected to places and spaces. Different places frame different acts and gestures differently. Placelessness and constant travel can create identities that are based on a feeling of non-belonging. Relations with other people

and communities, on and offline, produce identities. My identity is inseparable from the place where I grew up, “My roots are embedded in the cultural expressions, sounds, tastes, and rhythms of life that we so easily take for granted until we are disconnected with them”, as Minna Salami writes. (Salami, 2020, p. 83) Or, as Paul B. Preciado describes;

I was born during the dictatorship in a small Spanish city dominated by Catholic Francoism; I was assigned the female gender; Spanish was made my maternal language; I was brought up to be a perfect little girl; I was given an expensive education and private lessons in Latin. In the words of Judith Butler, these are ‘forcible reiterations of the norm<sup>48</sup> that shaped me. (Preciado, 2013, p. 93)

My example is not as extreme, growing up in a North-European secular suburban neighborhood, but what I am today is formulated by the demarcation where social norms and expectations jostled up against my own intentions and hopes. In school, this demarcation turned into an open fight when the gendered expectation failed to match with my appearance and behavior. I was not expected to be the “perfect little girl”, but obedient and quiet in the least. The expectations and norms of identity appear when you fail to fulfill them, when you fail in *passing*. My identity is also a result of inner discordance. For many years, I struggled with multiple identities and felt that my identity as an athlete did not really cohere with my identity as a future artist. My friends have influenced my identity. The neighborhood had an impact on forming my identity. I might not feel at home in the suburb I grew up in, but at least it was not the neighborhood suburb. I have had role models, and this matters. Even if at school I was told that my laugh was too loud and my performance was inappropriate for a girl, there has already been enough variety in representations to identify with.

Representations and their diversity matter: why it matters what kind of identities are represented in art and how they are represented. It matters if old representations are represented without considering how they come across today and how they are perceived now. It matters who is chosen to be represented, it matters who is given space, time, and a voice. It matters who is heard.

48 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 232. (Preciado’s reference)

It matters especially at a time when extreme nationalism is rising all over the world and identity is often equated with national identity, something that is taken as a given attribute, albeit exclusive. In fact, these national identities are socially and politically constructed. Instead of shared *Ursprung* and ancestors, national identities are created with stories, narratives, selected memories, artworks, education, language – including some, while others are left out. (Porin kulttuurisäätiö et al., 2017)

Identity politics is a complex concept that evokes a wide range of emotions.<sup>49</sup> It refers to a movement where people of a particular religion, race, social background, class (or other identifying factors) form alliances and move away from broad-based party politics. Identity politics can refer to a wide range of activities and politics used to increase equality and justice within marginalized groups. The term is rooted in the black feminist movement of the 1970s. Today the term is most often used when trying to quieten these groups and prevent their aspirations for equality. This is especially obvious when the term is used to criticize the works of artists hailing from marginalized groups. Queer trans artist and researcher Camille Auer writes about how the term is used as a vehicle to belittle the political aspirations of marginalized groups, often without defining what is meant by “identity politics” in a particular situation. Auer argues that using the term to downplay the works of artists while missing “neutral art objects” is a sign of “colonialistic phantasy of control, where objects can be (violently) separated from effects they are part of, and that art created by artist coming from marginalized positions is not “identity politics”, but art.”<sup>50</sup> (Auer, 2019)

49 See for example Nav Haq: *The Invisible and the Visible. Identity Politics and the Economy of Reproduction in Art* in Internationale Online (16.9.2015)

50 Auer’s text “Art handling minority positions is not ‘identity politics’” (Vähemmistöpositioita käsittelevä taide ei ole ”identiteettipoliittikkaa”) was published as a response to an article in *Taide-lehti* (3/19) by Mikko Mäki, who was struggling with criticizing art where the “author is the artwork”. In the article Mäki used a probably self-created concept of “minority author position art” and stated that when this position is visible in the artwork it becomes impossible to criticize the artwork without criticizing the artist. As Auer writes, Mäki is yearning for autonomous artworks, independent objects that have never really existed but are a fantasy of control and capacity to eliminate objects from the structures and phenomena that created them. Auer presents how Mäki in his text ignores the complex networks artworks can study and present, and how the way Mäki uses the term “identity politics” without defining it, has little content or relevance. (Auer, 2019)

Jennifer Doyle refers to the same suspicion of identity politics;

Artists working in the margins find themselves burdened with a distinct form of affective labor: dealing with their audience's desire to absorb such works into prefabricated narratives about what it means to make informed by, for example, discourse on race and identity. The deep suspicion of identity politics cited earlier (Bishop, Foster) may originate in an awareness of the problem of liberal formations around difference (e.g. its fetishization), but it has yielded a rather strange situation in art criticism in which the mere presence of especially race as an interpretive factor is enough to wipe out a work's difficulty and the complexity of its relationship to its context. Worse, that oblivion (which reduces work about racial discourse to a moment of racial identification on the critic's part) is more often than not presented as some sort of critical insight. (2013, 94)

Works by artists from socially defined minorities can be political but they do not automatically equal political. It is not enough that diversity is increased, or that works of contemporary art emerge from different positions. Rather it is about how these different positions and questions are framed, contextualized, and written. This is a crucial part of the process of improving the discourses in the art world.



This is Soukka, the suburb I am from, where I spent my childhood, went to school, and made my first friends. Places play a crucial part in forming identities:

*Don't be fooled by the rocks that I got  
I'm still, I'm still Jenny from the block  
Used to have a little, now I have a lot  
No matter where I go, I know where I came from (from the Bronx!)*

*Don't be fooled by the rocks that I got  
I'm still, I'm still Jenny from the block  
Used to have a little, now I have a lot  
No matter where I go, I know where I came from (from the Bronx!)*

(Jennifer Lopez: Jenny from the Block, 2002)

You can never take the places we grew up in away from us. We may leave but the places never leave us. How our surroundings are built and designed dictate our behavior and how we are perceived as people. Coming from a turbulent neighborhood is a label and a signal. It is what distinguishes you from others. This is my neighborhood. I know the people who are drinking cheap wine on the stairs in the picture behind my back. I know the urban legends and the mythical creatures and freaks. I remember what it felt like to stand in the snow cold, waiting for someone to pick you up from school, when you were not allowed to walk home alone because of the violent rapist stalking children. I remember how the mall was when there was still a bookstore and a bank. I remember them all turning into dive bars, dive bars that never questioned our age when we started frequenting them as teenagers. I remember hiding behind a car in the parking lot when someone started following us one night. I believe these are some of the reasons why Jenny is still Jenny from the Block, and I am what I am.



# INTERVENTION, AND A BOOK ABOUT INTERVENTIONS

"Will it be an ice cream kiosk? Will you serve beer? Are there crafts inside? Why has the city given you this space? Why is taxpayers' money used for this kind of activity? Do we get to keep it? Is it going to be an ice rink in the winter? Why are things like this being done? This is not art!" All these, and many more, are comments that I would have never heard had I continued working as a white cube artist. Even a small intervention in a public place creates possibilities for encounters. They get attention, awake and foster curiosity, and generate discussion. Interventions are platforms where many different things can happen simultaneously, from artistic experimentations to studying the environment to listening and learning. In interventions, art is no longer separated from its context. Rather, the context has become part of the work.

Considering that identities are created through encounters, it is not irrelevant what kind of encounters are taking place in our everyday life. Artistic interventions are, among other things, interference in the ordinary flow of everyday life. Intervention, the action of intervening, in the context of art

...means a site and time-specific act or artwork that breaks from the traditional framework of displaying art. At the same time, it addresses existing space or situation and possibly some other existing work of art. An intervention thus simultaneously poses questions concerning the making of art and its authorship and the space or situation at which the intervention itself is aimed. While interacting with

architecture, activism and urbanism, intervention also has an active and challenging relationship with the history of art and its different genres such as performance and conceptual art. Artistic intervention also challenges spectators by injecting something new and surprising into the familiar and existing. Intervention is a challenge to confront the unknown. (Jensen, Rajanti and Ziegler, 2018, p. 11)

Artistic intervention, be it a small gesture or a large object or installation, interferes with the expected flow of the everyday. Hence, it is capable of creating new trains of thought and, eventually and especially when these experiences are shared, new narratives and stories. Artistic interventions interrupt the way we perceive the space around us and our surroundings. They may make us observe it more carefully, “What appeared to be a question of object/non-object has turned out to be a question of seeing and not seeing, of how it is we actually perceive or fail to perceive 'things' in their real contexts.” (Irwin, 2009, p. 46) The experience of something hanging around us, even if we do not immediately recognize it or know what it is, impels us to pay attention to this experience. This experiment and moment of disconnection also signals a possibility for the actualization of a community. As Rancière writes, “The paradoxical relationship between ‘apart’ and the ‘together’ is also paradoxical relationship between the present and the future. The artwork is the people to come and it is a monument to its absence....an aesthetic community is a community structured by disconnection.” (Rancière, 2011, p. 59) Changes in our everyday environment generate curiosity, and curiosity generates connections. When something disturbs us, like an intervention or an object penetrating the everyday, we want to share this experience. When working in public space, strangers approach us and each other. The event and experience are encountered apart but are shared together: its temporality, how it comes into being and disappears, how brings together people, how the place was and how it will be. And finally, how I was before this encounter and how I will be after it.

When interventions happen in public places and they are about the context this means that they explore and comment on both the site where they are happening and the tradition they are a part of. Projects are mediated and kept alive through narratives and new projects. We realized this while writing the *Intervention to Urban Space* book with Taina Rajanti and Denise Ziegler.

*The Intervention to Urban Space* writing process was an opportunity not only to document what had been done but also to take time to reflect on past projects. In the hectic cycle of writing applications, realizing projects, and reporting on them, there is often very little time to consider what actually happened on a deeper level, and this, in my opinion, is where possible knowledge gets lost. Writing the book took us back to the projects done over the years, both in Pori and elsewhere, and made us realize how the projects still live on and how they impact what was done after each of them. Our practice seems to happen like a domino effect, one project, and its outcome lead to a new one. This book was a momentarily stop in the middle of falling dominos. It forced us to contextualize our practice in relation to art history and the academy – to think outside the bubble we had created in the distant and small city.

Again, collective work was an important part of the process. Writing and thinking together was fruitful and we did learn a great deal. Working closely together was also encouraged. We shared thoughts and ideas that had not been shared before. A moment of comprehension followed Denise Ziegler's confession that, joining the team in Pori after the rest of us, that before starting the book project she had understood hardly anything of any of the projects we had been telling about. That the documentation showed people standing in circles in different locations, image after image and the verbal explanations added very little to this. Documenting performances or interventions is not easy, and after this conversation, I have tried to pay more attention on how to mediate projects. Does it always need to be the picture of people standing in circles?

In interventions, life and art become intermingled. When entering a gallery or a museum one can be almost sure, like artist Allan Kaprow states in *Untitled Manifesto* (1966), that what is inside is art, and everything outside is life (Doherty, 2009, p. 40). Intervention art spills into to everyday life and becomes mixed with other events and emotions. It is like an intruder, no wonder it is not always welcomed. Sometimes this is hard to keep in mind as one is excited about ideas and projects and curious about the results and outcomes: even if intervention art can foster general curiosity, their its strength is related to its capacity to disrupt and intervene, perhaps even intervening in one's personal space and entering the privacy of the everyday. It is useful to keep in mind who these interventions are for. This is a crucial moment where the possibilities and responsibilities art are weighted.



Delivering a book, 2017

This picture is from November 2017. Jukka Juhala, Taina Rajanti and Denise Ziegler are sitting in our office in Porin Puuvilla and we are working on the intervention book that was published in January 2018. I have always wanted to write a book, I just never realized how exhausting the process can be, especially when writing something about which there was very little preceding literature. Intervention art has not been much discussed in the Finnish context, which forced us to expand our research. The original idea was to present the so-called Pori School and the practice established in Pori and then continue elsewhere in a book but we soon came to realize that if we did not provide the reader any background knowledge of the field and theoretical thinking the project would be just descriptions floating in a thin air. Our practice, even when happening in a kind of self-created bubble in Pori, did not happen in a

vacuum, but there was a whole tradition of thinking and creating behind it. The next challenge was to narrow down the models and examples and decide the most relevant texts, artists and artworks to present. All of us writers, Rajanti, Ziegler and I, share mutual interests but also come from slightly different academic schools, so this also meant compromising and adjusting. However, the process was also rewarding. The fact that we worked in Pori together and even lived together made it intensive but flowing. It was possible to dive deep into the process of thinking and writing together. The process also made me critically review the way we tend to document and archive things, and reflect how our projects throughout the years had been mediated and contextualized, and understand the value of self-reflection even more than before.

# JOUISSANCE

*Jouissance* is a concept connected to psychoanalytic discourse. It is more than just mere joy. *Jouissance*, as Jacques Lacan defines it, goes beyond the pleasure principle: there is only a certain amount of pleasure a subject can bear, and after that comes pain. *Jouissance* is this pleasure that has become suffering, and even if this is most often, especially how Georges Bataille uses the concept, been used in the context of erotic. This joy that is something other than happiness or pleasure is also known in the practice of art: the pain and joy of searching for something, trying to figure something out, and maybe, once in a while, arriving at it. As with the concept of desire, we often regard them as feelings towards another person, but we also desire places and thoughts and works. When we come close to obtaining our desires what we might feel *jouissance*. Minna Salami's thinking is parallel to Bataille's in how identity and joy are linked. How she uses joy is similar to *jouissance* – not as happiness, but as presence of *hope*;

By *joy*, I am not speaking of its close relative, happiness. I'm referring to an inner quality that is itself political in nature. By *joy*, I mean the type of emotion that may emerge if you had a near-death experience but survived, because the thrive under a system of oppression requires such intentionality. I mean the presence of hope. I mean being yourself even if it clashes with the approved perceptions of how you should be. I mean ease and lightness of being. I mean, in essence, freeing yourself from predefined notions of identity. (Salami, 2020, p. 78)

The ordinary everyday understanding of *jouissance* is closer to joy and enjoyment. *Jouissance* is defined as physical or intellectual pleasure, delight, or ecstasy. In art, this can even be a physical and intellectual pleasure, delight, or ecstasy, as art as an experience can, and often is, both intellectual and embodied sensation, for the maker and the spectator. *Jouissance* might be the feeling of trying to search for something, going to the limits of one's capacity. It is definitely not always pleasant, it takes time and effort, but this search itself is motivated by desire, and beyond pleasure. The flow of working is, however pleasant, even if the road there is sometimes painful. But there is a lot of joy in creating

and experiencing art: the joy of discovering, the moment of understanding something, and the realization that not only this experience of encountering the artwork but also our whole being, is shared.

This sharedness is also related to how art can create a sense of being connected - connected to the world, its beings, and its history. This creates a circle, as history is also represented in art. An even if there might be joy in understanding how art can store all these narratives and make the past available for a revisit, there is also a lot of pain understanding the violent and exclusive nature of the represented history. When working with art one is always working within this tradition. This tradition can be heavy, sometimes even overwhelming, and this is why one needs support and mutual understanding. The ultimate feelings, working on the verge of the pleasure principle, on the border of joy and pain, is easier with trusted colleagues. With these colleagues, we have recently started to discuss the theme of joy more. It is as if joy can't be mentioned until you have worked in the field for a certain amount of years without fear of losing one's credibility. The pleasure of our profession is almost like a taboo. Why is it, that when there is so much joy, and *jouissance*, involved in artistic processes and practice, that it is so hard to talk about it? Is it because we try so hard to make our work recognized as a proper profession that we are afraid of this aspect? That we fear art, and our work, might look less serious if we admit enjoying what we do?

I believe most of us have come to work with art because we really love what we do and creative work gives us a lot of pleasure even when it is painful. What leads one to work with art can also be an urge to express something, need to get something said or done, will to change things, or a hope to create beauty - all of these motivations are connected to the feeling of pleasure and joy at the moment when things start happening, formulating, shaping.

In feminist theory, especially in writings by Hélène Cixous, *jouissance* has been used to describe an experience bordering a mystical communion in the context of women's writing, *Écriture féminine*. Cixous own writing is a perfect example of this kind of writing where the body and the text become inseparable, and how the pleasure and pain combine in the writing. In her text the subject is neither never alone: "We want to write the torment, and we write the joy. At the same time. At each moment I am another myself. The one in and on the other." (Cixous, 2005, p. 25)



*Centennial*, 2018

This picture is taken during the installation of *Centennial* (2018). Not only did we love and enjoy the show, but the installation period was probably one of my favorites in my career of making art, exhibitions and events. It was a good example of the joy of art starting to happen in a space or a location, and the fascination that arises when it comes into being after all the planning, writing, discussions, theoretical thinking, ideas, failures, applications, emails and meetings. There were difficulties, but when the joy exceeds the possible pains, they are easy not to forget, to ignore. This image captures a moment of calmness between all the panic and chaos. The process of installing an exhibition is often messy, exhausting, intensive and full of sound and movement and decisions that need to be made. But it is also a moment where excitement, expectation and fulfillment meet. After all these years of putting on exhibitions, it is still magical how artworks, exhibitions and events come into existence and the chosen exhibition site comes to life.

Installing is also a moment that requires multiple skills, skills that one does not always have. In the right of this image, you can see an artwork by Raimo Saarinen (also responsible for the whole flower shop installation). During the installation we started calling the work “dry butterfly”. Behind the dry butterfly there was a massive hole on the wall caused by mine and Saarinen’s bad hammering skills. The dry butterfly was supposed to be one of the easiest works to install, but somehow we managed to fail in this simple task majestically.



# KINSHIP

“Make kin, not babies!” This thesis by Donna Haraway may sound provocative, but there is a point: the number of people on this planet is increasing rapidly, which means also growing increasing amounts of food, and both the number of people and for example chickens that are grown to feed them, is becoming unbearable. Haraway states that if there were more care and connection for place and all kinds of critters, humankind would not feel the urge to reproduce so overwhelmingly. In her work, she calls for care, accountability and attachment. In their work Haraway and her fellow scholar, Anna Tsing have discuss re-building possibilities for living well, and how being a scientist means spreading the word. Narratives and stories matter, as well as the way they are told: we need to tell stories so that they instead of paralyzing increase senses of care and belonging. (Haraway and Tsing, 2019)

At the core of the question of reproduction is power over female body. Being able to control the number of offspring one chooses to have can be considered as a sign of white privileged, but whether the number of children is zero or ten, someone will criticize it. The reproductive body is a social and political issue and reflects cultural expectations. Paul B. Preciado writes about this in a western context, where the pill creates an image of control and naturality, due to its artificial cycle and possibility of accidental fertilization:

The heteronormative logic of the Cold War period that dominates the Pill seems to respond to this double, contradictory requirement: every woman must simultaneously be fertile (and be so through heterosexual insemination) and able to reduce the possibility of her own fertility at all times to levels asymptotically close to zero, but without reducing it altogether, so that accidental conception remains possible. (Preciado, 2013, p. 208)

Making kin and kinship is an alternative way of making families. Kinship is not limited to bloodlines or even to being human. Instead of biological children families could be personal choices, households, organisms with human animals, and non-human animals. For Haraway, a family is about having and being had:

By kin I mean those who have an enduring mutual, obligatory, non-optional, you-can't-just-cast-that-away-when-it-gets-inconvenient, enduring relatedness that carries consequences. I have a cousin, the cousin has me; I have a dog, a dog has me. (Paulson, 2019)

Hierarchical structures and familial expectations need to be reconstructed. Instead of blindly expecting that changing the concept will change things for the better, one should also ask, as Maggie Nelson does, referring to Judith Butler, does radical recontextualising family arrangements constitute new kinship, or does the so-called new kinship system just mime the older versions? (2014, 16) This is related to how every day is understood and organized, and a question of knowledge: what kinds of arrangements are understood, naturalized, and neutralized, and what is seen as weird and uncanny. Knowledge is about producing theories, but also about practicalities and politics.

Artworks and exhibitions facilitate sharing and narrating. They are places for fabulating, places to build connections. They can make all kinds of critters, and all kinds of family arrangements visible. In a way, they often are, at least momentarily, family arrangements themselves. When we work on a project we often live together, eat together, think together. We have a shared goal, we share stories and ideas. The project becomes a household and the people involved become a family. Even if every day I shout "we are not your mothers!" a billion times when I get tired of cleaning up and cooking, it does not erase the structure of care and connections that have already been built. Kin is built in art and it is built in theory. It is built when H el ene Cixous writes "we" instead of "I" and every time I make food for an artist, and every time the audience starts to care for a place after coming to an exhibition.



Helmi eating blueberries, 2020

This is me and my sister's dog Helmi picking blueberries the summer she passed away. She loved blueberries. She was one of the most intelligent and compassionate beings I have ever known, and often assisted me with tasks I sometimes find stressful: writing grant applications, abstracts, and papers. I don't think it would be right to describe her as a "pet". She was definitely a valued family member, more like the *kin* Donna Haraway uses: someone you share your life with. Whether it is human-animals or animal-animals, I believe in chosen families; to build your family on love instead of shared genes, to share love, thoughts and ideas instead of spreading genes. Biology and genes are one thing, letting someone under your skin is another.

# KNOWLEDGE

We do not view knowledge as something that can be accessed, and assessed, through the arts and their connection to the emotions, senses, and embodied experience. We associate talent with the arts but not knowledge. Yet art is also suited to explaining reality because art captures reality from the inside out. Art explains who we are because our existence is artful. We are not simply rational and mental beings, we are also emotional and physical beings. Art is a way to understand and change reality just as much as quantifiable information is. (Salami, 2020, pp. 12–13)

In *Sensuous Knowledge* (2020) writer and social critic Minna Salami presents knowledge as a result of europatriarchal processes that present knowledge as something separate from you, as, “you cannot acquire what you already have”, and how this distinction “requires that you perceive knowledge as something that manifests of its own accord, which means that you must see knowledge as neutral.” (Salami, 2020, pp. 32–33)

And to understand knowledge as “neutral”, “you have to separate it from the thought patterns and social conditions that created it. To sustain the belief in the process, you must propagate that the most valid form of knowledge is that which can be measured. Ultimately, this is how the process of Europatriarchal Knowledge works. Acquiring knowledge at any price distances it from context and promoted bias.” (Salami, 2020, pp. 32–33)

Salami suggests that because knowledge has concrete and acute consequences the understanding of knowledge must be broadened.<sup>51</sup> instead of understanding knowledge as outside of ourselves, a separate field, it should be

<sup>51</sup> Salami refers to, for example, studies showing how racism affects black people also physically: discrimination causes higher systolic blood pressure and black women who experience racism have increased incidents of breast cancer. “We are not only politically and socially disenfranchised by Europatriarchal Knowledge, we are physically scarred by it”, Salami states. (Salami, 2020, p. 41)

understood as interconnected network: “the more we understand knowledge as an ecosystem that reflects interbeing, and that flourishes when our relationship flourish, whether they are relationships with facts, with nature, or with people, the more our world expands. The more we connect with the sensuous, the better we can identify needed political, economic, cultural and social change.” (Salami, 2020, pp. 40–41)

When I talk about art as a place for creating and mediating knowledge, is “knowledge” the best concept for this embodied, sometimes non-verbalized understanding? When it could also be information, data, awareness, cognition, comprehension, sense, reason, why use the heavily charged concept of knowledge? And what does this mean for the form of art and exhibiting it? Curator Gabi Ngcobo presents disrupting the form of an exhibition as a way to disrupt what we “know”:

But I think it’s something we always have to think about – how to disrupt what we “know”. I think we can treat the word “exhibition” as a convenience. It’s an exhibition because we do it within the convenience of the term “exhibition”. But I think the question of how to disrupt the form of an exhibition, how to make it unfamiliar, should never leave us. (Ngcobo *et al.*, 2018, p. 35)

The dictionary defines knowledge as “1) facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject 2) awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation.” (*Oxford Languages*) This means that knowledge is not only analytical but also experiential. The consideration of knowledge as a purely analytical and skill-based, it not only segregates knowledge as a purely human feature but also a feature that is more achievable for some than others. I want to observe knowledge as a more democratic and equal phenomenon in its plurality. Curating is connected to knowledge production, but there is always the element of uncontrollability in the process. In her thesis, Miina Pohjolainen refers to Carolina Rito's use of exposure to describe the curatorial and writes that “the concept of exposure reveals the fragility of the curatorial position; the curator can choose to point the light into things—to expose—but can not necessarily predict how the things will react in the light.” (Pohjolainen, 2020) I think this beautifully summarises

how knowledge can be perceived in the context of curating: the curator can and should know what are the elements used in the project and the knowledges forming it, but the knowledges yet to come are unpredictable and demand open-mindedness.

When I study art and write about art as “knowledge production” I do not only study or analyze the knowledge that is produced but the question of knowledge itself: what do we mean by knowledge, what kinds of different forms it can take and what is done by it. There seems to be a common understanding that experiencing art already needs a set of skills. I disagree with this. I believe art is something we experience and the experience does differ depending on our backgrounds and education, but that all these experiences create different kinds of knowledges that should not be hierarchically structured. Analytical art discourse probably does require specific knowledge but experiencing artworks and perceiving them from a specific perspective generates new kinds of interactions, and these interactions are related to how the world is perceived.

Even if we do not aim to give voice to the non-human and falsely articulate their knowledges I find it important to acknowledge that this different forms of knowledge exist. When a bee is dancing the location of a flower field to its roommates it is knowledge: interaction, care, and information that is being passed from one being to another. I interviewed artist Teemu Lehmusruus to the journal *Mustekala* about his project *Trophic Verses* that explores soil and combines artistic practice to research. In the interview Lehmusruus named the *unknown* as the area where the collaboration between art and research is most meaningful for him, and also questioned the understanding of knowledge and control, and connects these concepts to goodness: “If even an animal without brains, a worm for example, can make so much more good than humans can considering the living conditions in this planet, one should probably not be so proud about intelligence or control.”<sup>52</sup> (Jensen, 2020)

Knowledge is a difficult concept, it escapes, it takes different forms, it is political, hierarchical, exclusive, and too big of a thing to approach. In *Posthuman Knowledge* Rosi Braidotti asks “How can we develop a posthuman theo-

52 Translated by A. Jensen: Original: “Jos aivotonkin eläin, vaikkapa kastemato saa huomattavasti enemmän hyvää aikaan tämän planeetan elinolosuhteiden kannalta kun ihminen, ei älyllisyydellä kannata ehkä lähteä leijaillemaan ajatuksella, että tiedän kaiken ja kaikki on koko ajan täysin minun hallinnassani” (Jensen, 2020)

retical framework that aspires to justice, but is made outside history of society, encompassing instead what we used to call natural?" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 43) In my work, I rather tend to talk about *nonknowledge* than knowledge. The nonknowledge is a blurrier, a bit disturbing, and even messy, the concept introduced by Bataille, and as nonknowledge questions the structures rational nature (and "naturalness" itself) it is too useful to leave aside. Knowledge, on the other hand, is understandable to all, but at the same time has a variety of meanings and uses. Writing an academic dissertation against the orthodox methods means constantly struggling with knowledge: to trick readers to continue there needs to be a certain amount of structure and understandable knowledge to be able to insinuate some nonknowledge and start exploring its possibilities together. In this dissertation, the familiar form of an encyclopedia is the recognizable structure, the bait, the content is the blob – reformulating every time it is touched. Artistic research can be a source of non-discursive knowledge, shaping and being shaped in multiple constellations:

If we want to reconfigure the traditional oppositions between theory and praxis, then we should consider two types of inter-relationship: one is the 'praxis-theory of aesthetic manifestations which opens up new spaces of thought and relation through its particular connections, and thus gives rise to its own, non-discursive knowledge in the shape of a fruitful constellation of materials, objections, actions, outlines, images, or sounds. These form those 'languages of things' which Walter Benjamin wrote of, which, as languages of the singular, must be distinguished from discursive modes of speaking. They think multimodally, compositionally, and, in many media, simultaneously. (Henke *et al.*, 2020, p. 39)

In *Strange Encounters* Sara Ahmed writes about alien knowledge as exceeding our knowledge: aliens in popular culture are so overly represented that they have become immediately recognizable but at the same time "the absence and presence of the alien pushes us to recognize the limits of representations as that which exceeds 'our' knowledge." (Ahmed, 2000, p. 1) Aliens are uncanny, similar to the living dead and robots, haunting our understanding and concept of knowledge, also in a way they are both beyond the limit of representation

and overly represented: “The figure of the alien reminds us that what is ‘beyond the limit’ is subject to representation: indeed, what is beyond representations is also, at the same time, over-represented.” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 1)

When I write about art as a site for mediating and creating knowledge, what does this actually mean and how does this happen? In a world where an incredible amount of knowledge is produced all the time, there is also an incredible amount of knowledge that just disappears into thin air, or at least it does not reach more than a small professional circle, or it might be inaccessible for those who are not already invested. Art can be a more accessible way to make new knowledges approachable and experienceable. These encounters can again produce something new, act as a small push and nurture new ideas. Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing both argue for the necessity of not only producing scientific knowledge, but also sharing and spreading different types of knowledge in the form of narrating, storytelling and fabulating. They muse on how terrible stories can be told better ways. I believe that art is one way of telling such stories. (Haraway and Tsing, 2019)

Knowledge is not, after all, the ultimate goal or cure. Knowledge can be used to improve conditions and existential angst, it may help in coping with the uncanniness of our being, and it most definitely fulfill endless curiosity, but unlike traditions like the enlightenment and rationalism promise, the world cannot be solved with scientific knowledge. Neither do I completely agree with Hegel about absolute knowledge being the end of history;

“It will be recalled that Hegel proposed a global interpretation of history that focuses on the status of knowledge. Roughly speaking, this interpretation runs as follows: history is over because knowledge has become absolute. Rationality is the absolute becoming of the spirit in history, the stages of history marking the progressive development of the spirit as it invests ever more of the world.” (de Certeau 1986, xviii)

As Wlad Godzich explains in “The Further Possibility of Knowledge”, a foreword to Michel de Certeau’s *Heterologies* (1986, xviii). But with the uncanny and eerie spirits and souls and all the weird critters and experiences in the world there really cannot be absolute knowledge, can there?



## A. NON-KNOWLEDGE

At times, when encountering artworks they strike us with a sensuous, almost overflowing feeling of understanding, of being served some kind of information that we still can't put into words but that deeply resonates with our curiosity. They give form to something that we have sensed exists, but that we haven't been able to articulate.

Non-knowledge is also political and connected to artistic research. Like curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev states;

I think we always have to make a form of negative-dialectical critique of our own thinking and to be aware that when you say 'artistic research', you are both questioning that autonomy of art as a field, but you are also pursuing and strengthening the hypothesis behind cognitive capitalism, which is that knowledge is the product that will make economy flourish in the twenty-first century and therefore all of the divisions between the rich and the poor and the power relations and subjugation of people might be found by these knowledges. (Cotter, 2019, p. 251)

Cognitive capitalism denies the possibility of failure and openness in research. However, in artistic research, failures and openness can be fostered, instead of trying to "hammer it into methodologies, into temporal structures", as Lucy Cotter writes. (Cotter, 2019, p. 197) She writes about how science can be seen as a more natural partner to artistic research, rather than the humanities, because science too needs to deal with its lack of knowledge and can provide unwanted findings. Cotter calls this working on the verge of unknown "encountering the other side of knowledge to enter the space beyond the known", "a difficult confrontation with the unknown", and ponders that "maybe what is comparable within the artistic realm is the courage to deal with the lack of tangible coordinates to hold on to. There is a kind of swimming through darkness to find something, and that's a very confrontational space to work in." (Cotter, 2019, p. 203-205)

The complexity of our time demands new kinds of knowledges and practices;

Global complexity opens us to urgent cognitive and ethical demands. These are Promethean responsibilities that cannot pass unaddressed. Much of twenty-first century feminism—from the remnants of post-modern identity politics to large swathes of contemporary ecofeminism—struggles to adequately address these challenges in a manner capable of producing substantial and enduring change. Xenofeminism endeavours to face up to these obligations as collective agents capable of transitioning between multiple levels of political, material and conceptual organization. (Laboria Cuboniks, 2019)

To think of the unthinkable is a cognitive and ethical demand, as the Xenofemists claim. They dress the urgency of it, but art has for its part always tried to consider what has not been thought yet. Art has provided tools for creating utopias and dystopias, for imagining airplanes before their time, explored relations between math and music, and provided paths from painting to coding. To think of the unthinkable has been a task concerning the perceptible world, but also what lies beyond it. To imagine beyond the known has most clearly been practiced within the weird and eerie tales and horror fiction, but today the need for this kind of thinking is acute. Braidotti has argued how today's "hyper-objects" challenge our capacity and force us to think of the unthinkable. This, Braidotti writes, is "the end of the world as we knew it." (Braidotti, 2019, p. 76) According to Braidotti, the thinkability of a concept is related to a relational nature of thinking. She understands thinking as "a chamber of resonance, a space of vibration, between the multilayered and multi-directional plateaus of our embodied and embedded positions." (Braidotti, 2019, p. 68) To think of the unthinkable requires thinking in new ways, from new positions, creating new relational ways of thinking and expanding our methodologies.

## B. ENCYCLOPEDIA

The impossibility and paradoxical nature of an encyclopedia is already present in its description;

For more than 2,000 years encyclopaedias have existed as summaries of extant scholarship in forms comprehensible to their readers. The word *encyclopaedia* is derived from the Greek *enkyklios paideia*, 'general education,' and it at first meant a circle or a complete system of learning—that is, an all-around education." (Collison, 2022)

Embedded in the concept of an encyclopedia is a tension between completeness and particularity: how can something be a complete system or learning, or, even less, all-round education and complete system of learning of an extant scholarship, scholarship already referring to particularity? Considering my approach, and maybe the limitations of knowledge and organizing knowledge, the proposed conceptualization of encyclopedia as "recording much of what was known at the time of publication" (Collison, 2022) is more fitting. As a record of what is known at this moment the encyclopedia is also a document of shifts and changes, competing knowledges and ideologies. It is a product of a specific time and space.

Like all archives, encyclopedias are subjective, presenting choices that have been made. However, they are often non-committal about the selection process. With that in mind, this is not an encyclopedia or a comprehensive explanation of everything, but an encyclopedia exploring the concept of encyclopedia, a collection of knowledge, itself, where concepts, chosen based on their appearance and use in contemporary discourse and in the projects presented in the thesis. The dissertation revisits the (hierarchical) ideas we have about "encyclopedia", "concept" and "research." "Encyclopedia" has connotations of absolute knowledge and objectivity, but such knowledge does not exist. Whatever it is we mean by "knowledge" is always affected by certain space and time, by a context. Unlike the traditional idea of an encyclopedia suggests, knowledge, nor the world itself, is never completely whole, but rather fragmented. This thesis is a fragmented mapping project in this context, presenting research-based artistic practice as a spider web of theories, experiences, and encounters. Presenting projects that

cross borders between different genres and fields, the thesis connects to texts that have tested the limits of linear, narrative writing or traditions of fictive or academic style. It aims to respect experimental approaches from the past, the idea of searching new languages that are needed to create new structures, such as Hélène Cixous' idea of *Écriture féminine*, or Audre Lorde, who confronted oppression with poetry. The thesis also acknowledges its contemporaries, such as the authors writing in the genre of autofiction. These include Maggie Nelson who combines gender theory, art criticism and her personal experiences, in addition to Paul B. Preciado's challenge to existing social structures and power relations by using his body as a laboratory and starting point. One important, recent example is the book *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through* (2019) by T Fleischmann, a beautiful poetic novel that takes Felix Gonzáles-Torres's artworks as a starting point and experiments with the tradition of how to write about art. (Fleischmann, 2019) Encyclopedias today expand from printed books to collective online archives and lived individual bodies.

An encyclopedia is a par excellence example of rationalism, human superiority, classification, patriarchal hierarchical power. It often celebrates the idea of objective truth and lack of personal interest. In the introduction to his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* G.W.F. Hegel writes that, "philosophy is also essentially encyclopedic, since the truth can only exist as a totality, and only through the differentiation and determination of its differences can it be the necessity of totality and the freedom of the whole. It is, therefore, necessarily systematic." (Hegel, 1990, pp. 51–52) In this dissertation the aim is quite the opposite. That is, to present the fragmented, political<sup>53</sup> and relational nature of knowledge while affirming the impossibility of totalities and universal truths. This encyclopedia is a mapping project that explores the changing na-

53 Knowledge is never created in a void, but it is created and interpreted in a specific cultural context of interacting powers, and in every culture some forms are more dominant than others: "Culture, of course, is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls consent. In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others" (Said, 1979, p. 7) The dominance of some knowledges over others are most alarming in cases in which situated, experiential knowledge is erased and substituted what has been considered "universal knowledge", strategy that has been part of colonialization, and lead to situation where teaching "local critters or ecologies rarely happens", like Haraway writes, and instead, for example, "most Malagasy never see a lemur on the land, on television, or in a book. Those privileged enough to go to school with books saw pictures of French rabbits." (Haraway, 2016, p. 83)

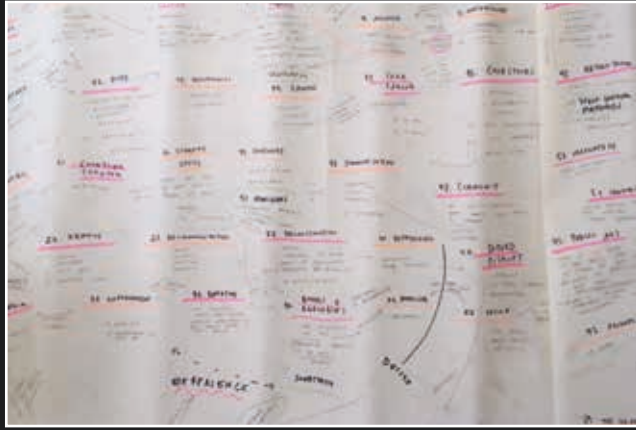
ture of *a system*, a rhizomatic network of ideas and powers and practices we live and work within: how a “system” is, to some degree, an organic construction. It is a manifestation of admitting that the world cannot be controlled by categorization. Neither can it be controlled how this study is observed, read, and interpreted, which leads us to the notions that authorship is always shared. The reader will create their own story. This dissertation offers the reader multiple choices for creating their own story with the dissertation. The reader might create their story with the rhizome of texts, projects, and reflections or based on fragments, pieces of texts picked from here and there, based on readers own interests and resources.

Opening a dossier: encyclopedic act *par excellence*. Diderot opened all the dossiers of his age. But at that time the act was effective, since knowledge could be mastered – if not by a single man (as in the time of Aristotle or Leibniz) then at least by team. ≠ Today: no longer possible to acquire an exhaustive knowledge; knowledge is now wholly pluralized, diffracted across discrete languages. The encyclopedic act is no longer possible (cf. the failure of today’s encyclopedias) – but for me personally, as a fiction, the encyclopedic gesture still has value, its pleasure: its scandal. (Barthes, 2013, 125)

In this quote Barthes touches on at least three topics essential in my research: encyclopedia as a dossier, a collection of documents, a case study or a case book, and the inevitable failure that will follow, as the amount of knowledge in uncontrollable. The feeling of failure is combined with pleasure — pleasure of knowing and not-knowing, pleasure of moving in the border of knowledge and non-knowledge, control and uncontrol. Pleasure of structuring something in chaos, but also admitting that we cannot master knowledge. Hegel wanted philosophy to be a watertight scientific system, an explicable whole without question marks, hesitation, obscurity, and confusion. But the world is confusing and obscure. Trying to create coherence, reason and sense in a fragmented and often irrational world is, indeed, madness, but admitting that the world is often absurd, random, and always escaping conceptualization is not an easy task either. Instead of determinate concepts the concepts mapped in this encyclopedic project are more like guideposts than pervasive explanations: instead

of being stable entities, they are signals and signs in the practice of experimenting. There is beauty in non-knowledge, but to be able to share this beauty, non-knowledge needs to be organized. The encyclopedia as a dossier provides neat compartments even for the most obscure of concepts. It also makes it possible to combine these uncanny ideas with more coherent case studies and project documentations. Juxtaposing these different elements is like alchemy, the encyclopedia bringing different elements together to create new forms and ideas. This encyclopedia expands outside its pages towards the artistic processes and projects presented and experienced. As a continuation of the deconstructive practice it can be observed like an exhibition: it brings together different voices, forms, languages and puts them in one place where they can be encountered. The visitor/reader can decide if they want to read the catalog first, or experience the artworks, if they want to follow the proposed route and order or create their own paths. A social contract is part of the experience: that art is more than the mere materials used to produce the objects exhibited, and the thesis is more than the concepts and words chosen.

Writing *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* Hegel's goal was to bring philosophy closer to science and to replace the title "love of knowing" with actual knowledge. (Hegel, 1990, 3). This dissertation aims in the opposite direction: to have love as a starting point and a fundamental element in knowing and not-knowing. Love is what exceeds cartesian dualism, it does not concern just the body, neither is it merely intellectual. Intuitive knowledge is an experience - love is hope, curiousness, community, and empathy. It is the desire to know more and the satisfaction of already knowing something.



Dissertation, mind map, 2020

This is the mind map I created when I began to formulate the ideas that would dictate the dissertation's form. In my research, I explore how art today is often presented as *knowledge production*, many times without a specific definition. I do believe art does produce knowledge, and that it is always research in some sense. It is also a mediation of this research. I do think the political motivations behind the idea of *knowledge production*, as well as the conception of this "knowledge", should be explored more closely. The relationship between art and knowledge is not straightforward, and the knowledge art produces is not always hegemonic and productive, but it can be disrupting and disturbing, it can question knowledge capital instead of producing it. Neither should art be reduced to having one predetermined goal. The knowledge art produces is diverse and this production can happen in many different phases of a project and take many different forms. Knowledge is not one but many and art has the capacity to include sensuous and experiential knowledge into the vocabulary of what constitutes knowing. I started collecting concepts that would function as stepping stones when creating connections and paths carved into the unsteady ground around the unknown.

Knowledge means different things to different people, and the tradition of objective knowledge as the outcome of the Enlightenment and rationalisation has reached a turning point now with all kinds of data now available for everyone. At the same time, people are starting to search for traditions that look beyond eurocentric and patriarchal knowledge. This is evident in the success of authors like Minna Salami and her book *Sensuous Knowledge* (2020) has shown. Common knowledge is criticized and alternative “facts” are provided by vaccine-critical conspiracy ‘theorists’, like QAnon. (Salami, 2020)

Towards the end of writing this dissertation I had an earth-shattering realization or hesitation that after carefully selecting these specific concepts for encyclopedia entries, they, in fact, could actually be anything as interpretations and outcomes of my research. But doing anything is merely an opening to something else, creating links. The gesture of how this is done is almost irrelevant. What matters is that it is done. And maybe the context where it is done.



# LABORATORY

When we think about knowledge we often think about science, and when we think about science we think about laboratories. In laboratories, knowledge production concentrates on elimination: eliminating unnecessary or redundant elements and eliminating incorrect results. Bruno Latour describes laboratories as, “excellent sites in which to understand the production of certainty.” (Latour, no date, p. 30) The laboratory has been a common way to describe process-based practice in the field of art recently, similar to “platform.” It is how many projects I’ve been involved with have been described. Instead of certainty, these laboratories have been sites where uncertainty has been produced and explored.

When exploring uncertainty, public places with different user groups are perfect laboratories. With minor events and interventions it is possible to produce knowledge about how a certain space is used and understood, and about our own presuppositions.

Artistic research has the possibility to concentrate on inclusion, instead of to exclude and eliminate. Widening perspective, taking the elements left out into account, making connections for the sake of the bigger picture. More specifically the “laboratory” term increased in usage when artists started working outside of studios, galleries, and museums. Rogers Sansi links the notion of the laboratory to the emergence of process-based, collective, and communal art practices. He notes that, in addition to there not necessarily being clear results or ends, the results are not automatically positive:

In more general terms, perhaps we could shift the discussion from how artists represent the people they work with to how artistic practice may be a tool for constituting social relations. In these terms, we may understand these artistic projects as laboratories for experimentation with social relations, establishing unprecedented connections between different agents and collectives; they could be described in

relation both to situationist practice and to ethno-methodological 'breaching' experiments. The outcomes of these experiments are not necessarily empowering or liberating; they may also result in conflict<sup>54</sup> and even generate new inequalities and hierarchies. (Sansi, 2015, p. 43)

However, art as laboratory does not inevitably refer to exploring human social relations or structures. Especially in site-specific projects there can be a limited ecosystem or urban space that is being researched. For example, in TUO TUO Arts in Joutsa, the events are created in response to the environment and locality. The remains of past exhibitions, events, and artworks can be found in the surrounding forests and field.

*Afterlife dreaming of laho paratiisi* is made entirely of natural materials, most of which were gathered from the forest and lakeside surroundings. After the exhibition season, elements of the installation will be lightly disassembled and returned to the forest. Meanwhile, fungi and bacteria will digest and decompose the remaining parts of the installation releasing carbon and helping to drive the carbon cycle within the ecosystem. (Tuo Tuo and CARACARA COLLECTIVE, 2021)

For a researcher, or an artist, the environment becomes a facility or a center for studying art and its relationship to time, nature, authorship, and spectatorship. Nature becomes a laboratory where we can see how the artworks interact with their surroundings. Instead of controlled conditions, nature heralds unexpected encounters. While the works melt or decompose, they also evoke questions about the ontology of an artwork – if its value is based on aesthetic pleasure and whose. How does the artwork's value change when there is no one to see and study them? How do they feed their environment? The dialogue between an artwork and the spectator expands into a dialogue between the artwork and nature, until they become one.

<sup>54</sup> This is what happened, for example, in our fourth Space Invaders project, *Heterotopia* (presented in the chapter *Heterotopia*), in Matinkylä, where the aim was to study the neighborhood while creating something communally enjoyable for the residents. It turned out that the residents fiercely hated the project. It wasn't a pleasant experience, but it produced a wealth of information and new understandings.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold writes;

Science, when it becomes art, is both personal and charged with feeling; its wisdom is born of imagination and experience, and its manifold voices belong to each and every one who practices it, not to some transcendent authority for which they serve indifferently as spokespersons. And where scientific pathfinding joins with the art of research, to grow into knowledge of the world is at the same time to grow into the knowledge of one's own self. (Ingold, 2018)

Personal curiosity motivates this research. When using the city or a rural environment as a laboratory and platform for art and artistic research, one is forced to reckon with different, interdisciplinary pieces of knowledge. I know about city administration, about how long-term unemployed people are being rehabilitated, how lime grass prevents erosion, about the life expectancy for different types of trees.

When different curiosities are brought together, as the collective working process does, the more we learn. In the first *Pori Biennale* (Porin kulttuurisäätiö et al., 2014) the main research question was the biennale itself. While the exhibition was being built was also this theme studied. The biennale spread all over the city and the biennale centre was located in an old commercial space in the city center. Before the biennale, it was a studio space where we worked together with the artists. I considered it a laboratory where the exhibition was developed. People came and went, worked on their pieces, had coffee, asked questions, discussed their works. All these things were part of the process of the formulation of the biennial. For us, the curators, it felt as if we were a research group making a discovery, a discovery that would inform the whole event which would then unfold again and again, in new encounters and in different parts of the city.

## A. PLATFORM

A platform can be used to describe almost anything and everything. A platform is where events or objects occur. According to the dictionary it is “a raised level surface on which people or things can stand” – so a platform can act as a syn-

onym for both space, a public place in a city or in nature, or an exhibition or an event, where something, people or things, take a stand. In the context of art, it is used in a parallel way to “laboratory”: a place for testing out things, where elements are brought together create something new, and are encountered in other than their “natural habitat.” As a business model, “platform” refers to facilitating exchanges between groups and creating value through this action. In art, the concept “platform” has today been established to refer to different kinds of spatial and temporal settings where people, ideas, and practices come together. Usually, these places or events are more than just exhibitions. The term stresses the open nature of practice and positions, slightly off-kilter from the conventional methods of practicing art.

Platform can also be a solid base for haphazard, fluid, coincidental, and random things to happen. When we create projects like *Space Invaders* or Porin kulttuurisäätiö's exhibition there are certain things we can control, and some that we can not, nor do we want to control them. We can control the base and the platform that is constructed: the theme and the research question, the *why*, *where* and *when*. But the how we cannot completely master or dominate.

Creating platforms means creating possibilities. I see this as one of the most valuable and interesting aspects of curatorial work. As a curator one can create platforms as opportunities where people can come together and study things collectively. In our projects, artists are invited to a place and a situation where a framework is provided, as well as a community, a support group, where the theme and the forms given can be explored and experimented together with the group. The curators and the fellow artists act as a peer group and a test audience. Often this relationship carries further than the initial project. I consider the platform as a starting point where the final outcome is not predetermined. It can be the project the platform was created for, or it can be an artwork, exhibition, text or collaboration that will happen somewhere in the distant future.

An important part of the platform is its shared nature, that the process and the outcome are shared. In my research, I consider the encyclopedia as a platform: encyclopedia as a recognizable form gives frames for presentation. I can control what is being presented, but how it is perceived and interpreted is out of my control. A platform is a springboard where ideas, artworks and experiments presented emerge. But it is not the final word. A platform makes things possible, but it does not aim to wrap them up.

A platform has become useful precisely because it does not contain the already encrypted assumptions of what it means. For example, an exhibition already invites certain kinds of expectations. When we talk about a platform the outcome stays open ended. As practice it refers to contingency and a lack of pre-defined outcomes or traditional structures. This lack of stable structures is what makes it political. Recently, I have started to think about a slightly problematic concept. The platform can be anything anywhere, it does not need permanent facilities or personnel. Calling ones project a platform is a guarantee that it cannot fail – there are no expectations. All this, especially when considering funding, means that platforms are perfect places for appropriation and exploitation<sup>55</sup>. The lack of permanent facilities and workers means that “platforms” are usually cheaper to run than, for example, galleries. The nature of the platform as a site where people informally “come together” also enables them as sites for unpaid labor. At the same time, this also means that they are, hopefully, low-threshold places where diverse groups of people find it easy to engage with.

55 Platform economy from Uber to Wolt is obviously the most flagrant example of this, and also related to precariousness and the concept of *entreprenariat*: “everyone is an entrepreneur. nobody is safe,” as Silvio Lorusso writes (2019, 7).



Olafur Eliasson: *Your Rainbow Panorama*, 2011.  
Aros museum, Aarhus.

The above image depicts Olafur Eliasson's *Your Rainbow Panorama* (2011) in Aros museum in Aarhus, Denmark. The work, placed on the rooftop of the museum is a good example of how an artist can use the city, the context, the surroundings and the public as a laboratory. Creating works in city space the artist works in relation to surroundings. The work changes how the surroundings are perceived. The surroundings will impact how the work is being observed. Despite the museum setting the work functions unlike the white cube, the visitors' experience is not controlled or predetermined. The work becomes a laboratory for the spectators. *Your Rainbow Panorama* not only encourages one to observe the city from a different perspective, but also the experience of the observation itself, as if the observations were put under a microscope in a petri dish. One becomes aware of how different colors have different impacts on one's vision. The light changes the sensation of bodily being in space. The way the colors and the lights change while moving inside the circle directs attention to embodied movement, itself becoming an object of observation, instead of a self-evident event.

# LANGUAGE

Language takes us from the obscurity of the semiotic world to the structured world of symbols and signs. Words are guidelines. Words and names attach us to the world and other beings. We name what we love, but there is also an element of control. We name what we own, or what we want to own. Naming is about power and language is a battlefield. As language is a place for maintaining existing power structures, it is also a possibility for deconstructing them, “Human language, as it is actualized in ‘discourse,’ is the permanent theater of a power struggle between social and affective partners.” (Barthes, 2013, p. 172)

We name things we want others to know we own. If I name it or create it, it is mine. Naming is a practice that makes these things more approachable for others. It is hard to imagine things without names, difficult to dream of what we cannot recognize. Names, words and language are paths. Naming is marking, is the act of making signposts. The practice of naming is an important part of art projects, especially experimental ones when you want to create a shared setting for different elements to emerge. Giving this project the name "encyclopedia" or an exhibition "biennial" or "world expo" creates expectations, understandings, and expected understandings of what the project will be about. This both marks out the field concerned, and creates an opportunity to observe these hopes and expectations. In artistic projects, we can surpass the limits of language (language understood as a written and spoken system of signs), but we are never totally free from it either:

Because not only no philosophical consciousness, but rather also no human consciousness at all, is thinkable without language, the ground of language could not be laid consciously; and yet, the deeper we inquire into language, the more definitely it becomes known that its depths exceed by far that of the most conscious product. (Schelling, 2007, p. 40)

According to Georges Bataille one is doomed to language, but existing always contains something that we can't reach with language and with words. (Arppe, 1992, p. 65) My practice happens at the intersection of language, words and forms. It is based on non-verbalizable, spatial experience. Not everything can be conceptualized and verbalized. Under structured and organized society, there is the underlying feeling of something trying to escape from its place. As we can't be sure what it is, it has been given different names and forms, from the uncanny to the real to eerie. Our society is largely based on the idea of organization and control, nameable entities, so that even the ones we do not really recognize are named. The problem is, they can be almost anything or nothing at all.

The problem of language and naming is acute in art and artistic research, which itself operates with forms and knowledges beyond language. Or art strives to create its own language. In *Reclaiming Artistic Research* Lucy Cotter claims that art has its own ways of knowing and unknowing. She argues that the unique epistemological possibilities should be acknowledged:

There is a very deep bias in academia towards linguistic articulation, and the expectation that all forms of knowledge can be translated into language has the effect of implying that traditional academic knowledge is the only real form of knowledge. The assumption that form and content are separable, and that the medium is secondary or superfluous, creates a discursive framework in which other ways of thinking go unrecognised, unheard or overlooked, even as artists try to make them explicit. Drowned out by the well-meaning question of what artworks are "about", which focuses on academically comfortable subject matter, conversations rarely enter into the more opaque languages of art. Art's own ways of knowing and unknowing, its unique material and conceptual epistemologies, thus become sidelined and artists are silenced by default on the very thing that matters. (Cotter, 2019, p. 16)

Language separates humans from other animals, "one should never seriously compare traits of animal ethology with traits of human sociology, never infer one order from the other (because between the two there's always at least this separating them: language)." (Barthes, 2013, p. 37) This has also been, for good



reason, questioned (see Derrida's *The Animal and Therefore I Am*): "language" is not only the spoken, verbal, written, language of humans, but many other sign and symbol systems, a way of mediating things, and it is obvious that also animals do this. Art operates simultaneously in the fields of language and making, or these can be seen as two "incomplete languages", as artist Falke Pisano presents. She states that, "From the beginning, it was very clear to me that both language and making are two incomplete languages somehow. My starting point was, and still is, language and how to define a problem to think through language. The aspect of art enters through bringing problems from a linguistic space that is not necessarily formal or material at first, but that is at least not a space of pure language." (Cotter, 2019, p. 55) In this sense language and knowledge are joined and propose similar questions. How language (and knowledge) are understood constitutes human subjectivity. Subjectivity is supposedly gained by stepping from the semiotic to the symbolic order, as Julia Kristeva argued in her influential theory of the semiotic and symbolic.

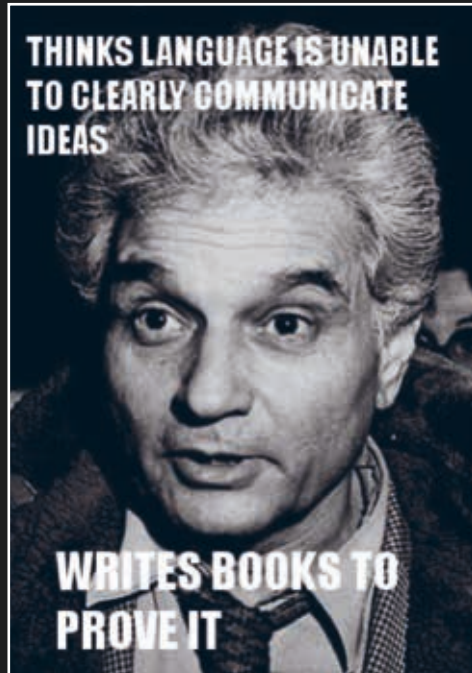
The genealogy of the subject as a critical category, however, suggests that the subject, rather than be identified strictly with the individual, ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation. Individuals come to occupy the site of the subject (the subject simultaneously emerges as a "site"), and they enjoy intelligibility only to the extent that they are, as it were, first established in language. (Butler, 1997, pp. 10–11)

According to Butler, subjection is based on the stories presupposing subjects, and this is why it matters what kind of stories are told and how (see Haraway). Perhaps it is the lack of story, the lack of subjecting narrative, that leads to the non-grievable, precarious lives Butler later writes about<sup>56</sup>. Naming is about love, as Roland Barthes suggests in *How to Live Together*: "The name is the name of what I love, it's my name: I only name what I love. I only name what's worth naming." (Barthes, 2013, p. 100)

Naming what we love is an act of care, but also an attempt to claim what we love as ours. Especially when it comes to animals and pets, naming is a form

56 For example in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (Butler, 2016)

of appropriation. Through the act of naming the animal's subjectivity is controlled by us. But this act is always shadowed by a risk: we can't fully control or own another being. This risk is reflected in both the subject name and the naming itself. Words, languages, and names are never fully transparent and clear, they mean different things to different people. Even when communicating in the same language, the question of translation is at stake. In *Lost in Translation* (Coppola, 2003) Sofia Coppola, who might as the critics insist, end up maintaining the orientalist stereotypes and fail in articulating that the film is a western interpretation of Tokyo, nevertheless displays how communication is never waterproof or perfect, but there are always different obstacles that make the communication, our language, and our life as lingual subjects, fragile.



Derrida and the problem of language presented as a meme

This Derrida meme is hilarious, but it also captures the concerns of my research in a single image. Language is limited when it comes to expressing the uncanniness of our being, our embodied and experiential knowledge of being in the world. Still, we need it if we want to share and discuss these unknown ideas and uncanny feelings. Derrida is considered a difficult thinker and writer. Trying to simplify complex phenomena means reducing what we might not know or understand to the already known and understood. This may seem like a self-evident attribute of philosophy and art theory, but it is a question that also has concrete everyday aspects, often related to language as an analytical and scientific tool separated from emotions, feelings and bodily dimensions. A doctor knows all the names of all the organs and muscles in our bodies

but when we try to explain pain, how much pain we feel, what is it like and where is it situated, language fails us. As an artist and curator, my relationship with language is special in multiple ways. My understanding of language encompasses non-verbal forms of communication. I am constantly using multiple languages from English to Finnish, to academic to everyday language. This intersection of languages is also very concrete and ordinary. We sometimes call our everyday spoken language “spinich” which is a mixture of Spanish, English, and Finnish. I consider mediocre English to be the common and shared language of the art field. I am not sure how I feel about it. I have always been a reader and a writer. I love beautiful words and sentences. I think something has been lost in this whirlwind of languages. But maybe there is also possibility in this melding of words, a new form of materiality where we need to redefine everything repeatedly and as such, have greater control of what we say and how: a place where we do not need to use the master’s tools, as Audre Lorde might say, but rather, where we can invent new ones to dismantle the master’s house.

# MEDIUM; MEDIATING

Merriam-Webster defines “*medium*” as:

- 1A:** something in a middle position  
*These shirts are all mediums.*
- B:** a middle condition or degree : MEAN  
*Look for a happy medium.*
- 2:** a means of effecting or conveying something; such as
- A(1): a substance regarded as the means of transmission (see TRANSMISSION sense 1) of a force or effect  
*air is the medium that conveys sound*
- (2): a surrounding or enveloping substance
- (3): the tenuous material (such as gas and dust) in space that exists outside large agglomerations (see AGGLOMERATION sense 2) of matter (such as stars)  
*interstellar medium*  
b plural usually media
- (1): a channel or system of communication, information, or entertainment  
— compare MASS MEDIUM
- (2): a publication or broadcast that carries advertising
- (3): a mode of artistic expression or communication
- (4): something (such as a magnetic disk) on which information may be stored
- C:** media plural: digital audio or video files available for playback or streaming
- D:** GO-BETWEEN, INTERMEDIARY
- E:** plural mediums: an individual held to be a channel of communication between the earthly world and a world of spirits

- F:** material or technical means of artistic expression (such as paint and canvas, sculptural stone, or literary or musical form)
- 3A:** a condition or environment in which something may function or flourish  
*Ocean fish live in a medium of salt water.*
- b plural media**
- (1): a nutrient system for the artificial cultivation of cells or organisms and especially bacteria
- (2): a fluid or solid in which organic (see ORGANIC entry 1 sense 1) structures are placed (as for preservation or mounting)
- C:** a liquid with which pigment is mixed by a painter

And "mediate" as:

Adjective:

- 1:** occupying a middle position
- 2A:** acting through an intervening agency
- B:** exhibiting indirect causation, connection, or relation

Verb:

- 1A:** to bring accord out of by action as an intermediary  
 (see INTERMEDIARY entry 1 sense 1a)
- B:** to effect by action as an intermediary (see INTERMEDIARY entry 1 sense 1a)  
*mediated a settlement that was satisfactory to both sides*
- 2A:** to act as intermediary (see INTERMEDIARY entry 2 sense 2) agent in bringing, effecting, or communicating : CONVEY
- B:** to transmit as intermediate mechanism or agency  
 intransitive verb
- 1:** to interpose between parties in order to reconcile (see RECONCILE sense 1a) them
- 2:** to reconcile (see RECONCILE sense 1b) differences  
 (Merriam-Webster, 2022)

When I think about the role of a curator I think of it as a mediating role, occupying a position between the artist, artwork, place of exhibition, and audience. I often also, maybe more controversially, think of the curatorial practice as similar to the practice of mediumship: channeling the earthly world and the spirit world, or, as Merriam-Webster defines it “an individual held to be a channel of communication between the earthly world and a world of spirits.” (Merriam-Webster, 2022) Instead of talking to ghosts or other paranormal activities, I consider mediumship as listening and active engagement with the surrounding world. Like a medium, the curator needs to use their psychic and intuitive abilities to see the past, present, and future. I quote the list of meanings in detail, because I believe even the most distant meanings can increase understanding or create new perspectives on our praxis, at least indirectly.

This act of mediating and the intuitive nature of it, is probably why the nature of the profession is sometimes hard to put into words. There is a certain amount of uncanniness in a practice that consists of intuitive listening to the world and mediating the results first to artists in the form of project plans and research questions, and then to the public. At the event itself these spirits are presented in the form of artworks and texts. The difficulty of describing and controlling the process is also related to the nature of the practice as a “middle position” and a “third party”: there are always others that need to be taken into consideration. Curating is about negotiating, it is an interactive process.

When a curator is about to mediate knowledge, and especially knowledge that can touch what is outside the ordinary. That is, traditional, structured knowledge. To act as an intermediary, communication skills are needed. When it comes to contemporary art, it is often stated that “I do not understand it” or that “it is incomprehensible.” What should be emphasized is that art is not (merely) about understanding, but about the experience. This experience makes it possible to touch, to impact, to change, through art. As then it is not about structured and articulated knowledge that happens in a limited circle. It is much harder, impossible in fact, to control how the produced knowledge is perceived. But, ultimately, maybe this is what it is all about: to admit and to accept the uncontrollable nature of our being, of art and life. In *documenta fifteen*, this question was handled by the “Where is the Art?” working group that grew out of discourses about the imbrication of art and life. (ruangrupa, 2022, p. 24) Sometimes curating, or mediating, is like the game *chinese whispers* or *telephone*

(in Finnish it's *rikkinäinen puhelin*, *broken telephone*) where players form a circle and pass a message around and, in the end, the first person and the last person announce the message before they are compared. Usually something happens in-between, during the process, that means the first and last message are never the same.

The curator's role as a mediator is crucial in this process. The theme, what the exhibition aims to say, where and how, is usually the result of the research interests of the curator or curatorial team, who then invites suitable artists and/or chooses artworks for the project. In Porin kulttuurisäätiö and Space Invaders projects this often means that the artists are chosen based on their previous practice, their capacity to work on the topic at hand and as part of the working group. What is especially important in the site-specific projects is their capacity to understand space and adjust their work according to it. This is where the reconcile part of mediating is crucial. The curator needs to reconcile the theme, place and artistic practice. After this, the curator articulates the theoretical concerns of the project to media and to the public and takes care of its accessibility. If the artists are the ones creating the environment, the curator is the one who draws the map and acts as a guide when the project is mediated to the external world. While the art operates in the experiential sphere, it can be easier to access if the premises are clear. Porin kulttuurisäätiö member Sanna Ritvanen uses the concept "radical accessibility" when speaking about making decisions and practices visible, how the concepts and languages used in the project and catalog can be made understandable for larger groups of people. In the *documenta fifteen* handbook, the glossary at the beginning introduced some of the core terms, ideas and practices to the reader as a guide (ruangrupa, 2022) – a practical gesture that will made the complex whole a little more accessible and simple.

What is the outcome of the curatorial process of mediating? It can be explored through these definitions of medium: "a condition or environment in which something may function or flourish" or "a nutrient system for the artificial cultivation of cells or organisms". (Merriam-Webster, 2022) When curatorial work is done well, a nutrient system or environment for cultivation and flourishing is created. In a successfully mediated project all the agencies and parties flourish, from artistic practice to spectatorship.





*Space Invaders* study project, 2016.

The photograph above was taken at one of the sessions with Aalto students held during the course related to *Space Invaders IV – Heterotopia* (Jensen and Suvanto, 2016b) in Matinkylä. In my practice, medium and mediating are fluid concepts that are deployed differently depending on the context. The *Space Invaders* course was a good example of a time when multiple meanings came into play. The aim was to organize an event and go through the process for its organization step by step, while also familiarizing students with the roles of a curator, of an artist or researcher, depending on each event. While mediating this professional knowledge, the location and the theme are being approached together from different perspectives. A suitable medium for the theme and the place are considered. When we go through the future project with the group we use a diversity of mediums: texts, images, visits to the site, group discussions. We revisit past projects we have realized and similar projects others have executed. We ask for the artists to provide us with project plans and budgets, and later descriptions of their works to add to the catalog or list of works.

When we start working in the space, the next step is to contemplate how the project is mediated to the public: how it is perceived, experienced and interpreted and what information is needed and provided. Usually the whole remains hidden and a mystery even to us, until the opening when things again take a turn and the project is opened up and given to the public.

Part of the process of mediating is the documentation: how to document the process and how to document the outcome? How to capture the experience and make it accessible to those who want to follow the project afterwards or those who cannot make it there physically. How to document the miracle of something coming into being in a space, experienced by a group of people and then disappearing? How to document temporality?

# NEW

The new never emerges passively and automatically from the forgetting of a past culture or from inner devotion to a hidden reality, to what 'has always been'; but neither does it emerge from the opposite, from amorality, greed, or heightened ambition. Rather, the new results from a certain cultural-economic strategies of the revaluation of values that presupposes familiarity with actual cultural mechanisms and the principles of their operation. For newness presupposes that one can guess which difference from tradition, the old, and the pre-existent will be invested with value in each concrete period, giving the difference the change to accede to cultural memory. (Groys, 2014, p. 51)

Art has both a paradoxical and fetishistic relation to the new. It wants new all the time and, simultaneously, it is not capable of reacting to the new. The completely new cannot be recognized. The new has a problematic relation to the contemporary. As in art, the new is always connected to the historical. What is new and contemporary for some is already passé for others.

The demand for the new and original can also cause problems with how artists consider each other's work and practice. As Suzanne Lacy points out when writing about the intricate relationship between beauty and contemporary (public) art;

The role of invention in beauty is more complex, especially within an art world driven by novelty. Our reward system, based on the appearance of innovation, often leads us to deny the work of intellectual and spiritual predecessors, unless they are long enough dead that association with them enhances rather than competes. This hysteria for the new, a prejudice of our society, has reached a climax in contemporary art. The implications for building a sustained and

effective argument for art's social role are severe if activist artists cannot acknowledge how they are building on each other's works and theories. (Lacy, 1995a, p. 44)

It is important to recognize that every time we create something it happens in a continuum and as part of the context of current discourse and the history of art. Our work is always commenting on something that already exists, no matter if it is a social construction or an artwork. We always aim to do something that has not yet been done. Writing about the paintings of Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze argues for this accretion of influences, "In fact, it would be a mistake to think that the painter works on a white and virgin surface. The entire surface is already invested virtually with all kinds of clichés, which the painter will have to break with." (Deleuze, 2002, p. 12) White and virgin surfaces do not really exist. If they do, they are a social contract that marks a particular space as virgin and neutral. The white cube is not a virgin space, but a space with layers painted on it. When working in a white cube, one needs to be somewhat aware of the existence of accumulated histories of usage and association.

The new is also related to capitalism and the increasingly fast-paced circulation of artworks, events and projects within the art world. Instead of long-term results and sustainability, there is a great hunger for the novel. Mega-events and biennials compete for audiences. They exhibit only the cutting edge, the novel. Eventually, this leads to a situation where the same themes, artists, artworks, and audiences travel around the globe from one show to another. This feverish pace infiltrates various scales of the artworld, from global to local, from funding to creative ideas. The fast-pace of the artworld has recently increased discussion about unrelenting cycles of labor and the importance of experiencing boredom. Instead of running after the emerging and the new, creativity thrives on boredom, on pause, slowness, stillness, and quietness.

## A. NOSTALGIA

"A young but devout time always honors the older time as one that is, as it were, still closer to the origin." (Schelling, 2007, p. 118)

In *Mustekala* journal's Pori edition professor Harri Laakso talks about the city of Pori, and about spending 8 years in a small university unit in the small town, the model of the education, and new conceptions of art that were created. He ends the article by stating that "it is clear that something is changing. And whatever the future will be, it will be post-pori; pronounced softly and without nostalgia: the post-pori condition." (Laakso, 2014) But like many other post phenomena, the post-pori condition cannot be understood without accounting for the nostalgia at work. The pori-condition, for those of us who experienced it, whether we wanted to or not, is related to nostalgia, longing, and belonging. The Pori-related nostalgia is a perfect example of the risks and benefits the concept of nostalgia holds. Nostalgia is the condition of feeling a sentimentality for the past. A nostalgic orientation can make it hard to observe the past critically. We know that not everything in Pori was perfect, but as we aim for creating a coherent and whole narrative explaining our present and our current practice built on the past experiences, we want to imagine that it was.

Nostalgia is homesickness, which implies that one has a home, that there is a place where everything started, where we want to return. Nostalgia is longing, based on an idea of an origin where we belong. As the sense of belonging is important for us, nostalgia is fostered, but also a misused and dangerous emotion and a tool. *Home* is another way to connect nostalgia as a concept to my research. Home is the place of belonging, but the imagined, nostalgic place can also be a place of the *unheimlich*, what we thought we knew but that turned out to be something entirely other, as often happens when the target of our nostalgic longing is perceived more closely and realistically. Dylan Trigg, who presents a phenomenology of nostalgia, claims that "the fragmentation of the world we are nostalgic for presents us with a privileged temporality, which brings together, in particularly vivid manner, the limits of imagination in the face of the diminished memory. The tension between timeliness and unreality is central to the logic of nostalgia." (Trigg, 2012, p. 174) According to Trigg, nostalgia is an embodied experience related to memory, time, and space, where the body is the center. The body is its own space, the actors and the stage settings are where "the ruins of the past to reappear and disappear." (Trigg, 2012, p. 177) Relying on psychoanalysis, Trigg observes the relationship between nostalgia, unhomeliness and homesickness:

At once familiar and unfamiliar, embodied and disembodied, nostalgia breeds a peculiar ambiguity. Such ambiguity pushes at the threshold of appearance and reality. Alongside phenomenology, psychoanalysis can help us in understanding the psychodynamic drama at the heart of this ambiguity. Accordingly, it will be worth voyaging into the Freudian backdrop, from which nostalgia's relationship to mourning is given credence, thus propelling the philosophically rich concept of "homesickness" to the foreground. (Trigg, 2012, p. 190)

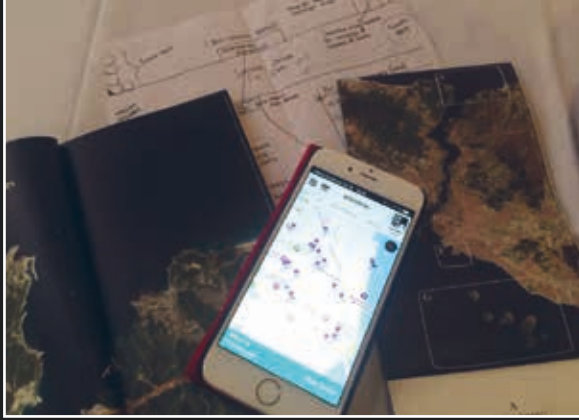
This longing for home that has been lost, or taken away, makes nostalgia appealing. Nostalgia is a personal feeling that is much exploited in politics and very much affects cultural politics and art in general. With the world-wide rise of nationalistic and right-wing parties in recent years, this has become evident. Instead of looking forward and aiming to create better futures we see politicians drawing from the past. This can be seen in the rhetoric as well. Donald Trump's promise to "make America great again" or the True Finns claim, "Finland back." With these claims, right-wing politicians appeal to sentimentality and yearning for a long-lost golden era, ruthlessly eroded by the modern era. When it comes to art, this is manifested in the damnation of contemporary art, judged as elitist and incomprehensible, while more "traditional" art with "historical" and "aesthetic" value is appreciated. This is not just a theoretical and philosophical question, it is political and practical. It impacts how art is funded and considered in societies and communities.

This is what makes nostalgia dangerous. As Michel Foucault states: "The linear reading of history as well as the nostalgic reference to golden age of social life still haunts a great deal of thinking, and informs a number of political and sociological analyses. We must flush these attitudes out." and "I think there is no exemplary value in a period that is not our period...it is not anything to get back to." (Foucault, 2003, p. 69, 107) Nostalgia seems to be somewhat embedded in the concept of nationality and nationalism. Being proud of a nation means being proud of its history, to a degree where this sentiment turns into a nostalgic longing. This was one of the points we wanted to make in the *Truth About Finland* (Porin kulttuurisäätiö *et al.*, 2017) project: how to approach the question of a nation in the present tense? Is it even possible?

Within the field of art, nostalgia acts like a snare, luring and tempting both the artist and the audience. It is easy to evoke feelings, create attachments and compassion with nostalgic elements, as people tend to project their memories, hopes, wishes, and grievances on monuments of the past. These attempts can be seemingly harmless, as in the recent trend in television shows like *Stranger Things* ('Stranger Things', 2016), where the horrors of a place are presented in the warm light of longing. Who wouldn't want to be a kid in the '80s driving a bike and playing board games? The monsters seem almost an excuse for this nostalgia-filled trip to the past. This may seem innocent, but when and if the present gives very little hope and is not what we expect as those board game-playing teenagers, these kinds of representations feed discontentment and make it easy for the neo-conservatives to increase in popularity. *Stranger Things*, as well as, for example, the German science fiction series *Dark* (2017) uses uncanniness as a kind of power. Everything is familiar, but we also feel the sense of unfamiliarity, *unheimlich*, beneath the surface, almost as if our childhood nightmares finally take a recognizable form.

Nostalgia is about imagined wholeness of the past. It is a yearning back to the mythical fountainhead and unity. The other and otherness are among what threatens this integrity. We want a past, a shared history, to know we have a future, and if the present is changing too much we can't imagine what the future will be like. Nostalgia is a tool for imagination, and it helps us imagine collective pasts and futures. This need is utilized by the conservatives who use nostalgia as a tool aiming to promote "traditional values", dividing the world into good and evil, setting limits to the welfare state, and riding patriotic ideology.

Nostalgia is a sort of antithesis of the new. While the new scares and attracts us, nostalgia comforts us. Nostalgia is what we know but even better, it is glazed with romantic hope and longing, based on the idea of an *ursprung*, clear simplicity and explanation. Nostalgia implies that there is a home we belong to. Nostalgia is longing for childhood's long summer days, the smell of freshly-cut grass, the taste of strawberries, the feeling of sun rays on your bare skin. It doesn't really matter if this is the childhood we actually had, as nostalgia is always partly fictional. It is constituted by the stories we tell each other and ourselves. This is what makes nostalgia so tempting, shareable, and dangerous.



Istanbul Biennial 2015 maps

This image is from the 2015 Istanbul Biennial: an event that spreads to multiple unexpected locations around the city, including the sea and below it. It is a perfect example of a contemporary biennial providing new experiences, new locations, new artists, venues, apps, texts, and approaches. The event reacts to the societal changes happening around it and adapts to them. It discusses them, includes them into the program frames them and contextualizes the exhibitions, while also deploying the old. It takes over abandoned places and fills them with contemporary artworks by fashionable artists, it uses nostalgia and a sense of belonging while looking ahead at things to come. It is free of charge and accessible for everyone. It brings together present discourses and the rich history of the city. It works together with activism and activists. But as all this shows, the biennial does not lie outside of the logic, ideas and ideologies of neoliberal capitalism but rather feeds it and is fed by it. Even if there is a theoretical framework we agree with, and an agenda we support, we fly, we travel, we use the application on our smartphones, we might disagree with the politics but we cannot stay away. The new is a fetish. All this newness, all the experiences, and the density of them forces us to move towards these events. The new is like an obsession – we can't stop thinking about it, thinking about new forms, ideas and places. Simultaneously, the new escapes us, we can't recognize or know the new when it is truly new. The form and content of the new remain unknown to us.



# THE OTHER AND OTHERNESS

If nostalgia is a concept related to senses of belonging and home, *the other* is the opposite. *Otherness* is connected to the terror of being alien to even your closest ones, even yourself, and never being able to fully, even partially, to understand the other. We share the world with others but even if the shared nature of our being is understandable, the other is not. *The other* is something that is needed in the process of constituting and explaining the self, but as it is mostly defined in this process, it always escapes, as Cixous has conveyed. (Cixous, 2013, 84) The need to get inside the brain of the other haunts us, but the other is unattainable. Art is a place where the mindset of the other can be represented, tested, and visited, but it always happens from a particular perspective. Also, the others represented in art are limited, there many “others” who are never seen in the context of art. And, because we do not recognize what we do not know, even if they are represented, we might not see or understand them. Furthermore, the other is elusive, and even the attempt to try to take it over can be considered violent, as Donna Haraway has argued;

But we’re not inside anybody’s mind. We’re never inside another human being’s mind. We’re not even inside our own mind. The notion that if I can only kidnap for a minute my own self so that I can actually know who I am – that fantasy of full knowledge is a violent fantasy. (Paulson, 2019)

Instead of trying to conquer the mind of the other, we should, according to Haraway, honor the unknowability of the other;

And otherness. If you take anybody seriously, one of the things you learn is not knowing. That’s one thing I learned from Cayenne and

my other dogs. Not knowing is a quasi-Buddhist value. And the appreciation of not knowing and letting that be is something you learn in a serious relationship. It's a kind of letting go. Not knowing and being with each other not knowing. (Paulson, 2019)

The other is beyond the border and limit of the coherent self, and so beyond our experience and understanding. This is what makes it disturbing, uncanny, and even scary. It can be confronting to acknowledge what we do not know, knowing that we share this world and our being with others that we cannot fully reach or understand and, ultimately, knowing that it is not the other other that we do not know, but also the other in ourselves. Cixous' example above suggests not only the undefinable nature of otherness, but also its spatiality. I and we are always sited in the middle and to the center with structure and borders, while the other is always elsewhere, in the unknown. As these positions never stay still otherness cannot be taken over by the homogeneous order.

The world is organized and structured by the act of othering. Since Plato, the philosophical tradition has emphasized both vision and the subject, and has been built on the *a priori* position of the same in the relation to the other, which then creates a power position. For example, Maurice Blanchot and Emmanuel Levinas wrote about language and words in the context of this tradition and the power structures it creates and grows from: verbs *voir*, *pouvoir* and *savoir* (to see, to control and to know) are all related. (Alanko, 2003, p. 38) To write and theorize, and to make art, are all acts of making visible. This is why it is significant to be aware of what kinds of subjects and positions we are making visible.

In his study about myths composing nations and people, Schelling writes about the creation story and the necessity of the other, both in the context of the image and in the context of language and naming. He states;

...when in the story of the Tower of Babel Jehovah speaks and says, 'Let us go down and confuse their language,' then the reason is clear, for God must multiply himself in order to separate humanity. Likewise in the creation story, where just Elohim alone speaks and says: 'Let us make man, an image which is like unto us,' for the ultimately one God us such is without image. (Schelling, 2007, p. 114)

Schelling refers to how Adam, differentiating himself to “become like one of us”, does this in an opposition to the other – to create us there needs to be the other, and this means that to create singularity we need to think about the plurality. (Schelling, 2007, p. 114)

The concept of the other is needed when systems and categories are created. Binary oppositions are essential for classification to create clear distinctions. At the beginning of the book *Handling the Undead* (Lindqvist, 2009) there is quote from Sven-Eric Lindeman’s *Att se sig själv i andra* (To See Oneself in Others): “Solidarity is always directed at ‘one of us’ and ‘us’ cannot refer to everyone...For ‘we’ assumes someone who can be excluded, someone who belongs to the others, and these others cannot be animals or machines, but people.” The book is about othering, using the living dead as an example of the ultimate other and society’s capacity, or lack thereof, to deal with them. It shows how the other can be perceived through Masahiro Mori’s *Uncanny Valley* graph: “us” is the line showing increasing empathy towards those who are most like us, and in the valley, there is everything we want to exclude, the other, like a zombie.

## A. THE STRANGER

How do you know a difference between a friend and a stranger? How do you know a stranger? Such questions challenge the assumption that the stranger is the one who is precisely not the object of knowledge. For in such a question, knowledge is staged as constitutive, not only of what is familiar, what is already known or indeed knowable, but also of what is strange, and who is a stranger ...the stranger is some-body we know as not knowing, rather than some-body we simply do not know. (Ahmed, 2000, p. 55)

Sara Ahmed’s description of the concept of a stranger speaks to the fundamental unknowability of the other. She refers to Plato in order to reflect on how well-bred dogs know friends from strangers: “it is a trait that shows real discrimination and a truly philosophical nature.” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 55) Ahmed then asks if a philosopher is someone with a good nose, able to smell the difference between a stranger and a friend. Smelling the difference is a way of knowing that establishes the border between the familiar and the strange. Do

you smell like a friend or a stranger? Ahmed strongly disagrees with Plato's argument that love equals sameness: a love of knowledge would mean being able to tell the difference between what you know and what you do not know, telling enemy from a friend, which, according to Ahmed, leads to situation where strangeness becomes a condition for philosopher's narcissism. I would also argue, it limits philosophy to only handle what is already known.

Knowability is here related to sense of smell. The experience of strangeness can be caused by many different things: look, language, and scent. In the prize-winning film *Parasite* (Bong, 2019), all members of a low-income family infiltrate the life of a wealthy family. In the narrative, smell becomes one of the core elements marking class and social inequality. Smell almost exposes the family, stigmatizing them. Instead of style, clothes, language, habits, smell is what distinguishes these two families from each other. Smell is what makes the other familiar and what makes them strange.

## B. MARGIN/AL/MARGINALIZATION

When the other is observed in a more structural sense, not only as constituting singular subjectivity, it reveals the nature of power structures, norms, and hierarchies. When someone is considered to be the Other, not me, not us, it usually leads to othering and marginalization. There is always an expected center, or multiple centers, structural and spatial. Some margins are more stable than others. Some are more related to personal positionality. The margins and borders are drawn with different practices and places, and some places are more marginal than others.

"In Western art, the other is often everything that is not white cis male, and the fight for gender and race equality is far from over." (Reilly, 2018, p. 17). Also, Rosi Braidotti writes that, "Woman as the Other of this subject is deprived of all these attributes. She is thus reduced to unpreventability within the male symbolic system, be it by lack, by excess or by perennial displacement of her subject position." (Braidotti, 2002, p. 24) It is not only the female other, but also other others, who have actively and visibly started to question existing structures. However, the symbolic and functioning system that is created by white cis males to support white cis males is still actively maintained by those unwilling to give up their position.

This becomes clear every time the freedom to present something in the mainstream art context is questioned. An example of this can be observed in 2020 when the Finnish National Theater premiered *All About My Mother*, a play based on the classic film by Pedro Almodovar. In the play, however, the trans character was played by a cis-male actor. When the trans community criticized this, a storm arose. Instead of listening to those who it was about and acquainting themselves with the discourse, they became defensive. The discourse clearly articulated how a man playing a transfeminine character maintains the belief of them as men who are playing women, which can lead to violence. The fact that transwomen are one of the most vulnerable groups in the world did not have weight in the discussion that was mostly founded on discriminatory prejudice and disrespect. (Gustafsson, 2020) The anonymous male commentators were (poorly) trying to hide these feelings behind bombastic statements about the freedom of art, the nature of theater, and concepts of play and acting – issues they couldn't care less about in their everyday lives. Unfortunately the theater, a large state-funded institution which should be fostering inclusion and equality, placated these anonymous commentators instead of the vulnerable group the matter concerned. Even if the conflict was about listening and respect, it was about art too. If we want to protect art and “classics” more than the living beings among us, or if art should be obliged to change and develop with the rest of the world. We know this is possible because many harmful representations and practices have already been obliterated. For theater to be a place where anyone is able to play whoever, the field and the world in general should be more inclusive and equal and education be more accessible. More mirrors and more representations of different kinds of bodies, genders, colors are needed, and if there aren't enough actors to present them, the diversity of education must be increased. In art, alternative futures and worlds that do not yet exist, that yet have no name, should be and can be imagined. But they need to be imagined in a way that produces narratives that increase diversity and possibilities for positive reflections.



Abandoned house, Corris.

Writing about the other is a complex task. The other penetrates everything but is also a large diversity of things. The other is the unknown, the formless that can't be grasped or comprehended, but also the political question proposed by other beings: are we willing and capable of treating the other like we want to be treated? Who is the acceptable other and who is *the other other* that exceeds our understanding? In the end all comes back to ourselves, like Julia Kristeva argues in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1988). When we are afraid of the other, it is the otherness within ourselves that we fear.

When this uncanny realization occurs, that strangeness is not only outside us but part of us, something already lost. The fundamental way it shakes our being is tamed. Art becomes a place for approaching this state beyond words. When we feel uncomfortable while watching a performance and we are forced to face the other, it is also the other in ourselves that we are facing. The artist attempting to reach for the other is attempting to collectively surpass a gap, while also realizing that this act of surpassing must be done alone. Art is a place for sharing what we all have in common: being thrown into the world alone, but that this loneliness is shared, which means that the foundational element in our being is something we all have.

# POLITICS; THE POLITICAL

At the intersection of art and politics the most common denominator is imagination. The possibility to imagine another future and work towards it.” In the study *The Power of Imagination – A brief encounter at the intersection of Art and Politics in the EU* Lina B. Frank creates an intersectional dialogue between culture, politics, and civil society. She presents imagination as a factor combining politics and art, stating that the fundamental meaning of imagination would be “to actively construct new meanings, narratives and possible futures. (Frank, 2019, p. 3)

Art and politics suggest and present new worlds and alternatives, even if their means and forms are different. Art and politics are about imagining things that are or could be. Sometimes they are also about imagining what they most definitely should not be: dystopias are fabulations of worst case scenarios, worlds without hope. I believe that creating a sense of hope is critical to art and politics - to tell stories that encourage action instead of paralyzing horror.<sup>57</sup> Hopeful optimism in today's world is a radical act, and it has recently been theorized by Judith Butler in *The Force of Non-Violence: The Ethical in the Political* (Butler, 2020). Butler suggests that instead of focusing on individuals we should focus on society as a whole and create new ways of considering violence and non-violence, which also means that the neo-liberal conception of the individual needs to be reconsidered.

Connections create a full circle, when it comes to being: I cannot exist without the other, and my subjectivity with others and the communication between us is what formulates communities (and the communities are formulating us).

<sup>57</sup> See for example Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing.

This being is always political, as the political and community are inseparable. Our being is tied to our surroundings, the experience of the world and the uncanny destabilize the stable, formulated nature of the world. The political, community, and power relations cannot be separated, as the community is the place where subjects come to exist. It is always tied to this political being-in-common. Politics is also a way for being-with, understanding and trying to improve this being-together. Art can be an ally in this, creating new ways for coming together and formulating ideas, thoughts, and futures.

Professor, author and translator Peter Connor states that “the political is the place where community as such is brought into play”, and continues:

I seek only to insist on the importance and gravity of the relations of force and the class and/or party struggles of the world at a moment when a kind of broadly pervasive democratic consensus seems to make us forget that “democracy,” more and more frequently, serves only to assure a play of economic and technical forces that no politics today subjects to any end other than that of expansion. A good part of the human community is paying the price for this. (Nancy, 1991, xxxvii)

There is a weird twist when it comes to how art and politics are perceived: politics is considered to affect everyone, while art is often thought to reach only those who have a special interest in it. In practice, however, political decision making and politics tend to remain distant and abstract, meanwhile, art can be experienced and received. This is probably also why it is considered to be a good tool in increasing social justice and wellbeing. This is also why art is a perfect ally to politics. Art is a way of creating new knowledge and practices, politics is a way of putting them into use. Both art and politics can be understood as platforms for research, thinking, and mediating.

I believe that all art is political. And this should not be confused with the concept of political art. What I mean is that an artwork is always a suggestion of a world: a world today, in the past or in the future. In our practice in *How to Life*, *Porin kulttuurisäätö* or *Space Invaders* the starting point is always political, in a sense that the aspect of art being a political tool is taken into consideration and our responsibility as agencies who comment and invent existing structures



is taken into consideration. This is not unlike the starting point for Group Material, who wanted to “develop an independent group that could organize, exhibit and promote an art of social change.” (Stiles and Selz, 2012, p. 1054) The nature of art as a political entity is related to the question of space: where art happens, but also space as democratic arena – spaces that shape our existence. Like visual artist Jonas Staal writes,

...public space is the democratic arena par excellence, the place in which public conflict and confrontation have to take place, the place in which political existence takes shape, the place in which we can say that we are not merely dealing with politics but with our politics. Not politics in which we contract out our vote, but politics that consists of the processes of *learning how to shape ourselves*.

(Staal, 2009, p. 276)

The political aspect, meaning an aim to influence the current state of things in society, is embedded in the practice. In Space Invaders this meant how urban space is being used and how cities are being developed, in Porin kulttuurisäätiö this political inflection was centered around how the artworld functions and how it could be rendered more sustainable, with better working conditions. In How to Life project we consider how the everyday constructs certain kinds of subjects and how the everyday could be deconstructed.



*Feminist Cultural Event,*  
European Parliament, 2019

In this image taken at the European Parliament *Feminist Cultural Event* in 2019, I am preparing to give a presentation about being an artist and a politician and how these roles relate to one another. During the presentation, I argued that I do not consider them as separate roles but like two sides of the same coin: the motives and questions are the same, although the ways in which they operate may be different. Politics and art both create new meanings and new futures and actively construct new narratives. They are both ways of being brave, and they require braveness, willingness and competence to step forward, to say things out loud, to be visible and to express opinions. This is also a trap in art and politics. They are often presented as inclusive fields with diverse voices when, in fact, having one's voice heard is a lot easier for some than for others. This is one of the reasons I felt it is my responsibility to be part of the Feminist Party in Finland: my public role as an artist and curator has prepared me for critical (and sometimes even hostile) comments. Even if I am the target for hate speech as a white and educated person I still suffer from it less than someone from a more marginalized position. My age and my previous experiences give me more tools to handle difficult situations and, maybe most of all, I can trust my friends and colleagues to be there for me when needed. These might sound simple, practical and superficial things to consider but both art and politics, even when the goals and means are grandiose, are often about the small and practical things.

# PRECARIOUSNESS; PRECARITY

“Unfortunately at this moment we cannot guarantee that there will be a budget. It's a precarious system” (a gallery manager, 2018)

Precariousness in common language refers to the state of being uncertain, to a state of being close to collapse: the condition of being likely to fail or get worse. An essential part of precariousness is the lack of predictability. Even if work, in general, is becoming more and more unpredictable, there is increasingly less continuity and secured positions. This weighs on many marginalized positions but in the art world especially. In this context, precariousness can be viewed in two different ways: the precariousness of the art world, the unpredictability, lack of income, general fear, and other practical issues related to our profession. I think one of the hardest parts in this profession is realizing that, unlike what you might have believed when starting your so-called career, things are not going to get easier. Or some things maybe are, but the uncertainty is not going to disappear. As an artist, you need to cope with insecurity, and also with the knowledge that it is never going to go away. This is the reason why replies like the one we got with *How to Life* project in 2018 from a gallery manager explaining the precariousness of the system seems absurd: we know it is a precarious system, there is no escaping it, and this is especially why we were asking about the budget, precisely because as curators and artists we calculate all the time: we calculate our income, the amount of money we can invest in production, the essential costs, like traveling, and whether we actually can realize the project, if we have enough money to practice our profession. Precariousness in the arts could be called, as Silvio Lorusso does, *enteprecariat*: artists are increasingly asked to practice a kind of entrepreneurship. But there is hardly the kinds of possibilities for material success that are available to entrepreneurs. Precariousness is vulnerability, as Lorusso presents, referring to Anna Tsing:

In her *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing takes up the theme of existential precariousness suggesting that precarity, rather than being an exception, represents the norm for our times and defines it as “the condition of being vulnerable to others.” (Lorusso, 2019, p. 42)

Precariousness is not only a material condition but a condition of subjectivity, of being recognized as an individual. Judith Butler uses precariousness as a concept to examine the more universal subjectivity, or more likely, the lack of it. For Butler, precariousness is living without recognition, living a life that is so meaningless that even death is not recognized as death. This is a kind of precariousness that defines who counts as living and who does not. This kind of precarity is a life that cannot be lost or destroyed, as they are already lost and destroyed, ungrievable lives. According to Butler “war is the business of producing and reproducing precarity.” (Butler, 2016 xviii-xix) This approach is not new: in the *Historical-critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, based on the lectures on the *Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation 1841–1854*, Schelling writes about myths, God, polytheism and

...the separation of humanity into peoples and states”, and how this created the situation of some to be recognized as people and some not: “For humanity has not merely divided itself into peoples but rather into peoples and non-peoples, admittedly, the latter are by no means completely what the still homogeneous humanity was – like when milk curdles, the noncurdling part is also no longer milk. (Schelling, 2007, p. 108, 110)

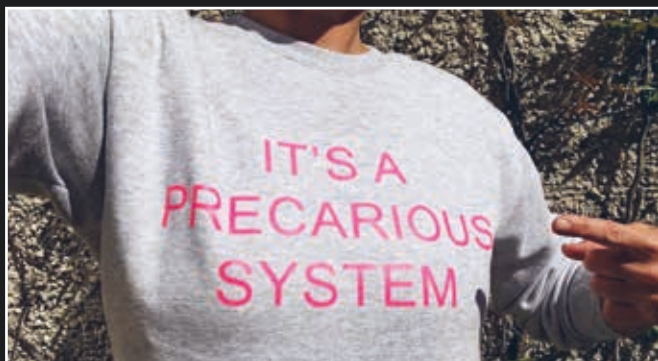
It is not only humans who are doomed to this precarious position. Derrida writes about the position of the animal in the philosophical tradition. The animal suffers but does not die:

It is a ‘Thou shalt not kill’ that doesn’t forbid one to kill an animal; it forbids only the murder of the face. Moreover, there is no murder other than of the face, that is to say, of the face of the other, my neighbor, my brother, the human, or another human. Putting to death or sacrificing the animal, exploiting it to death – none of those, within this logic, in

fact constitutes murder. They are not forbidden by ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ That is because the animal, at bottom, inasmuch as it is incapable of being the victim of a murder, doesn’t die. (Derrida, 2008, p. 110)

If we do not recognize someone as our brother, with a face similar to ours, we do not recognize its death, whether it is an animal or a human that has been dehumanized. Society’s division of people into those who are in the need of protection and those in margins is not new. In an interview from 1983, Michel Foucault describes how a system of social protection can create marginalization and segregation, and how societies are divided into protected and precarious sectors. (Foucault, 2003, p. 69) In many ways, the art world can be seen as one of the more precarious sectors of society. In the thesis *Practicing Coexistence. Entanglements Between Ecology and Curating Art* Essi Vesala explains how the neoliberal demand for efficiency feeds its precariousness:

The neoliberal climate advocates efficiency; using resources as efficiently as possible, usually to turn in more profit. Even though not entirely harmful, as efficient planning can be also sustainable, but it can also be seen negatively in the production of exhibitions: they are organized in a shorter time span, production- and exposure-wise, to bring in more visitors and more income. The high-tempo production span feeds to already precarious cultural sector, which is not based on efficient thinking as its core value. As a result, it brings pressure to artists to produce art faster, and be visible and attainable at all times. Add to that, some artistic practices just do not fit inside of institutional structures, which in this case might mean single, project-based exhibitions and a given, fairly short, period of time. This makes it nearly impossible for some artists to earn income from their art, as artist often rely on exposure given from exhibitions, residencies and grants – a vicious cycle, in which having one makes it more likely to get another. The artists have an apparent freedom for their art-making, but in reality, they have to balance between their artistic practices and pleasing gatekeepers such as funders, to actually make a living through art. The precarious working methods and working in-between can also be applied to smaller initiatives and independent curators. (Vesala, 2019, pp. 27–28)



How to Life statement jumper, 2019

This college jumper is from the How to Life project *And that's how the cookie crumbles* (Coyotzi Borja and Jensen, 2019a). Coyotzi Borja and I made shirts stating IT'S A PRECARIOUS SYSTEM. Precariousness is a pivotal characteristic of the Finnish exhibition system: usually the artist needs to apply grants for exhibition and there is no production budget, quite the opposite. In Finland, the artist often pays rent for the gallery for the duration of the exhibition. The precariousness in the field goes further than this. Later that year I fell ill and went to the doctor wearing this shirt. I was prescribed sick leave and the doctor asked if I needed a certificate for my work. Apparently she did not see the irony in the situation. Insecurity is rampant. Work contracts and possibilities are non-existing or short. Salaries are low, competition is hard, and it is difficult to take time off from work. One maybe lesser discussed but clarifying element of this precariousness is health care. Occupational health care doesn't really concern artists, and the precariousness of life and irregular income makes it difficult to invest in one's health. Even sick leave can be impossible to organize, or a disaster what comes to work and economy. Shortly after the exhibition I got sick and went to see a doctor wearing this shirt. The doctor apparently did not see the irony when asking if I needed a sick leave.

# PLACE, SITE, AND SPACE

Spaces, places, locations, sites, environments, and scenes excite me. Places feed my imagination. Different kinds of sites create different kinds of sensations and emotions that resist hierarchical order. I love the seaside, the wind, the sound of moving water, the vastness of landscape. I love forests and how they connect you with the eco-system, with the sense that everything around you is vital and connected. I love abandoned houses and premises, how historical periods become entangled and layered. I love when a room is empty and lacks traces of the present. I also love museums, the sacred calmness, the sense of devotion in the atmosphere. In my practice, I consider the site where an event, artwork or research takes place as a medium, rather than just a setting. A place often stirs the first impression when entering an event. Its impact on the perception of the artwork itself can be dominant. Spaces and places are bodily experienced, they are stored in our bodies as memories and, in turn, memories are preserved in places. They are sites of meaning, and still they often seem to escape comprehension: “Place is all around us and yet not always fully thematized. Place is at the heart not only of who we are, but also of the culture in which we find ourselves.” (Trigg, 2012, p. 1) Georges Perec describes unstable spaces:

I would like there to exist places that are stable, unmoving, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable, unchanging, deep-rooted: places that might be points of reference, of departure, of origin...

Such places don't exist, and it's because they don't exist that space becomes a question, ceases to be self-evident, ceases to be incorporated. Space is a doubt: I have constantly to mark it, to designate it. It's never mine, never given to me, I have to conquer it.

My spaces a fragile: time is going to wear them away, to destroy them. Nothing will any longer resemble what was, my memories will betray me, oblivion will infiltrate my memory, I shall look at few old yellowing photographs with broken edges without recognizing them...

Space melts like sand running through one's fingers. Time bears it away and leaves me only shapeless shreds. (Perec, 1997, p. 91)

Place is often conceptualized as space that is filled with meaning. According to Lucy R. Lippard, the concept of place has a warm feeling to it, it feels like home, as she states in *Mapping the Terrain*: "While place and home are not synonymous, a place must have something of the home in it." (Lippard, 1995, p. 117) A space can be anonymous, a place cannot. In the same publication, art critic Jeff Kelley describes a place as;

...a social site filled with human content": "One might say that while a site represents the constituent physical properties of a place – its mass, space, light, duration, location, and material processes – a place represents the practical, vernacular, psychological, social, cultural, ceremonial, ethnic, economic, political, and historical dimensions of a site. Sites are like frameworks. Places are what fill the out and make them work. (Kelley, 1995, pp. 141–143)

More poetically, he continues that "places are where time takes roots." (Kelley, 1995, pp. 141–143) Michel de Certeau describes the difference between space and place stating that "space is practiced place": "in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization." (Doherty, 2009, p. 119) When an exhibition or an event is organized in a place it becomes actualized space.

Space is said to be one of the most important questions of our centuries. Foucault is often credited for this proposition, which he argued in the essay "Of Other Spaces" (Foucault, 1986). But, for example, the Heideggerian conception of Dasein and its being-in-the-world is always spatial: "The fact that what is at hand can be encountered in its space of the surrounding world is ontically pos-



sible only because Dasein itself is ‘spatial’ with regard to its being-in-the-world.” (Heidegger, 2010, p. 102) Jean-Luc Nancy, acknowledging Georges Bataille, examines the relation between community and space: “Bataille is without doubt the one who experienced first, or most acutely, the modern experience of community as neither work to be produced, nor a lost communion, but rather as space itself, and the spacing of the experience of the outside, of the outside-of-self.” (Nancy, 1991, p. 19). Bataille’s conception of nonknowledge can be understood spatially, as Lucy Cotter does, describing nonknowledge as a way to question and explore knowledge and how these two entities are spaces where we move: “As we enter non-knowledge, we also brush up against knowledge. We go in and out of those spaces.” (Cotter, 2019, p. 206) Professor Maria Puig de la Bellacasa touches on the conception of knowledge in *Matters of Care* (2017), proposing speculative ethics emerging from the intersection of care, materiality, storytelling and soil:

Knowledge is not anymore considered a discrete human affair that filters an objective world out there; it is embedded in the ongoing remaking of the world... Even more than before, knowledge is relating – while thinking, researching, storytelling, wording, accounting – matters in the mattering of worlds. (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 28)

This understanding of knowledge shows the potential art has: what else is it than thinking, researching, storytelling, and mattering? In *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, space and the situated knowledges related to it are presented as possibilities for change and revolution:

Unable to see its edges, we are forced to live within it as a world in and of itself. This is why, in order to reimagine the body, one must reimagine space. Revolutionary change manifests through a reconsideration of the spatial, in negotiation of spatial limitations and identification of how to overturn, dissolve, break through these boundaries. Therefore, deterritorialization of the body requires a departure from the heaviness of space, with the realization, instead, that physical form is dynamic. (Russel, 2020, p. 84)

The importance of place is related to the shared, material essence of the world. “As I move through place, so my body opens itself to a thick world of sensations, all received haptically.” (Trigg, 2012, p. 10) Place can provide opportunities for grounded and situated perspectives and ideas, like Rosi Braidotti suggests:

Accounting for one’s position in terms of space as time grounds the subjects in very concrete but also multilayered locations. This method thus includes taking into account both the geo-political or ecological dimensions as well as cultural traditions, historical memory or genealogical dimensions of one’s subject position. Accountability is both epistemic and ethical. (Braidotti, 2019, pp. 49–50)

In art this method can mean exploring the multiple layers of locations, mapping the genealogical dimensions, and not only exploring historical memories but also creating new memories and making it possible to create and store memories within places and groups where memories are more easily erased, such as in suburbs where everything is disposable, and rootedness is despised by those making decisions. Art operates at the intersection of places and emotions.

Therefore art, in its wide understanding, can open up possibilities and moments for encountering different kinds of spaces and knowledges. These different spaces produce opportunities to become seen and heard but with respect. Through art and the acts and works created in a relation to this idea, we can actually obtain a wider perspective on the world we live in and on our society. For Nancy, in these places there is “neither subject nor communal being, but community and sharing.”<sup>58</sup> (Nancy, 1991, p. 25) This sharing is a crucial part of art practice, especially when it comes to process-based art. Also in-betweenness is a concept shared with art and place, and the “hold places have on us”, “experience, affectivity, and particularity are at the heart of place,” as Trigg writes, explaining that place as a concept is neither realist nor idealist, “but rather somewhere *in between*,” in between the world and the subject. (Trigg, 2012, p. 6)

58 Nancy though also continues after this sentence, saying that “But this still says nothing. Perhaps, in truth, there is nothing to say”, and continues with suggesting that instead of trying to find words and concepts for this, we should adopt “another *praxis* of discourse and community”. (Nancy, 1991, p. 25) This is interesting, as it can mean that the truth is unspeakable, it cannot be said, but perhaps can be approached through other means, or it can mean that actually, eventually, when we reach the truth there is nothing to say, that speaking is useless, needless or just meaningless, and there, in the end, is actually nothing even worth verbalizing.

Places constitute subjects. They are part of the constitutive outside and the “condition of possibility for the subject, the process through which it can come into being.” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 52) Subjects as lived bodies are “of it”, like Trigg writes, emphasizing the circularity between the subject and the world and how their existence is shared by the same ‘flesh.’ (Trigg, 2012, p. 158) However, there lies a tension between the place and the self: “Given the interplay between place and self, an adjoining correspondence ensues between the materiality of the world and the temporality of the self.” (Trigg, 2012, p. 171) We may be finite, but we share the materiality with the world around us, that will continue after our time. This notion of flesh and materiality, temporality and the loss it contains leads Trigg to concepts of memory, imagination, and the uncanny: “Damaged, the boundaries separating memory from imagination have been flooded by an oceanic melancholy, free-floating in its movement and disconcerting in its refusal to be placed. In a word, *uncanny*.” (Trigg, 2012, p. 214)

How we perceive things is a condition constituted by our previous experiences, bodily features and embodied events. This is one of the things art can study and contextualize, as Olafur Eliasson's *Your Rainbow Panorama* (2006-2011) shows:

Two people approaching each other from different directions inside the rainbow will carry widely different sensory impressions with them when they meet. The one person's eyes will have been subjected to reds and yellows, responding by producing the complementary colours green and purple, while the other person's experience will be the complete opposite. In this manner *Your rainbow panorama* demonstrates how we each carry different impressions and experiences with us, and how these experiences tint our behaviour, affecting the way we approach each other and the world around us. (Eliasson, 2011, pp. 19–23)

When encountering new places, we carry the previous places we have experienced to them with us: “we need only remind ourselves of the body's remarkable hold on to the places it not only inhabits but also passes through. At every instance, our bodies carry remains and reminders of a lived past, fulfilling the original meaning of the sense that *we carry places with us*.” (Trigg, 2012, p. 302)

## A. YOUR RAINBOW PANORAMA

ARoS art museum in Aarhus is built to trace Dante's *Divine Comedy*:

...placing the Inferno down in the darkness of the lower levels in the form of The 9 spaces, followed by a slow ascension towards the light through the building; on the top of the museum roof would be a paradisiacal setting linking the building to celestial spheres, the sky. (Eliasson, 2011, p. 13)

In 2007 Olafur Eliasson's proposal was selected as the winning project for AROS's rooftop and the rainbow-colored skywalk came to mark the museum, the landscape of Aarhus, and also how it is perceived from the roof. At the symbolic level, the piece became heaven, while the lowest level signaled the depths of hell and held the permanent exhibition of installation art. Meanwhile, it is also worth noting that they have a whole floor dedicated to installation art. This is one of the few museums in Finland that acknowledges installation art as a recognizable genre of art. For multiple reasons, I find this most hilarious.

*Your Rainbow Panorama* is an example of site-specific work that makes the viewer perceive their surroundings differently than normal, "installations that challenge our perception of reality," it is a piece of work where one can enter, but also an architectural and artistic element that changes the landscape. (Eliasson, 2011, p. 37) But as the work is entered it also directs the public's attention to the experience and embodied perception itself, especially when one is walking through the colorful circle on the rooftop, watching the city of Aarhus from different directions. Works like this are not objects available for passive observation but demand active participation. Eliasson states that "there is a tendency to separate the experience of art from the movement you make when you look at the art." He refers to how movement as a bodily activity is often separated from the experience of art that art criticism has traditionally framed as timeless and objective. (Eliasson, 2011, p. 101) This embodied dimension of perceiving art is spatial, but also temporal. It does not necessarily need gestures as large as *Your Rainbow Panorama* – they can be smaller, gentler, little interruptions that shift your perception a little askew from the ordinary.

## B. SITE-SPECIFIC ART

Spaces and places formulate beings. They are not objective or non-political, venues for different kinds of struggles and power relations, competing narratives, and controlling norms. Spaces are both material and immaterial, and they are what constitute subjectivity. As Nancy writes “There is nothing behind singularity – but there is, outside it and in it, the immaterial and material space that distributes it and shares it out as singularity, distributes and shares the confines of singularity – which is to say of alterity – between it and itself.” (Nancy, 1991, p. 27) For example, both Chantal Mouffe and Michel Foucault claim that our existence occurs in a network of power relations, where resistance is an always present part of this antagonistic rhizome. The same power(s) that produce this resistance produces subjects. Revealing often-hidden power relations and structures can be a way of art taking place in public spaces. This can produce a challenge and opportunity for site-specific art.

Site-specific art emerges from and in relation to a particular place. Infrequently, an already existing piece is brought to a particular place, but often-times works are realized on site and based on already existing relationship and research. Since the 1960s, land art and environmental art have been clearing the road for site-specific work and today this has become a major trend in larger exhibitions and biennials, even to a degree where one can talk about location fetish – the more distant and ruinous a location is, the better. The aim to make instagrammable art has established this development and led to a somewhat questionable choices of locations. The 2020 *Desert X* project was brought to Al Ula in Saudi Arabia even after the event was called morally corrupt and one of the three board members resigned. The projects have tried to justify themselves by stating that the show is “a vessel that transcends all boundaries,” includes local artists and residents, and free entrance to the exhibition. Most of the “local” artists have, however, at least studied or/and are based in Europe and the United States. My enlightened guess would be that more than equality and inclusion, what matters is money and the fact that sculptural art looks stunning in the desert. (Yee, 2020)

But site-specificity and unusual locations are about much more than just photographic backgrounds. They move, mentally and physically, and take visitors into locations one would never imagine going. They provide both the artist

and spectators the possibility of getting to know places, histories, sites, and communities outside the usual institutions and tourist attractions. They are a concrete example of how art happens in relation to the world around it, not only as objects in white rooms. It brings art to the everyday, undressing it from the sublime aura of alienation. However, due to the unique locations, the sublime can emerge in relation to the site.

At the 14th Istanbul Biennial *SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms* (2015) the exhibitions spread all over the city, taking the audience to places where art does not often lead: boats, hotels, former banks, garages, gardens, schools, and private homes. For me, the most stunning work was Adrian Villar Rojas' *The Most Beautiful of All Mothers*, mixed media statues of animal figures standing in the turquoise sea, waiting as if a surprise for spectators climbing down a narrow path from the ruins of the old house of Leon Trotsky, who lived on Prince Island from 1923 to 1933.

Even if participatory and site-specific art are not the same genre, at times critics conflate them, questioning the ethics of invading places and communities with projects, shows and exhibitions. It is true that especially short-term projects can only skim the surface of a place. However, at times an outside witness, or an intimate outsider as Silvija Jestrovic calls this kind of participation, might have an understanding that a local would not necessarily have. This is not always unproblematic:

The intimate outsider speaks the language of the city, has favourite city haunts, and understands local jokes, yet she has always been a visitor to the city rather than a citizen. The intimate outsider examines the relationship between the city – its architecture, its public and private spaces - and moving, performing bodies. She deconstructs imaginaries constructed through the gaze of outsiders, at risk of unwittingly imposing her own. (Jestrovic, 2013, p. 3)

This critic is invested in an idea of community as fixed, stable, and established. In reality, community is not like this. Communities change, formulate, and reformulate. When something new is brought to the community, such as artists working on the site, the community changes. It is never the same afterwards, apart from the duration of the visit. This is the responsibility artists and cura-

tors must shoulder. They must also realize that the community wouldn't be the same, even if they were to decide not to participate.

### C. TEMPORARY USE OF SPACE AND DIY

Perhaps because of the event-based and temporary nature of the collectives I work within, my practice is sometimes interpreted in the context of DIY culture. Especially the Space Invaders project has been pioneering in the temporary use of space in the context of art. During the years it has provided a wealth of knowledge about city planning and administration politics in different metropolises.

The world is full of abandoned, empty, or partially used spaces. These spaces include multiple different aspects depending on the perspective: they are expenses to cities, or at least they do not produce anything. They are wasted potential, they have an unwanted impact on the neighborhood, and they often tickle our imagination. I am helplessly attracted to finding empty, interesting spaces to start planning events and exhibitions in and a bit addicted to wandering around different neighborhoods and areas to scout out possible, and often impossible, spots. Finding one is like a rush. We can spend hours and hours negotiating a deal with the owner. I love the moment when showing the artists and then other participants and later on the audience to a new space, the moment of sharing the joy of discovery. There is genuine pleasure in the process of making spaces alive, turning them into something new. Using them as a canvas.

But then there are the political aspects, both considering space and urban planning but also working conditions and the situation of art and artists in society. In many cities, the city center is withering, and so is the countryside. Empty retail outlets, houses, schools, municipal houses, barns are manifesting atrophy. Places and dwellers need activities, an empty space is often considered not only useless but even threatening. There is a recognized need for activating abandoned spaces. There is also a need for reasonably priced spaces for arts and culture. Gentrification is often blamed. After drug dealers and thieves, artists and skateboarders are often the first to occupy new neighborhoods, such as former emptied industrial areas. And after artists come designers, architects, and the rest of "the creative class" as Richard Florida calls it. (*The Rise of the Creative Class*, 2002) The creative class is like the canaries in coal mines: they indicate if

an area is safe enough. After the canaries have tested the area for human use, it often becomes more popular and more expensive. The artists and the cultural workers can't afford the increased rents and need to, again, start searching for new locations for studios.

And as capitalism is a clever beast, it speeds up the process by inviting graffiti painters, artists, event organizers, and other active but often poor members of society to areas that are under development. These groups are expected to create interest and cultural value and attract people. "New Berlin" is often mentioned. But we have started to question if using spaces temporarily is actually enough in a situation where the goal is eventually to start making a hardcore profit? Or should artists and other agencies promoting and improving these new areas also benefit from the increased value? Perhaps by being funded, or by being promised affordable studios and project spaces in the future? Constantly searching for new areas and studio spaces and locations is hard work, it is time- and energy-consuming, and only increasing the precariousness of people in already precarious positions.





Dinner at Jakob's, 2020

This photograph is from Ebeltoft, Denmark and was taken during my residency period at *Maltfabrikken* Free Space residency in 2020. When I left Finland we had already lived with COVID-19 for about 8 months, which meant mostly being at home, or at the studio. The pandemic had completely changed how I experienced the world around me. Previously, it was all about keeping my eyes open for new places and sites and spaces that would be available for events or just feed my curiosity and imagination. Suddenly new places did not seem to exist anymore. I mostly saw and experienced things I had already experienced a billion times before. Of course I could read about places, and watch films, but the experience itself, the embodied sensuous feeling of facing something new and unseen had become non-existent.

Then I arrived at Ebeltoft and it was like an explosion of the new: smells, tastes, views, touches, ideas, thoughts, exchanges, experiences. I swam, walked, biked, climbed, read, wrote, and drew both to increase the feeling and to document it.

This photograph was taken at a dinner that took place at Jakob Vinkler's. It represents everything that was scarce during the pandemic. Vinkler creates events combining scenographic elements to art and food. He places guests in different locations, thematizes the situation and it becomes a total installation, a multisensory experience with different tastes, smells and sounds. We enjoyed wine, food, a tour and discussions about art, science and magic. The event itself felt like magic: a place that was material and concrete but also imagined and fluid.

# PUBLIC SPACE

In ancient Greek city-states, the *agora* was the central public space accommodating the social and political order of the polis: the center of important activities in the city. The agora was a commercial place, a place for speaking in public. Philosophy was an activity taking place in these public arenas, and so were philosophical conflicts. One of these public frictions happened between Plato's Academy and Diogenes the Cynic, who criticized not only the academy but also many cultural conventions and social values. He used public space as a place for questioning conventions and presenting alternatives: asceticism, independence, simplicity, and honesty. In the cynic tradition *parrhesia*, speaking the truth is a public activity, and instead of texts or doctrines, the cynic reflection happened through exemplary lives and personal examples of a mode of life. This speaking of truth did not only refer to verbal activities but also behavior that went against norms and expectations. (Foucault, 2001, p. 118)

This genealogy evidences that the public sphere has, since the ancient Greeks, been a place of debate and controversy. This tradition is still present today, however, under twenty-first century capitalism, public space is increasingly surveilled and controlled, so much so that it risks disappearing. Still, the public sphere today remains a site of struggle. For Bax, Gielen and Leven, the public sphere is "structured and dominated by emotions and affects, sentiments and feelings of hope and fear rather than by colloquial reasoning." (Bax, Gielen and Leven, 2015, pp. 16–17) This apprehension of the public sphere as a site of constant struggle is influenced by Chantal Mouffe's idea of agonism and antagonism. According to Mouffe, public space is and should be a place of positive conflicts, as every hegemonic order is always being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices. Therefore, there is no escaping this discourse. Hence politics becomes a sphere and activity that everyone is actively taking part in, not just defined as mere technical and governmental issues. Pluralism can never lead to agreement and consensus, and the dominant consensus must be unveiled. Mouffe suggests that art has a significant role to play in the battle

against capitalist domination. Artistic practice is a relevant tool in this “agonistic struggle”. (Mouffe, 2008) In addition, as Sara Ahmed has claimed, it is not only public space that is a site of social conflict, but also for example, national identities, the constructed ‘we’ of a nation is in a constant process of conflict: “National identity emerges as a site of social conflict: there is a constant redefinition of who ‘we’ are through the vert necessity of encountering strangers within the nations space.” She suggests that the negotiation between identity and strangeness should be understood as an ongoing process moving across different spatial formations, such as the body, home, the neighborhood, the city, the country, and so on. (Ahmed, 2000, p. 101) “The struggle over space is also a struggle over time and who controls it” (Fisher, 2014, p. 184), as Mark Fisher notes, creating archaeological connections between haunted pasts and futures that are ruined by capitalistic forces. Struggle over space and time is political and requires active participation, whether this participation entails resistance or acceptance: do we accept change, do we resist it, who gets to decide, on whose terms are these decisions are being made?

This conception of agonistic practice as the only possibility has been challenged. For example, Bassam El Baroni has referred to “reasoning together” instead of conflicts (El Baroni, 2017). Even if it is impossible to escape the idea of a constant struggle when it comes to communities, public space, and politics, the conflict could lead to collective reasoning instead of antagonism. El Baroni proposal can be traced to Rancière’s Disagreement, in which Rancière questions the conception of political philosophy, and to some degree, disagreement. (Rancière, 1999) Public place is where this reasoning can take place, and art can be a place for it to happen, a place where *disagreements* and misunderstandings and conceptions can be tested in various ways. This testing, however, requires public spaces. The struggle over space has become very concrete. Over the past decades public spaces have, to an increasing extent, been privatized. It is not only how the place itself becomes private, but also how many of the public services that previously took place in public sphere – libraries, public transportation, municipal offices – are now placed inside private malls and privately owned structures. Where to have the debate, or reason together, if all the activities are controlled and monitored by the private sector? This issue can be observed through the act of walking, like writer, activist, and historian Rebecca Solnit does in *Wanderlust*:

Walking is about being outside, in public space, and public space also being abandoned and eroded in older cities, eclipsed by technologies and services that don't require leaving home, and shadowed by fear in many places (and strange places are always more frightening than known ones, so the less one wanders the more lonely and dangerous it really becomes). Meanwhile, in many new places, public space isn't even in the design: what was once public space is designed to accommodate the privacy of automobiles; malls replace main streets; streets have no sidewalks; buildings are entered through their garages; city halls have no plazas; and everything has walls, bars, gates. (Solnit, 2000, p. 11)

Art can make us wander and wandering can make us think because, when you wander, you often walk slowly. Solnit suggests that this slow walking brings about thought. (Solnit, 200, p. 10) Wandering takes us to surprising locations and encounters. Projects realized in public or semi-public space often open up passages for discussions that would not otherwise be possible. They can also highlight the importance of public spaces. As art has always been a tool for approaching phenomena that cannot be fully explained, an instrument to understand experiences that cannot be verbalized, artistic acts make it possible to produce, collect and mediate new knowledge. Art is not merely a decoration in the public sphere, but an actor that can interrupt our thought processes, forcing us to think, see and do differently – to experience and explore, without the element of revelation or conquest. Art affects at a bodily level and allows for an experiential and sensuous navigation of the world. This is related to the question of public space, like Solnit points out, stating that “when public space disappears, so does the body as, in Sono's fine term, adequate for getting around.” (Solnit, 2000, p. 11)

When anthropologist Tim Ingold writes about art and knowledge production, he refers to art as a study of the deeper significance of things and its existence prior to the task of creating knowledge, which was given to science. (Ingold, 2002, p. 11) The way art can create knowledge and make it approachable is deeply embedded in the concept of “concept” itself: Concept “a general notion, the immediate object of a thought,” 1550s, from Medieval Latin *conceptum* “draft, abstract,” in classical Latin “(a thing) conceived,” from *concep-*, past-par-

ticiples stem of *concipere* "to take in and hold; become pregnant," from *con-*, here probably an intensive prefix (see *con-*), + combining form of *capere* "to take," from PIE root *\*kap-* "to grasp." (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2001–2023) Therefore, behind the abstract idea of thinking, there is a concrete and material notion of holding and grasping the unknowable. Art provides multiple mediums and tools for handling these concepts.

In the book *Hetken hohtava valo* ("Light that shines for a moment" 2012), Finnish author Juha Itkonen tells a story that spans the decades. One point of reference is the first moon landing, a turning point in human history. We all know it, we have seen pictures and videos, but do we really understand it? Itkonen writes about astronauts and space, stating that instead of sending engineers and scientists to the moon, poets and artists should be sent there, as it would have been the only way to be able to mediate the experience: "there is men of action and there are thinkers. Thinkers sent the men of action to space... But what happened was that the mystery was not solved. We still do not know anything about space, not the things we wanted to know..." (Itkonen, 2012, pp. 38–39)<sup>59</sup> Information and knowledge are not the same thing – we may be informed, but it doesn't necessarily lead to knowledge:

But information, in itself, is not knowledge, nor do we become any more knowledgeable through its accumulation. Our knowledgeability consists, rather, in the capacity to situate such information, and understand its meaning, within the context of a direct perceptual engagement with our environments. And we develop this capacity, I contend, by having things shown to us... To show something to somebody is to cause it to be seen or otherwise experienced – whether by touch, taste, smell or hearing – by that other person. (Ingold, 2002, p. 21)

The perceptual engagement with our environments is here a crucial point – public space is an important place for creating mutual understanding, as it is a shared place of engagement. This means that there already is some degree of shared knowledge which makes it easier to develop understanding further.

Knowledge is produced when experiences, info and understandings are passed from one person to another. Knowledge can be wisdom, it can be an

<sup>59</sup> Translated by A. Jensen

experience, it can be pain, enjoyment, bodily pleasure: it is always singular. Jean-Luc Nancy observes love and knowledge and how they are experienced singularly even when shared: “Love is known always singularly, though it is the knowledge of an encounter and a relation. Even when it is shared, it is the knowledge of a differential relation, existing only singularly in the passage from the one to the other.” (Nancy, 1991, xviii) Love is related to knowledge in Donna Haraway’s notion of feminist inquiry, which is “about understanding how things work, who is in the action, what might be possible, and how worldly actors might somehow be accountable to and love each other less violently.” (D. Haraway, 2016, p. 99)

Curator Hans Ulrich Obrist states that art practice today is not merely aesthetic work, but also a powerful force of knowledge production and dissemination. (Obrist, 2014, p. 80) Art not only comments on the world around us but also constitutes it. This becomes especially obvious when working in the public sphere. Creating knowledge and being able to share it in an experienceable and understandable form, is an important part of working as an artist, but it is the most essential part of curatorial work. “Understanding” is here more than just the regular idea of “getting something.” It is more readily related to experience - understanding is a much-used concept whether it is a question of art or the world, both art and the world we are living in may be impossible fully understand, but they can be experienced in a way that gives them more meaning.

Why is there so much talk about knowledge production under the title “public place”? Because practicing art in public and semi-public places has made it obvious that they are inseparable. You need a wealth of knowledge when you approach a public place, because, even if the name “public” suggests otherwise, public places are heavily regulated. We have learned a great deal about city administration when working on these projects. In addition, you learn about various topics when doing art projects in public places. People approach you, they want to share what they know, believe, or hope. Perhaps most importantly, art and public place should be connected through the mutual recognition that the public domain is a necessity that should be made available to different demographics. The public domain’s status as a public good, its accessibility, is under threat, especially as public services are increasingly privatized. The defense of public space is a question of power. In *Reclaiming Artistic Research* (2010), artist and writer Grada Kilomba asks “how can we interrupt spaces, appropriate

spaces and transform spaces” (Cotter, 2019, p. 388), and talks about the project “Kosmos”, where the idea was to do a long-term series of artists’ talks:

The intention was to occupy the space, to remember the history of that space and to transform it by changing the configurations of power and knowledge. We can only create new knowledge, new concepts of knowledge, if we change those configurations of power. That means that people who do not usually have entry to these spaces can enter. (Cotter, 2019, p. 388)

## A. SAFE(ER) SPACE

In the first three Space Invaders projects with Eliisa Suvanto, we also exhibited our own works, all of them playing with the idea of a nest, nesting, and creating one's shelter. This was our very concrete way of handling the question of taking over a space, settling in it, nesting, making it ours, even temporarily. In Finnish, the word “pesä” means an animal nest, but also a homelike safe space for humans. It can also be used as a slang word for female genitals in a sexual context, and even as a place for something evil to emerge as “pahuuden pesä”, the nest of evil. “Kotipesä”, “home nest” is the home base in the Finnish version of baseball, pesäpallo, nestball. “Kuolinpesä”, a “death nest” refers to the estate being sold after someone's death, but I also find it, maybe unconventionally, a poetic way of portraying a burrow where one can die in peace. All these various meanings of nests seem to carry an embedded tension between safety and threat: an *unheimlich* element where sacred and secured homeliness turns out to be uncanny. The exhibition was also about creating nesting spaces for others and nesting with the artists. Part of the act of enabling artistic research and practice meant to occur in this specific context – was the idea of providing a nest for collaborative work and thinking together.

Nesting and creating safe spaces expands to multiple directions in art, from a very personal experience of feeling safe while working on a project, to confronting an artwork about structural discrimination, to trying to protect marginalized and vulnerable groups with the safe-space principles. With Space Invaders the notion of invading a space already implies taking over an alien space, someone else's territory, potentially threatening it and turning it into



space where we and the working group can feel safe while working. The nest project was an attempt to occupy a space of our own in the middle of all the chaos the whole process sometimes caused. Space Invaders has also made it clear to us that creating safe spaces in these kinds of working conditions and contexts is difficult and sometimes even impossible. This does not only refer to the artworks that we know can sometimes offend. Different people have different triggers. This is something we can discuss with the artists, anticipate and mitigate by taking care and sharing a mutual understanding of possible risks. I understand art as an important place for dealing with difficult questions concerning issues of death, sexuality, and violence, but I also believe there are various ways and reasons to treat these questions in public, and that they should be handled with respect. To reiterate, I consider listening as key: listening to the artist, the audience, and one's own intuition. However, listening can only take place in situations where all the parties are willing to negotiate. In the face of open hostility from the public, I have at times felt powerless and unable to protect the artists I am working with. These are the moments that made me realize why it is important for me to use the conception of safer space, instead of safe space. Even if I wanted to, I cannot guarantee safety.

Another problem with safety and our projects relates to the places themselves. Working in these abandoned sites means that they are not always safe, nor are they always easily reachable. Our practice aims to be accessible and inclusive, but it is often the case that the sites we choose for exhibition are quite the opposite: exclusive and ableist. Because of the nature of the places, all the stairs, narrow doorways, paths, mold, dust, indoor air problems, the list of possible dangers is endless, it has not always been possible to provide safe working and viewing conditions.

Working in public and semi-public space, one is continually confronted with different aspects of safety. The space needs to be safe so that (hopefully) no-one is hurt. Still, people are surprisingly creative when it comes to finding ways of hurting themselves. The space needs to be safe so that no one is offended. Simultaneously, one cannot control the public in public space: people can be offensive. As a curator one should be able to protect both the public and artists working on the project, even while challenging and questioning existing norms and structures. One cannot always succeed, but it helps if risks are understood and mediated to participants before the project. This was also discussed when

Eliisa Suvanto and I were invited to discuss spaces, locations, and responsibilities in art in *Kuution jälkeen* (After the Cube), a podcast about public art by Arts Promotion Center Finland. (Kasvinen, Jensen and Suvanto, 2021) In the episode, the concept of the safer space was discussed, not only as a practicality but also an illusion, where the curator gives the impression of being under control, how art can change the way public places are perceived, and how this perception is often related to gender and power relations.

Because not everyone experiences the same amount of safety in public environments, it is important to have *Safe space principles* that include respect and non-discrimination. A code of conduct can become a practical tool in trying to increase equality, trust, and security: the question of safe(er) space is related to questions of ethics and inclusivity. How do we make as many voices heard as possible? And how can we control/do what we need to control these voices? What if there are offensive voices? How can we simultaneously listen and make space for the multiplicity of voices and representations? Is there a space for art to fail? What happens when we fail, as it is evident that at some point we will – when testing a new form, when not being understood, when not understanding all the privileges one has accrued from birth?

The idea of safe(er) space has also been criticized on the grounds of freedom of speech, which has evoked heated discussions at art events. But, even if protecting freedom of speech is a valid concern, it is crucial to keep in mind that it is not an absolute. There are certain limits, like the harm principle and the offense principle. Free speech and creative freedom are not natural rights, as they are too often presented, but unjust constructions: “white free speech and white creative freedom have been founded on the constraint of others, and are not natural rights,” as Hannah Black wrote in her open letter to the Whitney Biennial curators in 2017, demanding the removal Dana Schutz’s painting *Open Casket*.<sup>60</sup>

60 The painting, as presented in Hyperallergic, “is based on a photograph of the funeral of Emmett Till, an African American boy who was brutally murdered in Mississippi in 1955 at the age of 14 after he had been falsely accused of flirting with a white woman. Till’s mother insisted on having an open casket funeral so people could see the brutality of the lynching, exposing the horrific extent of American racism. The press images of Till’s mutilated body, along with the fact that his murderers were subsequently acquitted, are often credited as having galvanized the Civil Rights movement in the US.” And, according to Black, “The painting should not be acceptable to anyone who cares or pretends to care about Black people because it is not acceptable for a white person to transmute Black suffering into profit and fun, though the practice has been normalized for a long time. Although Schutz’s intention may be to present white shame, this shame is not correctly represented as a painting of a dead Black boy by a white artist—those non-Black artists who sincerely wish to highlight the shameful nature of white violence should first of all stop treating Black pain as raw material. The subject matter is not Schutz’s; white free speech and white creative freedom have been founded on the constraint of others, and are not natural rights. The painting must go.” (Muñoz-Alonso, 2017)



Diverse Universe in *Space Invaders II*, 2014. Photo: Eetu Henttonen

This is Diverse Universe performance group performing in the second *Space Invaders* (photo: Eetu Henttonen) in 2014 in Pori. As a curator I want to create space for unexpected events, possible failures, and experimentation. I want to create platforms for trying out different forms and testing methods that are still in process. In the moment captured in the photograph, I realized that I also wanted to be in control of what was happening, and that at that moment I had no control over the situation whatsoever. The worst thing was that no one else was controlling the situation either. There were dancers on the roof I knew was on the verge of collapse, there were small children in the middle of all the action that included fire, a morning star (a weapon with a spike ball whipped around) and very loud noise.

The spectators loved the show, but I believe one of the reasons they loved it was because they thought the situation was *imitating* chaos, not that it was chaos. Art can play with the idea of danger but it is not expected to cause danger. But (usually) art has no trigger warnings. In her book *Hold It Against Me* (2013), Jennifer Doyle discusses difficulty and emotion in contemporary art, especially how emotion is avoided in art criticism, and how long this history is in art history:

Thinking about emotions and art requires thinking about the nature of expression. It also requires thinking about identity as a thing produced through (and dissolved) emotion. The deeper we get into this subject, the closer we get to issues at the core of art history and the challenge of acknowledging a broader spectrum of viewers, seeking a wider range of experiences than those recognized by traditional articulations of that discipline. (Doyle, 2013 xviii)

Emotions can be difficult and political. We cannot fully control the emotions that the art we present evokes, even if we can do our best not to exhibit violent or offensive artworks. But we can start talking about emotions, even if we struggle with it in the beginning and even if there might not be words for the full spectrum of feelings, because, like Doyle writes, “emotion can make our experience of art harder, but it also makes that experience more interesting.” (Doyle, 2013, p. 4)



*The Truth About Finland Pavilion, 2017*

The image above depicts The Truth About Finland pavilion. The project (Porin kulttuurisäätiö et al., 2017) proved how fragile public space can be. We had considered the city of Pori to be an open-minded and flexible partner that welcomes various approaches and forms of art, but combining concepts of truth, national identity and public space proved to be too much for them to tolerate. However, the situation also created interesting public discussion about who controls public space, how and why. Furthermore, the discussion could be linked to the discourse about public space in general and how it, as a phenomenon, has become endangered. Cities are places of multiplicity: systems too complex to be controlled. This multiplicity and diversity is threatened when privatization and even de-urbanization, as Saskia Sassen calls it, change the ways cities are used and by whom.

# PUBLIC ART/ ART IN PUBLIC SPHERE

Public space has forever been the battleground on which hegemonic projects are imposed and confronted. Throughout history, these conflicts over public space and its usage have been made visible in the installation and reception of art in its domain. When one thinks about public art, monumental statues come to mind. Great men on their horses; harmless abstract sculptures in the middle of bland square; colorful murals animating otherwise grey neighborhoods; and perhaps some participatory theater production one once read about in the local newspaper. Most of these types of public artworks are hardly challenging to existing power structures, quite the opposite. Art in public space has long celebrated those in power and helped to maintain prevailing hegemonic conditions. Still, as art in the public sphere is one of the most visible art forms and can acquire attention unlike art confined to galleries and museums, it possesses great potential.

Public art, or art in the public sphere, has a contradictory position in the arts: it has revolutionary and political potential, there exists the possibility for commissions and much needed income opportunities, it entails engagement with historically and socially rich locations, a possibility for different kinds of encounters with new audiences. Nonetheless, public art has been overlooked or despised for a long time, both among artists and theorists. There have been many theoretical accounts written about public art over the decades, but the discourse seems to develop slowly. This was already pointed out in Suzanne Lacy's *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art* (1995), and the discourse is easily jammed with the same excuses and assumptions. As Lacy points out,

the term “new genre” has been used since the late sixties (1995, pp. 19–20, but it was still timely in 1995, and it is topical today. Lacy writes how the new genre of public art was “Not easily classifiable within a discourse dominated by objects, their work was considered under other rubrics, such as political, performance, or media art; hence the broader implications for both art and society were unexplored by art criticism.” (1995, 25) Perhaps, it is the lack of criticism or the quality of it in the discourse on public art that explains its marginalized position, and the sometimes questionable decisions made by the cities when it comes to public art.

Intentions for public art are divided. On the one hand, public art is seen to be useful for society. It increases the aesthetic value of the environment, makes unpleasant areas more tolerable, and works as a (cheap) tool to encourage the participation of inhabitants. On the other hand, public art directs our attention to social injustice, comments on existing structures, and highlights hidden power relations. Art historian Rosalyn Deutsche refers to Lefebvre’s ideas about public space and art remarking that “genuinely responsible public art must ‘appropriate’ space from domination by capitalist state power” (Deutsche, 1996, xvi) and that it must disrupt rather than secure the apparent coherence of its urban sites. How to succeed in this in practice is a more difficult question, as state power and hegemony remain dominant forces.

Even if the concept of public art is changing, it does not mean that only monumental statues of great leaders in prestigious places appear in cities. Still, change is slow to come. The discussion on public art seems to be stuck between two polarities of “temporal” and “permanent.” Traditional public art is generally thought to be everlasting. Especially today, as we are starting to question the number of material objects we need and as the museums are struggling to maintain, store and take care of its collections, the idea of public art should be reconsidered. Artist and researcher Denise Ziegler suggested at the *Sculptur Expanded* seminar (HAM Helsinki Art Museum, 10.11.2019) that what lasts is not the object but the experience – the work lives on in stories and memories even when the event, act, or object is gone.

When it comes to public art and its critics, words such as participation, inclusivity and sensitivity are regularly used, but rarely defined. What makes them especially problematic is how they are rarely used when city centers are discussed. However, the further away from the centers we go the more we

seem to worry about these. Indeed, different neighborhoods react differently to changes, but it is not only about the feeling of ownership in certain areas, as has been suggested when it comes to the suburban, neither is it the lack of educated taste, that might not have been articulated as such, however this does seem to be a common conjecture. It is natural that the center of cities, where there exists a hub of cosmopolitan activity, would be more open to change. This openness means that not every intervention is commented upon or paid attention to.

The idea that artists and curators need different kinds of skills when working in the suburbs is, to my mind, a matter of harmful presumption. Also, stating that there are skills like sensitivity that are needed in suburban areas, implies that when working in the city center or other places traditionally reserved for art, a curator or an artist does not need to care for their surroundings. The idea that art should be something that everybody likes and enjoys, that its value is based purely on its aesthetic value, changes when moving from the city center to the outskirts, which also implies a hierarchical understanding of the sites of exhibition. I argue that especially when art is not immediately liked and provokes discussion, important knowledge both about art, the location, and its inhabitants is produced.

Disrupting public art is a heterogeneous act, but homogeneous, productive, and structured society possesses a threat to its critical power by adapting its disturbing elements under control:

As a rule, social homogeneity is a precarious form, at the mercy of violence and even of internal dissent. It forms spontaneously in the play of productive organization but must constantly be protected from the various unruly elements that do not benefit from production, or not enough to suit them, or simply, that cannot tolerate the checks that homogeneity imposes on unrest. In such conditions, the protection of homogeneity lies in its recourse to imperative elements which are capable of obliterating the various unruly forces or bringing them under the control of order. (Bataille, 1985)



Even if heterogeneity as such refuses assimilation, much of the time heterogeneous acts, such as artistic interventions, are subsumed under hegemonic social order.

Art in the public sphere produces tension between private and public. There is always something intimate about art, in how it is created and encountered. The experience of art can be private, even if it is experienced publicly. This intermediate state between public and private is accepted and even welcomed by the audience. This surprised us when working on *Pori World Expo* (Porin kulttuurisäätiö *et al.*, 2015). In the exhibition, all the works were exhibited as telephone conversations between the artists and the spectator. I consider telephone conversations as emblematic of private encounter, an activity I would rather not do with strangers, nor in public spaces. It was not at all guaranteed that the audience would feel no aversion to speaking with a stranger. Somewhat surprisingly, visitors were willing to participate and call the artists. In fact, they were queuing to call. On second thought, this should not have been surprising to us. Previous projects in public place had made it clear that art is a way of breaking with conventional borders between public and private, and that an artist working in a public place has, seemingly, to accept being a private person who is open to quite intimate discussions and encounters with members of the public.



Satakunnan kansa  
newspaper 7.7.2017

Satakunnan kansa 7.7.2017 claimed our exhibition *The Truth About Finland* as “brouhaha” or “sensation” after the heated public debate about its location and themes. All the trouble we went through was an unpleasant but we learned a great deal. We realized how conventional the expectations are when it comes to art in public places and how much power large companies have over the city and places we might consider “public.”

# PRIVATE

The question of *the public* cannot be separated from the *private*. Understandings of public and private are continually changing. Today, critical questions concern the concept of the public itself. Who do we mean when we talk about “public” and is the notion of publics as a plural and heterogeneous notion taken into account? The other significant theme in contemporary discussion is the privatization of public places and the impact that has on social, public life, and even on the recognition of different citizen groups. Further on, this influences their subjectivity. Being recognized as an individual is required in the process of becoming private. While there are increasing questions about art in relation to the public, be it about the audience or public space itself, the public and private are not stagnant. When public places are under threat of vanishing due to privatization, the private is itself under threat with the rise of confessional culture. Everything is shared, published, and made visible to others. The increased popularity of autofiction can be seen as an embodiment of this trend. Autobiographical fiction is not a new genre but it seemed to gain popularity with the work of authors like Karl Ove Knausgård, Rachel Cusk and Maggie Nelson.

For example, the saying “the personal is a political” is used by the feminist movement. This sentiment is manifested in autofiction, and maybe even more so, in autotheory, which can be perceived as an outcome of what Michel Foucault referred to as biopower and a confessing society. One of the most obvious examples of this is Paul B. Preciado’s *Testo Junkie* (2013), where the author adapts Foucault’s idea of biopower in relation to of our contemporary moment, with the phrase the “pharmacopornographic era”. He writes, “When I take a dose of testosterone in gel form or inject it, what I’m actually giving myself is a chain of political signifiers that have been materialized in order to acquire the form of a molecule that can be absorbed by my body.” (Preciado, 2013, p. 139) Our private bodies, in fact, are not private at all, but political and social. Working in public places sometimes tends to turn one’s most private dimensions

public: over the years there has not really been a dimension in our being that has not at some point been publicly debated, by the visitors or even art critics, from our gender to sexuality to our professionalism.

After working in public and semi-public places for years, the private has increasingly interested me. When discussing definitions of art, one of the qualifications is often publicity – it becomes art when it is publicly presented as art or in the context of art. But what if art as an experience related to an event or exhibition remains private? “Private” is almost like a dirty word when it comes to art: private money, private investors, private collections immediately contrast to the inequality in the art world, inclusion, and precariousness. There is, however, also the possibility of emphasizing the experience as that which is both private and shared, and therefore surpasses this strict distinction.

## A. NEIGHBORHOOD

In the *Practice of Everyday Life* (1988) Pierre Mayol describes the neighborhood as “progressive privatization of public space.” There is continuity between “what is the most intimate and what is the most unknown,” as the middle term between “an existential dialectic” and “a social one,” and as tension between an “inside” and an “outside.” (de Certeau, Giard and Mayol, 1998, p. 11) An everyday example of this is how I use my neighborhood. I live nearby Helsinki city center, where I probably would not go wearing pajamas or without underwear, but if I stay in my own neighborhood, I do tend to use it as an extended home space where I can be more private than I do when entering other neighborhoods.

This is why people often are more protective about their neighborhoods than they would be about some more distant urban space, and this is what, for artists and curators, makes working with different neighborhoods a delicate task. Artistic projects are received differently in different neighborhoods and they evoke different feedback. This is often interpreted to be due to different levels of education, income levels, or general interest in art and culture. I would argue, however, that different neighborhoods have different cultures in terms of reacting and giving feedback. The closer to the city center one gets the more accustomed the residents are to different art events happening in their neighborhood. And the more accustomed to these kinds of events one is, the less reactions, positive or negative.

This does not mean that one can predict how projects are received in different neighborhoods: neighborhoods are unpredictable. As *Space Invaders II* and *IV* proved, a neighborhood can be happy and proud and easily accept demanding, challenging, noisy and disturbing art acts, whereas other neighborhoods feel threatened and at-risk when faced with the smallest changes in the surroundings. How art and events are received is related to the degree to which the residents have gained possession of a neighborhood. Mayol writes about “segments of meaning” and how a neighborhood always carries severe meanings. Art is one additional meaning to these segments and layers. Depending on how much dwellers feel they can control the situations and if they are in charge of their neighborhood, different meanings are produced and this ownership defines how art is perceived. But, as Mayol also notes, “the neighborhood is also the space of a relationship to the other as a social being”(de Certeau, Giard and Mayol, 1998, pp. 12–13), and through artistic research performed in different neighborhoods, we can produce a lot of knowledge of this relationship.

## B. FAMILY

Traditionally “family” has been understood as kinship, a group of (human) beings united together by blood and biology, or maybe marriage or some other socially regulated contract that is usually more or less connected to reproduction. Today the concept of both kinship and family is under reconstruction. Donna Haraway writes about kinship as personal family, and also notes how the words “kin” and “kind” are etymologically very closely related. “To be kind is to be kin, but kin is not kind. Kin is often quite the opposite of kind. It’s not necessarily to be biologically related but in some consequential way to belong in the same category with each other in such a way that has consequences.” (Paulson, 2019)

Alongside the traditional understanding of family, the idea of a family as something one can choose has emerged. A chosen family is a family that is not considered through the context of reproduction and blood relatives, but support, love, and friendship. This conception emerged from queer communities, where starting a family has not been, and might still not be, self-evident, and where for some, the community has become the only existing family if coming out has, for example, effected the relationship with biological family. In the current situation where not everyone is reproducing and also non-human animals

are taken into consideration, even as family members who one might share their apartment and life with, the idea of the chosen family has become more discussed and open. A family is a way to coexist, but it is also a political question with concrete consequences: who is acknowledged as your family impacts your taxes, your social support, possible inheritance, who can come see you if you are in hospital. A family is not as private a matter as we might believe. It is a political and societal concern. While Donna Haraway suggest that we should make kin and not babies, I'd like to suggest that we make collectives instead of nuclear families.

kulttuurilautakunta on jakanut harkinnanvoivia tukia kaupungin kulttuuriyhdistyksille, taiteilijoille, yhtyeille sekä kulttuuri- ja taidealojen opiskelijoille yhteensä 95 000 euroa.

7. Mai Anna Jensen added Eetu Henttonen.



13.7. Eliisa SuvantoJes, mahtavaa! Mulle sopii parhaiten Nilon bailut-ajankohta, ens viikon läsnäolo ei ole varmaa paitsi ma/ti/ke ja to.



18.1. Anni Venäläinenuups, wau! mä oon ens viikolla pois to-pe ja la oon töissä kun on museoiden yö. Mut muuten oon kyl taällä.

8. Mai



08.2. Eliisa SuvantoHei, miten Eetu ja Niilo, koska vois treffailla asian tiimoilta?



08.2. Anna Jensenjos tulisin poriin käymään, niin sopisiko esim. keskiviikkona nähdä?



08.2. Eliisa SuvantoMulle käy!

How we worked in 2013

With our collectives and in my practice, 'public' has been one of the key concerns. It is impossible to think about 'public' without thinking about the 'private.' While public is open, general and accessible to all members of society, private is secret, not known by the public or other people, and belongs to a single person or group. At some point Anni Venäläinen and I became so tired of everything related to art that dealt with the concept 'public' that we started to think about the most private possible ways to work, exhibit, and experience art. On the other hand, private is always present in the practice of art, where it comes from and how it is experienced. One of the difficulties with art criticism is the privacy of the experience. Art is always perceived from a singular perspective that can be hard to verbalize and contextualize.

Even if we only started to conceptualize our relationship to 'private' later, the very first Porin kulttuurisäätiö exhibition dealt with this concern. The main exhibition took place in the studio apartment where I lived at the time. The exhibition catalog or the text was a sound piece presenting our private conversation during the process.

# POWER

"Sugar, spice, and everything nice. These were the ingredients chosen to create the perfect little girl. But Professor Utonium accidentally added a can of Whoopass to the concoction. The Whoopass girls were born!" ("The Powerpuff Girls", 1998)

*The Powerpuff Girls* is an animated American superhero television series originally developed in 1992. Instead of the usual superhero figures, men, boys, or even animals. The show stars three small girls, Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, with superpowers like flight, super strength, and superhuman speed. With large eyes, pastel colors, and big hairdos, the characters are pretty but powerful. Their cuteness does not subtract from their power. As children and sisters, when they use their power they do so at an intersection of power relations. They are aware of this and comment on their position, while not kicking the asses of criminals, or fighting with each other. There is violence but power can be a violent thing. At the same time, the show features other kinds of powers: such as relying on the powers of friendship and togetherness. I would argue that Powerpuff girls is a story of non-heteronormative family, friendship, and collective action.

When describing our practice, one of the key lines used is "making hidden power structures visible" (or "deconstruct existing power structures," or "to explore power structures"). When power structures are discussed, they are often superficially presented as something one is exposed to. It is not as simple as that: one is always both an object, a target of power, and a subject, using power. In addition, when we want to explore power structures that might not be obvious, or are complex and unclear, we might look different to different groups. Revealing a structure that has been hidden is not the same as correcting it, it is not an improvement itself. Sometimes representing harmful structures can, instead of questioning them, only strengthen them by reproducing them.



Therefore, it is questionable if simply pointing out grievances is the most constructive practice.

The act of controlling subjects happens in multiple ways. A functional society requires healthy, productive citizens, who obey laws, respect each other and reproduce. Education starts at home and continues at school, and it continues in the form of social control throughout one's life. Non-normative behavior is punished, and propriety is rewarded. Public places are good laboratories for observing these strategies of control, punishment, and reward. They also indicate how different subjects are treated differently, and how different bodies meet different expectations. What is clear is that the ideal citizen has a healthy, functional body, with a mind corresponding to that.

What I am attentive to is the fact that all human relationships are to a certain degree relationships of power. We evolve in a world of perpetual strategic relations. All power relations are not bad in and of themselves, but it is a fact that they always entail certain risks. (Foucault, 2003, p. 72)

Michel Foucault's statement concerns human relations but could easily be expanded to all relations: all relationships are to a certain degree relationships of power. Human-animal, animal-animal, machine-animal, human-machine – these complex relationships are no less complex if the other cannot articulate its power position, quite the opposite. Power happens in a network of being heard and seen, to be known or not known. This is how it relates to knowledge. Minna Salami names the combination of europatriarchal knowledge production, power, and social structures as “the ultimate weapon in turning women against women.” When knowledge is produced through patriarchal power, everything we do becomes systematically patriarchal:

If our approach to knowledge production is patriarchal, then ultimately everything we know, and everything we do as a result of what we know, will be patriarchal too. If knowledge production is systematically antiwoman, then these values will shape everything from our intimate relationships to our social structures. (Salami, 2020, p. 110)

Or, like Preciado formulates this question of gender in the context of power and knowledge production, “penises and vaginas are biocodes of power-knowledge regimes.” (Preciado, 2013, pp. 102–103)

Like these examples suggest, power lives in us and outside of us. It can be considered to be outside of the subject, something other, but it is also something already embedded in the subject as an embodied entity. It is neither merely something a subject resists, but also something they depend on, something forming the subject, like Judith Butler, referring to Michel Foucault, writes:

We are used to thinking power of power as what presses the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to lower order. This is surely a fair description of part of what power does. But if, following Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are. (Butler, 1997, p. 2)

Power is not a singularity, but a network of multiplicities and interconnections:

...when I speak of power relations, of the forms of rationality which can rule and regulate them, I am not referring to Power – with a capital P – dominating and imposing its rationality upon the totality of the social body. In fact, there are power relations. They are multiple; they have different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution, or an administration – or, between a dominating and dominated class, power relations having specific forms of rationality, forms that are common to them, and so on. (Foucault, 2003, p. 95)

Art is one of the places where these power relations can be made visible, explored, and deconstructed. It is not the free and purely aesthetic sphere that is has sometimes been claimed to be. It is not particular, nor free, nor unitary, as curator and art critic Simon Sheikh writes:

...firstly as a sphere that is not unitary, but rather agonistic and a platform for different oppositional subjectivities... Secondly, the art world is not autonomous system, even though it sometimes strives and/or pretends to be, but regulated by economies and policies, and constantly in connection with other fields and spheres. (Sheikh, 2009, p. 139)

The autonomy of the art world is most often and most fiercely defended by those who are on top of hierarchical structures and suffering the least from the causes of these structures. But "power" in art does not only imply these relational power structures but also the power of art itself: the experiential power of artwork, event, or exhibition that is both intellectual, emotional, and sensational. When I think about artworks that have been subversive to my life, thinking, and practice these elements are what make the experience revolutionary and durational: the artworks keeps unfolding and offering perspective and thoughts even years later.

Walter De Maria's soil installation *The New York Earth Room* has been on long-term view to the public since 1977. The work contains 250 cubic yards of soil and dirt installed on the floor of an apartment in a fancy building in Manhattan. (De Maria, 1977) Walter De Maria is best known as a land artist, his work is deals with land and our relationship to it. The work plays with the expectations and presuppositions one has when entering a gallery space: the space could be any high profile gallery in Manhattan, but the smell of the regularly nurtured soil takes permeates the atmosphere. The air feels moist and the spectator is surrounded by the feel of the earth, soil, land, and dirt. This experiences produces the strange sensation of being in two places at once. Later this emotion starts unfolding into various intellectual and theoretical questions, from spatial to ecological, to questions about spectatorship and experience, control and the human desire to control nature and land, in addition to the politics of land, of art, and of city space. This contemplation extends to the basic questions of art and its exhibition. And then it leads back to the power structures, possible privileges and constant balancing between different wills and hopes. While these mentioned thoughts, ideas can result in good deeds, the perception and consideration of land as related to our being can be groundbreaking, the work is also dirt that is occupying a full apartment in a city full of homeless people, who are not taken care at all, while the dirt is constantly cared

for. These issues of property and ownership have not been dismissed in the context of art. Rather, they have been explored in Hans Haacke's work *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (Haacke, 1971), a critical artwork documenting the activities of New York City's slumlords. Artists, who are always on the move, finding cheap areas in the city and then moving away from them when they become gentrified and too expensive, are like canary birds in mines, sensing changes in cities, documenting, and mediating them, and therefore great allies for urban researchers. Artists are, and this has also been noticed by the cities and large estate companies, useful and cheap tools for creating knowledge and increasing market value in new neighborhoods.



Drawing zombie-ants, 2021

“Mushroom growth can generate an explosive force. When a stink-horn mushroom crunches through an asphalt road, it produces enough force to lift an object weighing 130 kilograms.” (Sheldrake, 2020, p. 60) Mushrooms are powerful but this power does not result from individual strength, or at least physical strength does not meet our usual conception of it. Insect-pathogenic fungus, for example, are small in size but can control the behaviour of insects. *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis* is commonly known as “zombie-ant fungus”, as it has the power to alter the behavioral patterns of the host animal to benefit the fungus. It is “is a fungal parasite that infects and manipulates formicine ants to achieve its only goal: Reproduction by dispersal...Once inside the host, *O. unilateralis* begins the process of taking control of the ant. The parasite emits enterotoxins which are a group of chemicals that disrupt the ant’s chemical communication.” The ants infected by *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis* are also called *zombie ants*, because *the other*, the fungus, has taken over their behavior. This is a good example of the concept of “we” and how it can be a conscious and positive choice, or an involuntary change where the “I” becomes “we” because of the situation, circumstances or conditions, like a parasite fungus entering the body.

# PRACTICE

When I think about the word “practice”, I think about walking. I am not alone with the idea that walking and practice, whatever they mean for different people, go hand in hand. There has been much writing about walking, but I still think that the connection between being a moving entity in the world, thinking, and the act of walking is hardly verbalized. Even after all the walks I’ve been on, it has taken a while to try to find the right words for this experience. But walking, like reading, drawing, talking and writing, is a way of thinking, organizing thoughts, and trying to catch the thoughts that are no more than intuitive stirring. Walking is an attempt to occupy my body, to do some of the work my brain is struggling to unravel. Walking is also a way to pay attention to perception, to experience the moment of perception and what happens in it – it is an act of filtering unnecessary thoughts, ideas and elements from those that are important and needed.

Walking and thinking as both embodied and mental process and are related to why getting hold of the idea of practice sometimes feels difficult. Practice seems to include presuppositions that it should be something explainable. This leads to a situation where practice is usually explained and evaluated through the outcome: when I present my practice, I present exhibitions and catalogs, documentations of what was done. But what was done, and how, remains formless pulp. The process escapes me and spreads into different directions. The outcome is controllable, the process is a mystery. This is also where the gap between theory and practice, knowing and not knowing opens up, and where the comprehensions about artistic research and practice-led research differ. On the one hand and according to Sophie Hope, “If practice is to be considered as valid research, then the researcher needs to be confident of the position and trajectory they are coming from whilst not being bound by existing paradigms and methodologies.” (Hope, 2016, p. 15) Lucy Cotter, on the other hand, argues that “art’s postdisciplinary ways of working and its ability to start in the middle are pertinent qualities at a time in which the world’s greatest urgencies do not come

in neat disciplinary packages”. (Cotter, 2019, p. 17) Cotter believes in the power of not knowing, and not seeking answers, but articulating new questions:

Non-knowledge lies in “forms of knowledge that are often below the radar of our conscious thought and which can bypass our rational minds to incorporate contradiction and intuition.”<sup>61</sup> It is constituted not only by what is not yet known, but also includes what is unknowable or *cannot be assimilated* as (formal) knowledge.<sup>62</sup> This is where artistic research becomes antagonistic to academic knowledge, but is arguably at its most interesting from an epistemologic perspective, as I will address in my next book.<sup>63</sup> Artists often work with areas that are not only beyond current thinking of certain subjects and situations but also off the radar, moving into unknowable territory. They embrace this unknowability, being comfortable with holding open spaces of *not* knowing that confound traditional research. Artistic research thus revolves around articulating new questions without seeking answers. (Cotter, 2019, p. 18)

The “not knowing” Cotter talks about is not the same thing as shallowness, quite the opposite. Being open to the unknown and finding new paths through practice requires work and patience. Instead of forced answers the results can be found in the processes and in the questions they provoke. To be able to explore and share these results, the practice needs to be moved from intuitive thinking to the analytic, so that the chains of actions, new connections, and understandings can be mediated, and new questions articulated. Instead of forcing artistic research and its fruitful and unique methods into the frame of traditional academic research, it can provide ways of confronting the complexities of our time, but also be a place for critically observing the tradition of academic research, as Cotter suggests. To be confident within the unknown, however, requires anchors and points of references, so that within the unknown there are some solid and known markers. Being familiar with one’s practice is one of them, but a surprisingly difficult one.

61 Lucy Cotter in the text refers to a definition by Sarat Maharaj in a workshop during *Cork Caucus*, in Cork, Ireland, in 2005 (LC)

62 Georges Bataille: *The Unfinished System of Non-Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 201 (LC)

63 “I am currently completing a book entitled *Art Knowledge: Between the Known and the Unknown*, which explores this aspect in contemporary art.” (LC) (Cotter, 2019, p. 18)

In 2019 and 2020, me and Andrea Coyotzi Borja taught a course at Aalto University in ViCCA (Visual culture, curating, and contemporary art) MA program, where the aim was for the students to learn to present their practice, and simultaneously, make it more clear to them what it means to have a practice, and what their practice is. I learned to understand how complex the question of practice is and how rarely we, artists and curators, actually take time to think about our own practice. When we are invited to give a talk or a lecture or write about or when we submit proposals, we are often giving something that we think is wanted in this specific situation. We compile a Powerpoint presentation showing our recent projects, explain the themes we usually work with and relate information about our background. We copy and paste bits and pieces from the same statement we wrote when we graduated, update our portfolios with images and short texts from catalogs and press releases, but we hardly ever have time or take time, to properly think about the question of our practice. What is it that I do? Why? Where? For who and with who? What good does it make, what have I learned, what have I taught, what have I been able to share? What kind of impact does my practice have, if any? How do I, in the end, spend my days, and what comes out? What does my practice do to myself, and what does it do to others?

Artistic practice refers to an attempt to describe what one does and the problem is that artistic practice is so much more than just the medium one uses or the themes one observes, and, still too often, describing one's artistic practices becomes an act of trying to validate it. Even when the value of your art or the value of art as a profession is not questioned, we often start fighting back prejudices and biases. This is especially the case when you do not produce objects that can easily be interpreted as art. When I was a painter, my profession was maybe questioned as something that might not provide me steady income or if I was being a useful citizen for the society. Still, everybody understood what my practice was about. I painted and the painting was then exhibited and or sold. They become objects of value and consumption in commodity production and my practice hence is understood as a productive part of the capitalistic system. If I do not produce objects or I do not take part in turning them into surplus-value by selling and trading them, then what is it that I do? Stating that I "think" and I "walk" and sometimes I "talk with people" sounds odd even to my own ears, so I often use artistic research, research-based practice or process-based practice as emergency exit concepts.



## A. PROCESS-BASED PRACTICE

However, process-based practice, or research-based practice, leaves even more questions when it comes to how one's work and its possible outcome are understood and how to mediate these, even to oneself. If the process is the core of my practice, then what motivates it? What is the goal and where does the process end? How do I document and mediate these processes, and do they need to be mediated and documented? And if not, then how do we learn from them? And how do they (do they?) become a part of a tradition – as art always happens in a continuation and in the context of its tradition, then what is the connection in my case?

The process is often, or always, motivated by a research question: we, the working group and collectives, want to study something and learn something, and this requires certain acts (and methods, forms, gestures). We might not know what these acts (methods, forms, gestures) are in the beginning, but we will find out. This is the process. The result, what is documented, can be both these acts and then the final form of what was discovered. The process is documented with different mediums, writing, photography, and I might even consider sharing as documenting: the process continues its life in the stories told. We have tried to increase transparency about what comes to the process by also sharing bits and pieces of the in-between periods, but sometimes it's hard to formulate things in the middle of the process, things that are yet to come. When it comes to tradition, it is always present, even in a plural form. Working site-specifically means that the tradition and the history of a place is always present in the process. Different time periods and their structures and values and architecture and city planning manifesting them need to be taken into account. Research and process-based art often refer to other artworks, comment and deconstruct previous ideas and ideologies.

More than for the artists and curators, and even the spectators, process-based practice seems to trouble critics, which then leads to a lack of relevant discourse around the topic. Compared to the object as an outcome, it is much harder to analyze the process. The multiplicity in mediating processes does not make the task any easier. Perhaps understanding the long tradition of process-based practice when it comes to creating knowledge and finding out about the world could help? Mythology is one of the oldest practices of art,

aiming to poetically reveal the world, its history, and truth to mankind. Schelling describes mythology in terms of process: “The central question with respect to mythology is the question of meaning. But the meaning of mythology can only be the meaning of the process by which it emerges into being.” (Schelling, 2007, p. 135)

This becoming-meaning is also what Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *In Praise of Philosophy* (1988) argues is the center of a philosophy:

the center of a philosophy does not lie in a prenatal inspiration, but that it develops as the work progresses, that it is a becoming-meaning, which builds itself in accord with itself and in reaction against itself, that a philosophy is necessarily a (philosophical) history, an exchange between problems and solutions in which each partial solution transforms the initial problem in such wise that the meaning of the whole does not pre-exist it, except as a style pre-exists its works, and seems, after the fact, to announce them. (Merleau-Ponty, 1988, p. 19)

This exchange with and working in relation to history is what working with art, theory and philosophy is about. The meanings come about in a rhizome of problems and solutions, thoughts, forms, styles, acts, and arguments. Process-based practice is built on admitting to the interminable nature of our work and being. Events, exhibitions, objects, texts are only milestones along the way, not vanishing points. Also, one should be able to encounter events and exhibitions without expectations of having to produce “constituted knowledge,” like Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev states, reflecting on her starting points as Artistic Director of Documenta 13:

You arrive at something that’s embodied and that’s also very much about temporality and locationality and how these two are intrinsically connected, intra-acting the temporal and the spatial, kind of mutually engendering each other. You can arrive at that in, let’s call it an intelligent manner, without ever having to produce any constituted knowledge... (Cotter, 2019, p. 248)



How I think by doing, giving forms and colours

The image above is of my desk, but this could just as well be a picture of the sea, as I often swim during the day to avoid getting stuck in a thought process. It could also have been a photograph of a working group, referring to the collective nature of my practice. It could have been an interesting location, as a reference to what is often a starting point and/or a platform for a project.

A dictionary definition for practice is “the actual application or use of an idea, belief, or method, as opposed to theories relating to it” and “the customary, habitual, or expected procedure or way of doing of something.” (Oxford Languages, 2022) When we talk about artistic practice it is more against these definitions than a manifestation of them. Artistic practice is theory and practice entangled. It often tries to find methods that go against the habitual or expected. *Practice* is also about trying to improve your skills in something.

Artistic practice is what you do, how you mediate it, who you work with, how you perceive the world, and eventually, how you live. It involves always trying to improve. There has been a tendency to demystify artistic work and practice, to present artistic work as any other, and this is a politically justified and reasonable act, as artists deserve to be paid and have holidays like anyone else. But there is also a mystical element in artistic practice: how does it take shape? And what is it, in the end? Nothing and everything. When I talk about my practice, I present the projects I do and the themes I study. But what happens during the days I am working is blurry, unreachable. I do not practice my profession by spending hours in front of my desk. Neither is all about the meetings I have, or the exhibitions I make or the lectures I give. It is what leads to these gestures, and it is a combination of experiencing, contemplating, dreaming, reading, discussing, sharing, staring at the wall. And somehow the structure of this work collapses when I try to verbalize it.

# PRESENT; TIME (AND TIME AS A CONFUSING GIFT)

What I want to bring together for my model of 'presentness' is the intimate inseparability of the experience of physical space and that of an ongoing immediate present. Real space is not experienced except in real time. The body is in motion, the eyes make endless movements at varying focal distances fixing on innumerable static or moving images. Location and point of view are constantly shifting at the apex of time's flow. (Morris, 2009, p. 27)

As artist Robert Morris writes, experience and perception cannot be separated from the context of time. This means that art is always, even when recognized as “timeless,” deeply embroiled with time. When considering art, especially intervention art in the public sphere, we tend to state that it disturbs everyday flow and creates disruptions in time. This statement is based on the idea of time as linear and controllable, and yet constantly flowing. Apparently, dogs can smell the passing of time. For them, time smells different through the day, like the smell of a room changes as the day goes by. (Wallius, 2016) In the film *Time Trap* (Foster and Dennis, 2017) a cave is discovered where time moves differently. In the film the border between “real-time” and “other time” is presented as a moist wall: “there is like this invisible boundary, where the earth completely changes.” In the German television series *Dark* ('Dark', 2017), the present is repetition and continuation in circles where people travel and try to solve time and its implications. These examples indicate how the concept of time baffles us. The time in which we are living, the present time, is practically the only time

given to us, as we can never know about even the next minute, but the given time as an idiom always refers to future events.

Especially after the Enlightenment, perhaps even before, human presence has been inseparable from the idea of the future. First the future here in the mundane world and then the eternal future that follows our earthly existence. This idea of building towards what is to come has led to forgetting what goes on at the moment, what we should be caring about right now. Ourselves, our loved ones, the beings around us. This disorder in our intelligence has become more prominent now at the time of the climate crisis. If we want to have a future at all, we need to act now, not tomorrow.

This living towards tomorrow has been going on for so long that it sometimes seems to be impossible to attach our thinking and actions to the present. As an experiential sphere, art can help us focus on now instead of tomorrow. Embodied movement in a chosen location creates effects and bodily memories of how I feel right here, right now: how the moment smells around me, what it sounds like. Do I want to care for it, or is it something I willfully let go? After this experience, will I still refuse to care about art, the other, or nature? Art can propose without judging, make suggestions in the space/place constellation it offers to the spectator. According to Morris “the experience of the work necessarily exists in time.” (Morris, 2009, p. 26) This means that the experience also focuses our attention on time, and on our being as temporal entities.

An exhibition or an event, or even an artwork is a situation in a certain time and space, and therefore, always related to these elements that are inseparable entities as such. Even if an exhibition or an event can create a cut in the constant flow of time and be understood as a heterotopia, all the places in one place, even heterotopias are connected to time. As Michel Foucault writes:

Opposite these heterotopias that are linked to the accumulation of time, there are those linked, on the contrary, to time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival. These heterotopias are not oriented toward the eternal, they are rather absolutely temporal. (1967/1997, p.5)

It is not only the exhibition, or the ship, or cemetery or library that Foucault uses as an example, but also holiday villages: “such as those Polynesian villag-

es that offer a compact three weeks of primitive and eternal nudity to the inhabitants of the cities.” (Doherty, 2009, p. 54) Another example could be the spa culture, “tropical” oases in the middle of North-European gloom, or Botanic Gardens that defy circumstances of time and space. (Porin kulttuurisäättö, 2021) (Sysser, 2021)

Holiday time is often understood to differ from standard time. The strange thing is that even if a holiday specifically depends on the idea of it being time away from something else, it is sometimes marketed as an everlasting opportunity. Yyteri dunes in Pori advertise the “eternal holiday in Yyteri” holiday homes, the city of Kajaani is using #holiday365 as its slogan. But an eternal holiday is a paradox, however fascinating, based on the idea of being able to slow down time. We often seem to glide through our days without paying attention to what is around us. We are busy, we are already looking for the next big thing, waiting for us just around the corner. There is an unarticulated demand for productivity. We are trained to concentrate on the already structured and organized side of the world to create an even more productive and structured tomorrow. Faith in technology has strengthened this faith in productivity. Art can act as an intervention in this cycle, lead us to new paths, show us the unexpected, and create new ideas by arranging our everyday differently by directing our attention to the other. Art is the given time, time that is offered when the artist and the curator have put time into a project. It is the time the public takes to experience it, but also the given time that is spent with the artwork later when it is contemplated and the experience is being reflected upon.

How art succeeds as an experience depends on multiple actors but one of the important is *momentum*: the ideal time and place for certain kinds of acts and forms. A curator is responsible for handling the right questions at the right moment. Finding the right questions and moments requires openness, listening, trust in intuition, but also the capacity to react at the right time. This is the reason why bigger institutions often seem to lag behind. Smaller agencies are more flexible and freer to react to immediate changes. This ability to react could be interpreted as a possible punctum in curatorial work: what punctuates the other spheres and structures and what makes the event or exhibition more than just a mere presentation of objects.



Lapinlahti park, Helsinki, 2021

This photograph was taken on an ordinary weekend day in June 2021 at a nearby park. People were having a picnic dressed as if they were from a Renoir painting. Perhaps they also have the feeling that time has lost its shape, focus and meaning during the pandemic. Time has become like an everyday puzzle, moving at unpredictable speeds and slowing down unexpectedly. Cyclic, linear, and embodied conception of time has been interrupted when the normal flow of the world was disturbed by the pandemic. Events that were the pulse of our being in time disappeared.

Worrying, being anxious and concerned are time consuming activities. Maria Puig de la Bellacasa connects time and care:

...the work of care takes time and involves making time of an unexceptional particular kind.... I have noted earlier how future, urgent, speedy temporality suspends and compresses the present. It could be thought that care time suspends the future and distends the present, thickening it with multilateral demands. (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, pp. 206–207)



# PLEASURE, JOY, HAPPINESS, AND HUMOR AND LAUGHING AS A POLITICAL ACT

Making art or curating, finding the right forms, artists, artworks, and places can be like a game, a puzzle that rewards problem-solving. Making art has a long tradition of suffering, as if artists and martyrs were almost one and the same, as if there needs to be a certain amount of suffering to be able to make art from the world. From *The Sorrows of Young Werther* to Vincent van Gogh's poverty and mental health problems to Amy Winehouse's alcohol poisoning, the tortured artist has been a mythical figure believed to be able to transcend their overwhelming emotions in the service of art. The figure of the suffering artist is connected to the solitude of the profession, and the pronounced status of the individual artist within this profession. Suffering is lonely, whereas joy and happiness are usually shared. Joy, happiness, and pleasure are, in opposition to the alienated suffering individual, possibilities for solidarity and community.

However, I believe that most of us end up working with art because of love and joy and that these warm feelings should be nourished. This does not mean that everything should come easily and that we should all eternally stick to our comfort zones where everything is simple and comprehensible. Quite the opposite: I believe there is much joy in new discoveries, in overcoming obstacles, and

in deconstructing existing beliefs and structures, even if none of these actions are smooth and light.

As death and suffering have long been considered as constitutive elements of subjectivity, it is a radical act to offer another framework with an emphasis on pleasure. What if, instead of mourning and melancholia, we understand the power of pleasure? What if, instead of using suffering as a blueprint for shared experience, we use joy and pleasure as a collective, embodied affect?

Choosing pleasure over suffering also opens doors to the operations of art: aesthetic pleasure, or any other pleasure for that matter, that we receive when encountering art can elicit a groundbreaking experience and lead to significant changes. Joy, laughter, and happiness are political: it matters who is laughing and who is laughed at. Laughing together creates bonds. Feminist Saara Särnä states:

We should be able to laugh at ourselves and at the fact that none of us is perfect. If we have messed up or when everything feels pointless, nothing helps except laughter. Laughing is essential for coping, and laughing as a group is empowering. We should laugh at power: laughter has always been an effective means of shaking up power structures. (Gustafsson and Haapoja, 2020, p. 101)

In the history of feminism using the phrase “feminist killjoy” referring to the person raising uncomfortable questions and problematizing everyday issues, has been a method for calling out individuals and institutions. However, laughter might be another strategy, a way of occupying space, breaking the expectations of proper behavior, an embodied and loud way to resist: “The feminist killjoy, the laughing hysteric, and the humorless capitalist all choke on their laughs, though each in different ways,” cultural historian Maggie Hennefed writes, claiming that “Their unrealized laughter opens the floodgates for its transmutation into a new collective body politics.” (Hennefed, 2021) Laughter, especially female laughter, is often expected as a sign of approval. Countless times, I have attended meetings and lectures where the male character leading them has told questionable jokes and everyone in the room have obediently laughed. Not to laugh is a sign of resistance. Sometimes to laugh is revolutionary. Sometimes to laugh is the only thing we can do:

...Georges Bataille wrote; that we laugh, not because we do not happen to know, but because the unknown makes us laugh. This abrupt passing from a world in which there is stability to one in which we lose our sense of assurance makes us laugh. (Cotter, 2019, p. 351)

Like Cixous has argued in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975), the element of the unknown in laughter makes it subversive, challenging cultural distinctions between theory and practice, body and mind, inviting the oppressed to laugh, to write, and to love and desire. (Cixous, 2013) Cixous presents laughing as part of the subversive, rebelling new way of writing that brings the body to the fore.

It is not only laughter that makes joy and happiness political. There is subversive potential in joy, pleasure and happiness when it comes to questioning neo-liberal capitalism in the field of art. Joy and happiness may not bring food to the table, but they do provide alternative motivations for work, more than economical compensation tied to the production and exchange of objects. This can be a disturbing idea for the system: to practice something that will be shared for the sake of joy and fulfillment, instead of producing something to be shared for the sake of compensation. Instead of market value, material objects, or even knowledge, we can produce joy, and this joy can, in some cases, produce a sense of meaningfulness. I am aware that this can sound very naïve. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit us in 2020 and locked us down, it annihilated most of the joyful parts of my work: interesting encounters, visits to new places and exhibitions, thinking together in person, experiencing performances. It did not that working would be impossible but it disrupted my conception of *why* I work, the sense of meaningfulness and importance of my work life. Pleasure, and holding onto it while working, is a way of creating hope instead of hopelessness. It is easier to approach anxiety with anxious gestures, but it can definitely add more layers to try to find softer methods.

In *Evergreen Inner Jungle* (2021) Porin kulttuurisäätiö examined multiple complex questions, from questions about the colonial past of botanical gardens to the climate crisis to the nature of scientific knowledge production. Working in the middle of a global pandemic added an extra layer of heaviness to the process. However, from the beginning the idea was to do something that would be fun and light and rewarding for us and the artists. Even if the project, like

all projects, had moments that were challenging, I believe that we achieved this goal in the exhibition. We were able to make the visitors happy, and even enchanted. The project also made us realize how demanding it is to try to handle these complex issues with softness, and how dealing with these two oppositional elements, joy and oppression at the same time, can lead to juxtapositions that can either be read as interesting openings leading to new interpretations and ideas, or as simplifying and belittling. The following year during the 2022 Pori Biennale we realized that most people who had visited the *Evergreen Inner Jungle* exhibition only remembered the exhilarating experience of viewing the exhibition and nothing about the themes the exhibition actually handled. Though I do not want to make assumptions, this is nonetheless an interesting observation, and something to keep in mind for future projects.

#### A. IRONY

a critical look at your position reveal that  
irony was only ever a privilege for those who see  
themselves  
reflected in all facets of society  
dude's ironic poetry  
deconstructs  
deconstructions of identity (Ruotsalainen, 2018)

Writer and PhD Researcher Nelli Ruotsalainen presented the above poem as a part of *Space Invaders VI- Living Together Speakers' corner* event (2018). This was during a moment when art used irony to question society. Post-internet art had become mainstream. Since the early 2000s, irony has proliferated. Memes, comics, and overly simplified funny drawings and texts are a way to be active and political. It felt almost like the post-internet art as a genre was trying to prove that they are so avant-garde that when most people are only getting to know the internet, they are already past it. The works were aiming to control the visual presence so well that the created 3d spaces would provide an opportunity to enter the reality of internet without needing to go online. This is also an interesting possibility of the genre: how the internet as a space is taken seriously and how the materiality of this space and the new possibilities it affords

for spatial thinking are taken into consideration, put to work, and shared. The individual experience of the internet as a space becomes embodied and shared.

But the problem of irony remains, and that is, as the poem suggests, that irony is not at all as accessible for all. Even the hopelessness, the feeling of disenchantment, is only available for those who have been used to feeling hopeful. For those, who have been promised everything. Irony is a way of distancing oneself from these hopes. A way of trying to accept the possibility of failure without really being able to admit to it – if my practice is ironic, it proves that I know I can't change anything, or at least I pretend that this is the case, even if I maybe secretly hope that my work has some kind of meaning. Irony is, therefore, connected to a privileged position. Irony is for those who can afford it, who know that they are, have always been, and will be recognized. If humor and laughing can be interpreted as subversive feminist act, irony, at its worst, is the little brother of it, a white privileged male, sure of its position, sure of being seen and understood, using irony as a strategy of strengthening the structures around it.

In *Hold It Against Me* (Doyle, 2013) art critic and queer theorist Jennifer Doyle explores the difficulty of emotion in contemporary art. She writes that

thinking about emotion and art requires thinking about the nature of expression. It also requires thinking about identity as a thing produced through (and dissolved in) emotion. The deeper we get into this subject, the closer we get to issues at the core of art history and the challenge of acknowledging a broader spectrum of viewers, seeking a wider range of experiences than those recognized by traditional articulations of that discipline”, and that “emotion can make our experience of art harder, but it also makes that experience more interesting. (Doyle, 2013, p. xviii, 4)

Irony is It is a safeguard for the artists who want to deal with emotional questions and a protective mechanism for those who encounter these works. Instead of irony, Doyle proposes that cynicism as a coping mechanisms: “there is a false assumption in much art writing that we can be smart about emotions only if we are being cynical about them.” (Doyle, 2013, p. 107)



*Saatanan kesänäyttely*  
working group supper, 2015

I believe that joy makes art (and research) better. I am still a product of art education that believed in the refining power of suffering. The more the artist suffers, the better the art and the nobler the artworks, I was told. But, as there is often fairly little economic compensation, very little rest, and no high hopes for successful careers, I think we should at least enjoy what we do. I also believe that joy, pleasure and happiness create trust. In collective practice trust is a way to develop, create something outstanding and experimental.

This image depicts a gathering for dinner with the *Saatanan kesänäyttely / The Bloody Summer Exhibition (2016)* working group. It was not the easiest project and there were moments without joy, happiness and pleasure. Re-visiting the process and I see that one of the issues that made it difficult for me was the element of irony present in some of the works: this form of humor exceeded my understanding and made me feel excluded. It might be that some of the artists felt the same way about our approach. But it was the final installation day and we wanted to invite everyone under the same roof and eat together. Sharing a meal is a good way to smoothen things out, and a place to discuss without the pressure that might exist during the tense installation period. It is an opening in the

bubble of an exhibition project. The project itself, and the work within it, should give pleasure, and working with others should strengthen the project. It doesn't always happen like this. It is a sign of professionalism to admit this and to push through the difficult moments, but I believe it is also a skill to be able to create an atmosphere of joy and pleasure.

The projects we work on with different collectives are critical and experimental, but they often also play with humor, so much so that some of them could be understood as extended jokes. Very serious ones, but jokes nevertheless. *The Bloody Summer Exhibition* plays with this tradition and the idea that no artists or curator with self-respect would participate in one, the name Porin kulttuurisäättö is itself a joke. *How to Life* laughs at the idea of knowing how to life. Artists are expected to be serious in order to be taken seriously. I comprehend this as part of the meta work we are expected to do to make sure our profession is taken seriously. Not participating in this practice is a political act. However, it is no joke, quite opposite: to work in a playful manner is risky, and to minimize the risk one needs to work double as hard, so that the work itself does not become the joke.

# THE PORI SCHOOL

*The Pori School* as a concept is one example of a serious joke. Aalto University launched a master's program in Visual Culture in Pori in 2004 and it was run there, before being transferred to Otaniemi, for ten years. During that time the practice of working between theory and art and outside galleries, studios, and classrooms, in close contact with urban space and societal structures, was created. The grandiose name *The Pori School* was used partly as a joke, but also because there wasn't a suitable name for describing what happened in Pori during these years. And, to be fair, the professor of the program Harri Laakso wrote in his article "What are we talking about when we talk about Pori model" (Laakso, 2014) that he does not use the concept "Pori School" as the meaning never was to create a cohesive school of thought or art genre. We, however, appropriated the term later on when speaking publicly about what was done in Pori, and considered it as a practical umbrella concept of things that might avoid conceptualization as such.

Pori as a laboratory and a model was properly theorized and analyzed in the online journal *Mustekala* in 2014 (Venäläinen, 2014), and later, for example, in the *Intervention to Urban Space* book. In both contexts, the emphasis was on aspects of spatiality, research, experimentality, the experience that would not have been possible in other conditions. The small city and the unique community created a platform where this kind of practice was possible:

Social context and interaction with surrounding society were regarded as important aspects of art and teaching in the MA program. The core of activities was research and experimentation. These emphases made artistic projects part of the cityscape of Pori and the everyday lives of its residents. Both art and the teaching of art were taken out



of academies and galleries, with focus on considering the contexts of art and on experimental interventions. (Jensen, Rajanti and Ziegler, 2018, p. 13)

The Pori School can be seen as a distant offspring for the Black Mountain College, a private liberal arts college founded in 1933. Black Mountain College emphasized holistic learning, non-hierarchical methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches and was experimental in nature. Even if the Pori Department was part of Aalto University, the distant location made it possible to maintain an image of freedom and independence, which were important parts of teaching and practice. The Black Mountain College was also used as a kind of example and benchmark.

The experimental and liberated atmosphere came as a surprise and made it easier to adapt to Pori, and also created a foundation for collaborative practices. I moved, reluctantly, from Helsinki to Pori and to Aalto University from the University of Helsinki, aiming to combine research and practice, and learned to do this in ways I couldn't have imagined before, and I still can't imagine happening in Helsinki or the capital region of Finland. We learned to use the city as a laboratory and platform, and most importantly we learned to realize projects even if they were not "perfect" or "complete." My understanding of "perfect" and "complete" have changed completely since: there is no such thing as perfect or complete. Works are always completed in encounters with spectators and they keep on completing in the minds and stories of those who have experienced them. We cannot control this. Neither can we control all the situations and expectations people have when they encounter art. We can do our best, we are responsible for what we exhibit or publicly present, this is not something we can escape. Complete control and mastery are illusions.

"Low-threshold" became the keyword. The threshold, meaning easily approachable and attainable, was meant to be low for both the artist and the audience. If we want to approach the new and unknown, we might need to present something that is not ready and coherent, in a traditional sense. And to lower the threshold for the audience (and thus be able to learn from these encounters), the art practice in Pori often happened in public or semi-public places and intervened the everyday. The projects often had roots in the history of the city or its buildings, like the old cotton factory or market hall, and they creat-

ed channels for discussions. When art was happening everywhere, all over the time, the threshold for encountering it and making it was lowered.

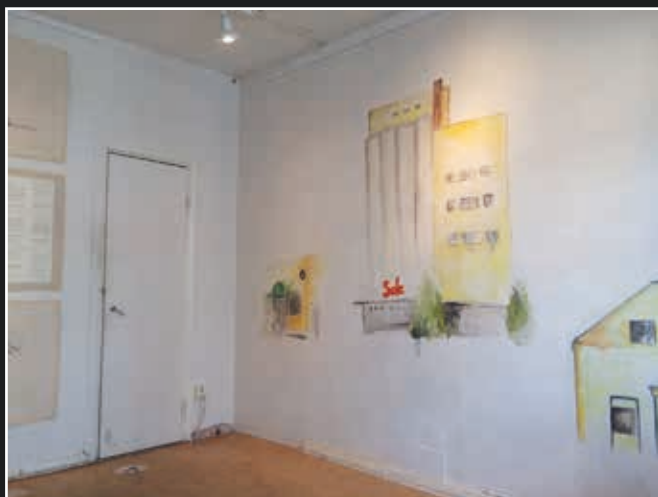
## A. IDEOITA KAUPUNKI PORI/IDEAS CITY PORI

In 2016 I and Eliisa Suvanto applied to the *Ideas City Detroit* event. Ideas City is a collaborative platform for artists, policymakers, and designers. It is an initiative starting from the premise that art and culture are essential to the future vitality of cities. It is co-founded by Lisa Phillips and Karen Wong. (Phillips and Wong, 2011) When we were not accepted to the project we stole the name and created our own version of it, or how we imagined it, in Pori. The year was already packed, we were giving a *Space Invaders* course at Aalto University and were producing the exhibition in a challenging collaboration with the city of Espoo. In addition, Porin kulttuurisäättö was struggling with several different things with the forthcoming Bloody Summer Exhibition. The exhibition project surprised even ourselves, but in a good way. We happened to notice that there was a cancellation time in the local gallery 3H+K, where we had also started the *Space Invaders* project 2013. The first reaction was that it would be madness to do one more show on top of all the other projects happening, but as we had already planned the Detroit participation, it was also an opportunity to give life to the ideas we had about the event. The surprise element meant that there was not too much time to contemplate and re-evaluate our ideas. We were pushed to do things a bit differently, to follow and trust our intuition and build on that. I now believe that the project was also a place where we could non-verbally reflect all the things that were happening elsewhere and where we could simultaneously do something that was elementally our own, using the leftover thoughts and ideas, maybe even frustrations, from other projects to turn them into something that we thought was fun and exciting.

The city of Pori was the starting point, framework, and locale for our practice and now we wanted to bring the city itself to the spotlight. We also wanted to pay attention to the different meanings and roles the city played for different actors and agencies: how does the city feel, look and sound? What has formed it? How is it planned and run? How can we approach it with different mediums and how to be part of forming the city? Instead of a traditional exhibition, we wanted to create an open platform for different events and acts and use the

space as a scene for this. We invited several artists who had worked in the city and with the city to be part of their works exploring Pori to be included in the scene. When planning the project, we were thinking about a famous sight in Pori: *Juselius Mausoleum*, built by a local businessman for his daughter Sigrid who died of tuberculosis at the age of eleven. The frescoes in the mausoleum were originally painted by Akseli Gallen-Kallela and later repainted by his son, Jorma Gallen-Kallela. When designing the gallery space, we aimed for the spirit of frescoes, sepulchers, shrines, but also something contemporary and immediately recognized as local. We painted the gallery walls with recognizable figures from the city that were meaningful for us. Instead of the obvious ones we chose to paint a supermarket, our favorite bar, water tower, the old cotton mill that is now a university consortium and the origin of our practice, and the old wooden house where the gallery 3H+K used to exist before the building was demolished and turned into a parking lot. Within these paintings, we installed works by Antti Turkko, Anni Venäläinen and Denise Ziegler. During the exhibition there were workshops, lectures, walks, and talks by Anna Kholina, Hans-Peter Schütt, Max Ryytänen, and Tiina Uusitalo. (Jensen and Suvanto, 2016a)

The exhibition explored the concept of a city, but also the concept of an exhibition. How to create a place for, instead of the traditional way of entering the exhibition space as a passive spectator observing the objects presented, a space of active participation and encounters? With these approaches, we wanted to pay respect to the Pori School and the way it combined theory, art, and social questions into a site-specific practice that aimed to be accessible and open. The event also proved to us the differences between working in a gallery space and public or semi-public space. Even if the events were open for all and we knew that the themes and topics were widely discussed and the event was promoted for different user groups it seems to be much harder for many to enter the gallery.



*Ideoita kaupunki* at Galleria 3h+k, Pori

This is from *Ideas City Pori* (Jensen and Suvanto, 2016a) created together with a group of artists and researchers, exhibition in 3h+k gallery, 2016. One of the most famous attractions in Pori is Jusélius Mausoleum, built in early 1900 for the daughter of a local businessman with frescoes by Akseli Gallen-Kallella. In the exhibition we wanted to celebrate the city with a hunch of gloominess and to create a mausoleum-like feeling to the gallery space. We wanted to revisit the idea of atmosphere we want to be surrounded with for the eternity. We wanted to combine elements of sublime and sadness to humor and everydayness, and painted what we think were the important places in Pori to the gallery walls, the exhibition itself studying the city. In this picture you can find the Irish Pub, probably the most relevant place in Pori when it comes to the art scene, an old grain silo, that used to be an artists' residency and has a supermarket, and Autotalo, a building where we had our studios and when it was doomed to be demolished, organized the second *Space Invaders*.

At the opening, one of the guests asked why everyone who came to Pori to study is making art about the city. I would propose that Pori School, a name that is partly a joke, is the reason. A combination of context-oriented teaching and entering a new, very intense city and starting to study it with fresh eyes while being influenced by new ideas, theories and practices, together with the method of using the city as a laboratory and a platform, made the city into the context, the place and the material for our works. But it is not only the city that we were studying, but the city as an example of all cities. The city became not so much an anthill but an ant terrarium where you can observe how communities function, how individuals move in their environment and what kind of marks they leave.

# PRESENCE

In our practice and research, presence has relevance in at least two different ways: *presence* is occupying space, being there, and existing for and with the others. This spatial dimension of presence has become more apparent than ever in 2020 during the pandemic, when working home, alone, during the lockdown, being present online is not the same presence as the presence of bodies occupying space or sharing it with others. This sharing can be wanted or unwanted, intentional or unintentional, and, importantly when it comes to the two different understandings, the structured and understandable existence of a person in a space or the uncanny manifestation of the awareness of something or someone being present.

“Presence” in art tends to have connotations that refer to performance art or the act of being present in the artwork itself, or at least part of it. In our projects, we are there for the artists and we are there for the visitors. We are present and available for discussions, questions, and conversations. Our presence is aimed to be open and accessible, we do not assume to be able to control the situation at all times which makes it possible to encounter all kinds of people we meet in everyday life. This type of presence is highly spatial and spatiality is related to accessibility. It is a presence that happens in a certain space, and it is the presence of space as it becomes both a stage for the event taking place in and also a subject of research itself. In that sense, presence is related to the idea of a situation and situational art works. By creating open and accessible meeting points for different kinds of people, experiences, and discussions we can bring out hidden pieces of knowledge of communities, and sometimes even create new kinds of communities.

This spatiality and physicality of presence are part of how artist Hito Steyerl handles the question of presence, connecting it to the labor and economy of art. Steyerl writes:

The idea of presence invokes the promise of unmediated communication, the glow of uninhibited existence, a seemingly unalienated experience and authentic encounters between humans. It implies that not only the artist but everyone else is present too, whatever that means and whatever it is good for. Presence stands for allegedly real discussion, exchange, communication, the happening, the event, liveness, the real thing – you get the idea. (Steyerl, 2019, p. 22)

Artistic projects can make other kinds of presences available. The past, space, place, the history of a certain place, its politics, are all given their presence in projects, where they are brought to the consciousness. This indicates how presence works in two directions. On one hand, it creates tangibility and rootedness, it is a stable factor in an unstable world. Presence brings certainty to our uncanny being in the world, we can have embodied and haptic knowledge of the fact that we are, for example, at this very moment occupying space. On the other hand, presence can be uncanny itself. When this knowledge fails us, it creates an eerie sensation of a presence that should not be there or a presence that should be there, but is not. And, as Steyerl points out, “the economy of art is deeply immersed in this economy of presence”, and that “the physical presence of people is, on average, cheaper than the presence of works that need to be shipped, insured and/or installed.” (2019, p. 23) This is related to the question of events during the exhibition: it has been suggested that today, many independent curators curate discussion, reading groups, workshops and talks instead of exhibitions because it is cheaper and less laborious in a precarious field. According to Steyerl “presence also means permanent availability without any promise of compensation. In the age of the reproducibility of almost everything physical, human presence is one of the few things that cannot be multiplied indefinitely, an asset with some inbuilt scarcity.” (2019, p. 23)

This resistance to reproducibility means that presence challenges documentation and mediation: physical and spatial experience often requires embodied presence from the spectators. But due to ecological reasons and the remote locations that are not always easily reachable, there is a need for art to be experienced without physical presence. One tool we have used when trying to communicate our projects to those who are not able to make it to the actual exhibition is mediating not only the outcome but also the process. Doing this

often makes different aspects of the projects more approachable. We also want to, instead of just providing the curator's view on the project, have artists presenting their thoughts about the project. The form is free, it can be a text about their work or practice, for example. And with Porin kulttuurisäätiö we have from the first biennial onwards, invited someone “from the outside,” meaning not a curator nor an artist, to write about the event and produce a new layer of presence.





Porin kulttuurisäättö's street survey for the *Centennial* exhibition.

This image is from 2017 when Porin kulttuurisäättö did a survey on people's hopes and wishes when it comes to the art they want to experience: the themes, mediums, locations and styles. The results were turned into an exhibition in the 2018 *Centennial* project. The survey was done in two different parts: during *The Truth About Finland* exhibition in July and later in the autumn when we encountered people in the Pori city center. Even if we really wanted to know how people perceive art, it was also about making us available for encounters and discussions. What we have learned during the years is that people are not as skeptical about contemporary or "difficult" art as the myth goes. Rather, they see art as a way of opening up spaces and moments for sharing emotions. In addition, it makes us see that it is important to be present for these moments, to take ideas, thoughts, concerns and feedback seriously.

Presence, as a spatio-temporal phenomena, is related to care because of its relational nature. Attachments, hapticity, involvement: giving you time and presence to something you find important.

# QUEER PHENOMENOLOGY

In the book *Queer Phenomenology* (Ahmed, 2006) Ahmed presents a detailed explanation of how things are organized and how this organization normalizes other things and makes some phenomena queer. For example, spaces are structured and this process is gendered. Pierre Mayol considers this topic in the context of the neighborhood and “the sexualized organization of public space,” stating that how space is organized and used are social manifestations responding to “a gendered organization of society, each partner playing the role presented by his or her sexual definition within the limits imposed by property.” (de Certeau, Giard and Mayol, 1998, p. 23) Mayol’s example shows how embodied and spatial the phenomena of space is, how “spaces are not exterior to bodies”, as Ahmed writes (Ahmed, 2006, p. 9). In his phenomenological approach on places Dylan Trigg articulates how the body is what makes places have meaning as such:

Places are felt to be moving in and through the human body, as human bodies are experienced within those same places. The body’s inhalation and exhalation concern more than the elements we breathe. With its pulse, the body opens itself to the heterogeneity of a particular place. Indeed, thanks to the body, place gains meaning *as* place. (Trigg, 2012, p. 170)

Since childhood we collect embodied knowledge about spaces and places so that we can read their manifestations, and through this knowledge the organization of society organizes us. Still, there are spaces and moments that are queer or uncanny, that we can’t interpret, but we want to explore further. They can be approached through language, like this dissertation does, or materially, through artistic methods. Art and artistic interventions can also change how the manifestation of a specific space is read: it can become more inviting, or more exclu-

sive, the strangeness of a space may be revealed, or reduced. The social contract regarding the space may change as the agreement on how the space is used changes:

Spaces are not just dependent on where I am located: such a model, in its turn, would presume the subject as ordinary, as the container of space rather than contained by space. The social depends in part on the agreement about how we measure space and time, which is why social conflict can often be experienced as being 'out of time' as well as 'out of place' with others. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 13)

In the *Intervention to Urban Space* book, this feeling was referred to as "dislocation" that was a result of the surprising, even disturbing, element in the encounters with intervention art in public sphere. (Jensen, Rajanti and Ziegler, 2018, p. 21) Such moments, as Ahmed writes, can be a gift, or the site of trauma. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 19)

In phenomenological terms, these kinds of surprising, dislocated, queer and uncanny moments can be called moments of intellectual experience of disorder, moments of disorientation. And as it is a tradition of spatial, bodily experience, it is not only an intellectual but a vital bodily experience of something being out of place. This experience is close to what Sarah Ahmed calls "queer phenomenology," suggesting that these moments of misorientation and reorientation give space to different and new ways of orientation – use queerness to make different points. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 4) Disorientation is moving without a given map, and therefore related to non-knowledge, because, as Sarat Maharaj points out, "one of the points about non-knowledge is that we are dealing with a world in which we do not follow a given map." (Cotter, 2019) And, according to Trigg, "phenomenology's overarching achievement is to draw our attention to the strangeness of things." (Trigg, 2012, p. 26)

In his essay "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" (1906), Ernst Jentsch defined the uncanny as a lack of orientation:

With the word *unheimlich* ['uncanny'], the German language seems to have produced a rather fortunate formation. Without a doubt, this word appears to express that someone to whom something 'uncanny'

happens is not quite ‘at home’ or ‘at ease’ in the situation concerned, that the thing is or at least seems to be foreign to him. In brief, the word suggests that a lack of orientation is bound up with the impression of the uncanniness of a thing or incident. (Jentsch, 1997)

This uncanniness can be contemplated in the context of Heidegger’s philosophy, like Tanja Tiekso does, proposing that it opens to two directions: uncanny is a fundamental state of our being, but also an impulse that makes it possible for the truth to manifest itself in an artwork. (Tiekso, 2013, p. 117) In this Heideggerian conception, uncanny is what forces us to think and wonder, and these are the origins for experiencing art. (Tiekso, 2013, p. 137) Through the experience of uncanny we can encounter something *genuinely novel*, as Trigg suggests: “The uncanny refuses to concede to stillness, and instead presents us with something genuinely novel: *an augmented familiarity*, thus (un) familiar to the core (*unheimlich*).” (Trigg, 2012, p. 27)

## A. QUEER MOMENTS

The bodily and spatial uncanny phenomena of the *unheimlich* can also be named *queer*, and tied to the question of orientation as Ahmed does. In Ahmed’s phenomenological reading of perception, Merleau-Ponty’s conceptions are employed to explore how bodies are shaped through time and space. In Ahmed’s theory, orientation is like a map – being orientated feels like being at home, knowing where one is and stands, within familiar objects. When orientation fails this feeling of being oriented is disrupted, perception becomes queer and instead of feeling at home, the feeling becomes uncanny – *unheimlich*. These moments “where the world no longer appears the right way up are usually corrected as soon as possible and the queer effects are straightened up.” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 65) This is also how art and artistic interventions can work and change the way they everyday environment is perceived.

The feeling of being constantly lost is unpleasant and it is quite exhausting to draw new maps everyday, but what if there wasn’t always an immediate demand to straighten these gaps and queer moments in perception? If we would learn to approach these moments more openly, what could we learn from these moments and how they can be used? I believe art is often already a place where

these queer moments are embraced instead of rejected, and therefore it can also be a place for exploring how these categories of queer and straight moments are created and maintained, and how they could be reappropriated. As the process of “straightening” our perception in these queer moments is related to how bodies are modeled and act and how spaces become grounds of these actions, could we rethink bodies and spaces in the framework of queer orientation? When art, especially art that cannot be immediately recognized as art but as that which disturbs the spatial experience of the everyday flow, is brought into a space to be faced by bodies, it creates queer moments and demands reorientation. This also directs our attention to the moment itself, to how it is perceived. Ironically, putting on exhibitions where art that does not immediately resemble art is presented, we often use maps to guide visitors to the artworks and to indicate where the art is. At times, it feels like these maps are just more confusing than clarifying. They are merely drawings of the cartographic locations, not the experience. It helps you navigate, but it does not help you perceive, or interpret what you are perceiving. It is obvious that some of our visitors think that the maps, meant to be helpful, only widen the gap between reality and realm of art through these incomplete representations. I believe these maps could be seen as vessels for reorientation, but not reorientation as straightening but reorientation towards the unknown.

When, for example, new knowledge is gained these moments of reorientation are important, or even indispensable. The process of straightening guides us towards the already known, whereas the unknown can be frustrating and confusing. In learning processes, emotions are equally important as reasoning, and even if the immediate assumption might suggest differently, moments of confusion and frustration can increase curiosity. Sometimes, instead of being paralyzing or pacifying, they can make us push harder, and this improves the learning process. When new models are perceived the old models in the brain are questioned. So when art presents new and even unrecognized forms, it gives the brain possibilities to create new models, connections, and knowledge. And this might, and even probably will, generate resistance and confusion. Rather than considering frustration as a negative reaction from the public, it could be understood as the start of a process for learning anew. It has been proven that things that are immediately clear do not awake curiosity nor the need to strain to figure something out to the same degree. (Räty, 2020)

This is a photograph of pink smoke in an old mine in Wales, Corris, where we did a residency in Studio Maelor. During the residency period we walked a lot and discovered places that triggered our curiosity. With different practices and methods, like drawing, walking, mapping, writing, and using smoke bombs, we tried to search for forms to present, or point out, something about these places: how to turn a slight tensing of your body into a line or a color? How to document the process, first the place, then the emotion, then the experiment? With the *How to Live* project Andrea Coyotzi Borja and I have studied the site-specific nature of queer moments, infraordinary and uncanny and explored ways of approaching things we don't have words for and don't even know if the experience is shared or not. What is symptomatic in queer phenomenology is the sense of lacking orientation and this lack of orientation produces speechlessness. These moments and these experiences do not have a name and this highlights the feeling of being lost. What is also characteristic is that we may not even know what it is that has confused us. if it didn't sound so obscure, I might talk about chasing the soul or a spirit of a place. Or perhaps I will anyway, as there is something in a place that haunts us, something that has evolved over time. The classical example in phenomenology is a table and how our intention is targeted towards it and how we then perceive. In some places, we have an intention, we perceive them and can read them as we expect. But then there are places that already mess with our intention, shake our perception, and are impossible or difficult to read. Or, they might produce texts that need to be translated, or are new in a way we might not be able to interpret them yet, but we can still have a feeling that they are relevant.



Smoke bombs in an old mine, Corris, 2018

# RATIONALISM, REASON

Michel Foucault's perception on rationalism is based on the idea that reason is self-created, which for him means that different forms of rationality, different foundations, creations, and modifications that engender and pursue each other, need to be analyzed. Instead of "founding act" Foucault believes that reason has been discovered or established. (Foucault, 2003, p. 88) According to Braidotti, Foucault's analysis of reason and its foundations establishes "the analytic conditions for a critique of the human in a post-Enlightenment frame of reference.":

The strength of Foucault's case is the effect of resonance it establishes between the crisis of a concept – Man, as the referent for humanity – and the posthuman conditions that make it thinkable in a critical vein. A concept becomes thinkable as it loses consistency and self-evidence, and thus ceases to be a ruling principle. That kind of self-evidence is the result of specific power configurations that attribute to dominant notions a strong sense of entitlement: they are all the more powerful in that they remain implicit. It follows therefore that the task of critical theory is to analyze power relations explicitly and to unveil the mechanisms by which they had gained such self-evidence in the first place. (Braidotti, 2019, p. 67)

Rationalism in philosophy refers to regarding reason and reasoning as sources of knowledge, a method of deduction, and intellectual judgment in a process of filtering out the truth. Like the Enlightenment, the "age of reason", was inspired by René Descartes's notion of the subject, whose whole being is, in fact, dependent on the act of thinking. Spurred by the Enlightenment, rationalism as a philosophical methodology has been the basis of the western world as it is today. Values, ideologies, and concepts like democracy, individual liberty, civil society, freedom of expression, and equality of all men were invented and/or



spread wider. Science, communication, and common concern were accounted for, and the public sphere as a shared realm of communication was created. All this created a platform for the rise of the nation-state, liberal capitalism, and the industrial revolution.

The Enlightenment and rationalism pass through everything in our presence, thinking, and existing today to a degree where their influence is inseparable from our being. Even those who might have questioned the ways The Enlightenment and rationalism have shaped our thinking seem to have difficulties escaping them. Hegel is a good example of this, questioning Cartesian and Kantian traditions, but stubbornly stuck with the idea of reason, as presented in the introduction to *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings*: “What appears to be most foreign to our manners of thinking, however, is Hegel’s stubborn maintenance of reason as the sole dominating principle in the intellectual world – an attitude that could appropriately be called his totalitarianism of reason.” (Hegel, 1990 xi)

An encyclopedia is a perfect example of the Enlightenment at work: a way of creating and sharing taxonomic knowledge, and an act that would eventually succeed in organizing and categorizing everything, turning life into a logical structure. This, along with the focus on the autonomy of the individual, has today become the subject struggling with the impossible task of formulating a whole and integrated existence, constantly in the process of self-development. The uncontrollable nature of our being, everything that cannot be explained or known, has been a challenge for communities throughout the history of humankind. It has been studied and expounded with stories, myths, plays, theories, images, collectively and solely, but only in the modern age was the task given to a single individual who was told that merely by rationalizing would they be able to give reality a logical structure. Considering this, it is no wonder that the Enlightenment has sometimes been blamed for the loss of meaning in our time. The relationship between knowledge and meaning is complex, and how I practice the form of an encyclopedia in my research is to study and acknowledge this complexity, as well as the questions related to mediating knowledge, or approaching non-verbalizable non-knowledge through words that do not capture its essence. The reappropriation of the structure of an encyclopedia is an attempt to show its problematic nature, while simultaneously using its familiarity to make complex issues approachable. The form acknowledges the

fragmented nature of knowledge but by issuing the experiential and embodied side of how we structure and encounter world, the fragmented nature of reality can be taken into consideration.

One of the problems with rationalism, at times even reasoning, is that it assumes that a single reality is the same for all. The Enlightenment and rationalism aimed for equality, natural rights, and absolute freedom, but it was not equality, rights, and freedom for all. What was created was the conception of bourgeois egalitarianism and the public sphere (Habermas, 1989), while industrialism, capitalism, and nation-states created possibilities for oppression, discrimination and segregation. Many early feminists, like Mary Wollstonecraft, welcomed the idea of rationalism and the idea of treating everyone as rational beings would consider women as well as men. Instead, the idea of these rational beings created two categories for humans: the category of intelligence, rationalism, and culture that men present, and the category of nature, body, and emotions that was reserved for females, slaves, natives, and others who did not constitute the enlightened subject.

The age of reason dismissed the body in favor of the mind. Rationalism can be seen to forget the experience while focusing on the use of logic. However, I believe that the total rational control of everything with an analytical mind is an absurd idea: we can't know ourselves, let alone the other, so how would it be possible to intellectualize and rationalize everything? We are capable of rationalizing many things, but this already requires some a priori knowledge and understanding of things – or at least that we recognize them as things. And this recognition demands that these things are somehow visible in our social structures, socially acknowledged, and available for us to study. Traditionally the encyclopedia has been a way to spread systematized knowledge. In my thesis, I am appropriating the concept to deconstruct both the system and knowledge, and instead of expecting pure and objective knowledge and rationalism, I focus on the experiential and embodied knowledge that is site-specific, cultural, temporal, and relational. If the enlightened, cartesian subject was most of all rational, the posthuman subjects are, like Braidotti writes, “work-in-progress”, and principally relational: “What constitutes subjectivity is a structural *relational* capacity, coupled with the specific degree of force or power that any one entity is endowed with: their ability to extend towards and in proximity with others.” (Braidotti, 2019, pp. 41–42)



Doctor Fisher

This is probably my all-time favorite meme. It perfectly captures the faith we place in science, reason and rationalism, and how little the world respects this faith. How we name, organize, classify and structure things, and how little these names in the end mean.

And it is good that we trust reason and science. The world without reason and rationalism would be a world of chaos. However, it is important to keep in mind that there are many competing knowledges, and none of them are objective or “pure.” This became evident during the pandemic when the world was divided into those accepting the pandemic and trusting vaccines to cure it, and those questioning these facts. Both sides refer to “statistics” and “data” but often what these terms actually mean seem to get lost. It is hard to reason together, of the other side is completely irrational.

And sometimes the complexity of an initiative makes it seem absurd even if it makes sense for those who are competent in the field. In 2021, Porin kulttuurisäätiö did a project called *Evergreen Inner Jungle* in Kaisaniemi Botanic Garden. We collaborated with LUOMUS – Finnish Museum of Natural History and got to know their practice a little bit. They mentioned that they have some problems presenting the plant processes as well as their work to the visitors and when we were introduced to the crown jewel, the evolution tree, we understood why. The “tree” is a combination of maps, plants, paths, names, years, and taxonomy that spreads all over the garden. It covers a time span of millions of years and species we have never heard of. It aims to represent evolution and relations but largely, it succeeds in demonstrating how absurd the idea of controlling something so big is. Absurd, but not fruitless. (pun intended)

# REPRESENTATION

“Hollywood is teaching people that the way you react when you see a transgender people's body is to vomit. Nick Adams, Glaad director of media & representation” (*Disclosure*, 2020)

“It's an interesting question, a thought experiment to go back and think what I would feel today, as an out trans person, if I had never seen any representation of myself in the media. On the one hand, I might not have ever internalized that sense of - - of being monstrous, of having fears around disclosure, of seeing myself as something abhorrent, and as--as a punchline and--and as a joke. I might be able to go on a date with a man without having the image of men vomiting. On the flip side, would I even know I'm trans if I had never seen any kind of depiction of gender variance on-screen. Jen Richards, actress, writer.” (*Disclosure*, 2020)

The rationalistic project of selection, classification, taxonomy, excluding and including is executed in cultural representations: who is being represented and how, who has representatives and where. Representations matter. The film *Disclosure* (2020) presents the history of trans representation in films and television. In the film, Trans thinkers, activists, and creatives share their thoughts and experiences. It documents the violence, the jokes, and the stereotypes that have shaped the understanding of what trans is, and the slow evolution of those representations. It shows how enormous the power of representations are at both personal and societal levels.

Representations not only make visible its object but also the ideologies and values of society. The visual world gets represented, but how it is perceived depends on time and culture. Representations reflect, but they can also question prevailing ideologies. This is one of the reasons why the relationship between art and representation is as complex as it is. We do not only represent what we see but also how we expect to see things. We keep repeating the same representations because they are simple and understandable. Representations are signs.

When children learn to draw they all go through a phase of drawing what is called *tadpole* figures. In Finnish, it is, even more accurately, called *pääjalkainen*, head-legged. The tadpole is a simplified human figure with a large round head and two lines as legs. It is not a "realistic" representation of a person, but it is good enough to be recognized as a human. It is not about the likeness, but about getting the message across. This means that we often repeat the representations we are used to, maybe without giving them and their consequences much thought. Even within the arts, the discourse around representation has mostly focused on the theoretical conception of representation and whether art is merely representation or expression - this is hardly a surprise, considering the discussion has been, for centuries, led by white males, who see themselves represented in every possible surface and mirror and do not need to struggle with being recognized as subjects. Recognition requires representations, and representations matter:

A naked African woman in bronze crouches, frozen in space at Järntorget, a heavily frequented public space in Gothenburg, Sweden. She is part of Tore Stringberg's (1882–1968) 1927 statue *De Fem Världdelarna* (The Five Continents), or as it is typically referred today, *Järntorgsbrunnen*. She is positioned as one of five naked women who occupy the outer circle of the fountain, all of whom are either seated or crouching, looking outward into space, with their backs to each other. These women, representing the world's continents, were sculpted to mark the port city of Gothenburg as central actor in the global export of iron ore. *Järntorgsbrunnen* is a marker of imperial memory and the European colonial archive (Wekker 2016). At the same time, over one hundred years later, the statue is part of our cityscape. Moving through this space, we heard the statue whisper, as she asked us to engage the colonial archive and the ways in which our own past, present, and future intertwine in and with this public archive. And in hearing this whisper, listening carefully, we chose to respond. (Osei-Kofi and Sawyer, 2022, p. 118)

In their practice, Nana Osei-Kofi and Lena Sawyer engage imperial archives through black feminist methodologies. In this specific project about the *Järntorgsbrunnen*, they wanted to create affectively based knowledge about the

statue they consider “as trace, a vestige archive of slavery.” Sei-Kofi and Sawyer describe how their project is a way of thinking and speaking through the monument and the history of editing public archives. They wanted to encourage people to listen, and through this create alternative visions and narratives of our shared public spaces. This means they do not only want to look at the past, but also the shared future. (Osei-Kofi and Sawyer, 2022, pp. 118–119) Osei-Kofi’s and Sawyer’s work is a good example of how when one works as an artist, curator, and researcher, issues of political aspects of art: inclusion, feminism, power relations, and equality, the question of representation is unavoidable and it takes many forms. What do we represent through our practice, how, and why? Are we constructing or deconstructing otherness through representations? One would think that at this point in larger public projects asking these questions would be self-evident, but the Finland 100 anniversary made it clear that this is not the case. In the country of many minorities, Finnish Swedes, Roma, and Sami people, the jubilee largely continued on the path violently cleared during the early years of independence, when “official” Finnish identity was created through visual and literal representations of a true origin. Representations then, and in 2017, included whiteness, nature, healthy outdoor activism, and sauna. Porin kulttuurisäättö’s *The Truth About Finland* project wanted to expand on this idea and present the multiplicity of voices and ways of being in Finland today, while also looking deeper into the past.

## A. THE TRUTH ABOUT FINLAND

In 2017 Finland celebrated its 100 years of independence. This included grandiose parties but also many different art and cultural approaches to the topic. In the beginning, Porin kulttuurisäättö was included the official program, but when it started to develop it became obvious that our initiative was not comparable to the mostly traditional, clean, and neat projects celebrating a conventional image of Finland as the land of nature, sauna, skiing, and woolen socks – which, of course, can be part of a Finnish identity, but it is not the whole truth. Instead of relating to these kinds of exclusive representations, we aimed to show that Finnish identity is more complex than this.

The project took multiple forms: an exhibition with performances and workshops in Helsinki; a catalog with 100 different representations of Finland

in 2017; and an exhibition in Pori presenting these works. (Porin kulttuurisäätiö *et al.*, 2017) The jubilee started as an ideal platform for a project reflecting on the so-called “public truth” envisioned by the official Finland 100 program. Instead of the one “official truth,” Porin kulttuurisäätiö invited 100 artists and researchers to present their own truths about Finland in an A4 format to be exhibited in Pori and published as a catalog. In Helsinki, *The Truth About Finland* took a different form: a group of artists, curators, and researchers (Erno-Erik Raitanen, Honkasalo-Niemi-Virtanen, Miika Tervonen, nynny) were invited to take part in a working group on the topic and the outcome was presented as an exhibition and a series of events in Kallio Kunsthalle in June 2017. With the group, we had multiple meetings where we tried to solve the problem of how to make the invisible cultural hierarchies visible and deconstruct existing power relations without just replacing them with new, probably problematic, ones. We discussed how to process problematic visual presentations of the past without just strengthening them by repeating them. The task was overwhelming and there were moments when it felt impossible to arrive at any kind of mutual understanding or conclusion. Ultimately, I am more than happy about how the exhibition and event turned out.

Dealing with the injustices of the past and present by trying to collectively find ways to discuss them without reproducing them was challenging but rewarding. As mentioned previously, especially the swastika and its highly problematic symbol status in Finnish culture and history both in the past and present was discussed. Academic Teivo Teivainen describes its position in Finland, “In Finland there’s this idea that it’s a random decorative sign – which to some extent it is”, and this has made it possible that the swastika is still in use in art and in institutions – for example Finland’s air force used the swastika in their symbol for their uniforms, unit flags and decorations until 2017 when it was quietly stopped. (Allen, 2020) The generality of the symbol in relation to its history make it difficult to deal with, which is why it is also a good example of difficult structural issues to be solved together. Moments of this anxiety were described in the catalog in our text *The Truth About the Process*:

It is hard to find ways of approaching the essential ideas and acts that have been creating cultural identity for decades while trying to avoid pre-arranged perspectives, concepts and thoughts. Is it even



possible to be aware or avoid these naturalized ways of thinking, and if so, are we then only substituting them with new ideologies? And while trying to find new expressions, languages, working methods and contemplations how do we balance between still understandable but not reproductive forms? How can we present things so that they stay also open and make sense also for those not necessarily already inside this discourse? (Porin kulttuurisäätiö et al., 2017, p. 11)

What we didn't foresee was the triggering effect of the word "truth." One would easily assume that it is more or less obvious that truth is a problematic concept, especially when it comes to national identities and history. But for surprisingly many, there apparently was a truth about Finland, and the idea of our project questioning or opposing this truth was offensive. This led to us losing the promised exhibition venue in the city center of Pori and a heated public discussion in the local newspaper, where our project was, for example, called "malicious". (Elo, 2017)

It was a very surprising turn that our project exploring power structures and exclusion throughout the history of Finland brought all these hidden tensions and fears to the surface. We came to realize that when art is exhibited in the public sphere there remains the expectation that it reinforces hegemonic ideas. For us, the concept of "truth", especially in this context, was a kind of a joke. There were more than a hundred artists invited which already meant that the idea of one ultimate truth was absurd. In addition, through the concept, we wanted to question how the historical narrative named "truth", is usually the truth of the majority and built on the backs of minorities and those in margins. As we at no point intended the project to be as provocative or hostile as it was interpreted, all the public opposition can be considered a highly interesting research result and a compelling indicator that the concept of "truth" bears weight that we were not prepared for.

I also believe the project succeeded in how the national representation was handled, instead of settling for the obvious choices of repeating or counter-reading the conventional representation. Like in other Porin kulttuurisäätiö and Space Invaders projects, the idea is to not illustrate the theme or the topic, or to substitute old representations with what we consider better ones. Instead the idea is to propose, suggest and provide a variety of new perspectives and starting points.



Erno-Erik Raitanen: *Set in Stone. Truths about Public Sculptures in Helsinki*, 2017, detail.

Eight horses and a bat. Dozens of megaliths, obelisks, and few steel spheres. Six sundials and two benches. Bronze, steel and granite. Great men, mothers, and a man risen from a rubbish bin. Stones commemorating everything from the spruce of independence to the national anthem. Two memorials to peace and 29 to war. (Erno-Erik Raitanen: *Set in Stone. Truths about Public Sculptures in Helsinki*. The Truth About Finland, 2017, 19)

In 2017, as part of Porin kulttuurisäätiön *The Truth About Finland* exhibition, artist Erno-Erik Raitanen presented a map with public sculptures in Helsinki. The map categorized public works by gender of the artist and gender of the person represented in the artwork, as well as human and non-human sculptures. 21% of the sculptures were created by female artists, 10% of memorials to national hero statues were dedicated to women: “Fishes (8), horses (7), and bears (6) appear more often in statues than significant women,” as Raitanen wrote in the catalog (2017, 19). Representations matter. It matters what we see and by whom it is seen. It matters who makes the decisions. It matters what is honored and what is dismissed.

# RESPONSIBILITY, RESPONDING, REACTING

In order to be responsible it is necessary to respond to or answer to what responsible means. For if it is true that the concept of responsibility has, throughout a history that is as consistent as continuous, always implied involvement in action, doing, a praxis, a decision that exceeds simple conscience or simple theoretical understanding, it is also true that the same concept requires a decision or responsible action to answer for itself consciously, that is, with knowledge of a thematics of what is done, of what action signifies, its causes, ends, etc. (Derrida, 1999, p. 27)

Representation is related to responsibility. If we are occupying space with representations, what and how we want to represent? In a world full of restrictions, limitations, and rules, art has construed as a “free zone,” where one can be wild and liberated, a field where everything is possible and accepted. As responsibilities and ethics are increasingly demanded, a substantial group of artists and arts workers have emerged to defend and justify the freedom of art. It is true that we need art to act as a counter power with the freedom to speak freely. Art needs its autonomy, but it can also be insisted that this happens under certain conditions such as taking responsibility for the possible consequences this autonomy or freedom has. The idea of art as a free zone is related to the idea of art as inherently good. The assumption is that making art instantly means that the artist’s intentions are good and that, when intentions are good, then the outcome will be beneficial to society. This notion of art’s unquestionable virtue

is related to the idea of art as something larger than life: a sublime entity that is above any critic. But if art is a way of creating and mediating knowledge, then there must also be criticism and discourse. Not everything should, or can, be accepted as such. Today's generation of artists, writers, and critics are sometimes considered "sensitive" and "touchy" as not everything is accepted and consideration and inclusivity are required. The whole discussion about artistic freedom is an outcome of the myth of the artistic genius, whose creations are holy, and hence not expected to follow the same regulations as everything else. Instead of believing that artistic freedom is something that justifies anything and everything, I trust that artistic freedom makes it possible that within art it is possible to think about what responsibility means and care for it.

Agnes Denes considers responsibility towards others, and art as a statement on that: "Making art today is synonymous with assuming responsibility for our fellow humans." (Denes, 2008 p. 193) and also on how art can be seen as a unifying element: "Today, when humanity lacks unity and a clear overview, art can become a unifying element that captures the essence of the site, its purpose and meaning for the community." (Denes, 2008 p. 184) Responsibility implies to self-presentation and responding, as Derrida states: "'Here I am' as responsibility implies this self-presentation, this autotelic, autodeictic, autobiographical movement, exposing oneself before the law; and second, because 'Here I am as responsibility implies the possibility of 'responding', of answering for one-self in the response to appeal or command the other.'" (Derrida, 2008, p. 111)

Artistic practice is an act of responding, an act of responsibility and reactivity: reactivity to a certain situation, time, or place and taking responsibility through that response and reaction. Artistic practice should include taking responsibility for one's actions, for the situation and for those we work within. Responsibility within curating is not only an ethical and theoretical question but concrete work with very practical topics. For example, taking care that no one dies when making or experiencing your event or exhibition. This can be simultaneously considered a minimum of expectation but also an impossible task: the curator is expected to have control over the event, but we cannot control the faith or destiny of the visitors. Maybe this is also one of the questions where curating and the curatorial can be seen as different spheres: curating is about taking responsibility for your artists and audience, the curatorial concen-

trates on the ethical issues and considers responsibility as a larger, global issue. Artists and curators are already expected to shoulder a lot of responsibility, to the degree that Tom Holert calls it an “imperative of responsibility,” framing a demand, especially in times of crises and anxiety, addressed at artists to “work on adequate and timely responses to historical events, political changes, social crises, and environmental catastrophes.” (Holert, 2020, p. 161)

Leftist groups have sometimes been blamed for not being able to offer alternatives, for merely reacting to the current situation and to the conditions of capitalism. And, when it comes to both politics and art, there is the possibility and maybe even a responsibility to imagine and to present new, other, and better worlds. This means that art and curating cannot only be about reacting but it should also be about imagining the new, even if this presents a difficult task. Choreographer and feminist Sonya Lindfors advocates for radical dreaming, even if it seems like an impossible task: “When I close my eyes and try to dream of the future, I see partial repetitions of this moment. Radical dreaming is hard, even impossible, but we have to try the impossible, too.” (Gustafsson and Haapoja, 2020, p. 62) This radical dreaming is also a way of being responsible. If we dream about the future it means we care about the future, we want there to be one. It means that we first need to dream it, then put these dreams into action.

A curator often works at intersection of dreams and making them happen. It is not (always) these grandiose visions of the world's futures, but also small dreams of events, happenings, and artworks – forms, places, and publics. I consider the curator's work to be about reacting responsibly to different demands: what the artists want and hope, what the public might need (this does not mean pleasing the public, but making art accessible), and what the place itself requires. The curator's work involves reacting to these different hopes and needs: to create platforms for dreaming together.



With Sanna Ritvanen in  
Kaisaniemi Botanic Garden, 2021

Art is about reactions. We receive an impulse, internal or external, and we react to that. It about communication and dialogue. However, it should not be merely reaction, but understanding its responsibility in different situations, its context. In this image, Sanna Ritvanen, a member of Porin kulttuurisäätiö collective and I are hugging a tree in Kaisaniemi Botanic Garden in 2021, while preparing *The Evergreen Inner Jungle* exhibition. We don't always go around hugging trees but this was an exceptionally silky and soft Paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*). *The Evergreen Inner Jungle* continued the series of exhibitions exploring our responsibilities to different agencies around us: the artists we work with, other collaborative parties, our collective, society, art community, and nature. There have been enough examples of trying to raise awareness about the amount of plastic waste by making art from plastic waste or presenting refugees as an artwork when trying to express worry about the refugee crisis). Therefore, we sought alternative ways to increase understanding, to create shared moments and experiences. We are not preachers, and we do not want to preach. What we can do is speculate, and speculating together can create something meaningful. This speculation can take various forms and we can use different tools to spin tales and stories. We need to experiment with a variety methods to reach different groups of people with alternative narratives. This is also why we can't only concentrate on the carbon footprint, or the amount of waste created - art is about creating experiences and shaping forms. At times, these forms are material. At times, they are immaterial.

# THE REAL

When I was little, I experienced these weird moments in the middle of ordinary days and while playing. It was not often, but sometimes, when I was playing alone in my room or in the small forest nearby, I felt a rupture in reality and suddenly, I was sure that I was alone in the world, that when I returned to reality, normally populated with people, there would be no one, not a single soul would be left. I worried that perhaps, the reality I had become estranged from temporarily had never even existed: that the "normalcy" actually was, and had always been, a fine shell covering the uncanniness of everything. Later, I found out that there is a concept for this: *the real*. Of course, back then I did not understand the theory of symbolic order. Nevertheless, I understood it as the solidity of the world and our understanding, as something that was fragile and needed maintaining. A safeguard towards the collapse of coherence was the company of others and avoiding the unknown in its multiple manifestations: unknown people, unknown places, unknown ideas, unknown games. The problem is that the unknown is also very exciting. The fact that this horror cannot really be explained in any meaningful way, means that it requires, especially when one wants to share this shattering experience, a lot of attention.

What we know might frighten us, but what we don't know horrifies. How to respond, respect, or let alone, care, for that which that horrifies? The contour of a common figure breaks into puzzling fragments of frightening: *the real*. Jacques Lacan's concept of "the real" is considered to be the most difficult notion in his oeuvre: it can be concrete and material, but also goes beyond description. The real is beyond the imaginary and symbolic order. It occurs at the limit of symbolization, something that emerges outside language, resisting form. It is impossible to imagine and to integrate into the symbolic order, and therefore, only experienced in traumatic gaps in the symbolic order. It is the primordial libidinal matter, the foundation of subjects being that the subject cannot speak of.

This limit of conceptualization fascinates and disturbs, but the process of naming and capturing it is always on the verge of failure. Judith Butler considers the possibility that attempts to systemize these uncanny phenomena causes more trouble than it solves:

We can agree that there is a limit to conceptualization and to any given formulation of sociality, and that we encounter this limit at various liminal and spectral moments in experience. But why are we then compelled to give a technical name to this limit, 'the Real', and to make a further claim that the subject is constituted by this foreclosure? The use of technical nomenclature opens up more problems than it solves. On the one hand, we are to accept that 'the Real' means nothing other than the constitutive limit of the subject; yet on the other hand, why is it that any effort to refer to the constitutive limit of the subject in ways that do not use that nomenclature are considered a failure to understand its proper operation? (Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000, p. 152)

Butler touches on two important themes regarding the real: experience and subject constitution. The real poses a threat to the supposed and expected coherence of the social solidity: we want our world to stay firm and structured, but we are also frightened that this solidity might start perishing when we least expect. What frightens us in the real is its meaninglessness: it is not something we learn from, something we can avoid by being careful, but something that is so monstrous that it is beyond our articulation, and this makes it even more horrible. The real refuses to be named, it refuses to be assimilated in the symbolic structure: it is the formless goo we fear, lurking behind the thin layer of order and structure routing our existence. Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek explains the real with an example: In the film *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag* the characters are surrounded by a dense, formless fog, an emptiness that through a window resembles what we call "a normal world," but that must be kept on the other side of that window. If the window is opened or breaks the obscure real would leak in and destroy our understanding of the ordered world. (Žižek, 1992, pp. 13–15 & 1999, p. 19)



What is difficult in thinking about art, curating, responsibility, and is that while doing so we need that which we might not yet know: the other, the unknown, the formless. The Real is one of the concepts that have been used to approach the fundamental unknowability of the world. But even if it is about a sublime borderline experience and exploring the limits of representation, is it useful when it comes to visual arts. Like the example of the Jonathan Hoag movie, the formless obscureness of the Real is represented in a visual format. We can hint towards the Real and its existence beyond presence and absence and symbolic order, but we cannot capture it.



Giving a visual form to formlessness: Meme from the internet

When language fails you, you can turn to images. When I was teaching the Finnish language to illiterate people and/or we did not have a common language, I often did a google image search for a word I was trying to explain and, along with assisting words and images, I tried to formulate an idea of the meaning. The Real, however, doesn't really bring up any image results which illustrates its ultimate resistance to symbolization. As there were no "proper" images to illustrate the real, I stole a meme, beautifully representing what cannot be presented, from the internet.

# RELATIONAL AESTHETICS

As art has the potential force for change, it can positively impact the world in a variety of ways. For example, it can increase a general sense of meaningfulness, thereby the quality of life of people. It nurtures new ideas, perspectives, and knowledge. It brings people together. What, then, could go wrong when human relations and social context become the starting point for making art?

Relational aesthetics was coined by curator Nicholas Bourriaud and takes, as both its impetus and material, social relations and encounters. Bourriaud describes relational aesthetics as a movement that brings people together and explores interhuman relationships:

Every artist whose work derives from relational aesthetics has his or her own world of forms, his or her problematic and his or her trajectory: there are no stylistic, thematic or iconographic links between them. What they do have in common is much more determinant, namely the fact that they operate with the same practical and theoretical horizon: the sphere of interhuman relationships. Their works bring into play modes of social exchange, interaction with the viewer inside the aesthetic experience he or she is offered, and processes of communication in their concrete dimensions as tools that can to be used to bring together individuals and human groups. (Bourriaud, 2006, pp. 164–165)

Instead of focusing on individual visions or mastery, in relational aesthetics, artworks observe and create social spaces, environments, and relations; instead of objects, it produced situations and encounters; instead of everlasting pieces, it produced durational events. Sansi presents this methodology: “Rather than showing works that discuss identity politics, they enact specific social events

and situations; from art practices that talked about stuff to people, to art that actually does stuff together with other people.” (Sansi, 2015, p. 9) The term ‘laboratory’ in the context of art can be related to relational aesthetics, as the social relations and structures were observed under a magnifying glass. But as relational aesthetics was borrowing more than just the idea of a laboratory from scientific discourse, it perhaps neglected to consider scientific ethics as a guide for practice. Relational aesthetics highlighted the interpersonal and relational aspects of art: in particular art’s capacity for bringing people together, how art can create places for encounters in order to research social conditions. Many characteristic present in contemporary art practices can be traced to relational aesthetics. Nonetheless, some of the methods and premises have, for good reason, been questioned and challenged. If an artist wants to explore capitalism and question the “dirty money”, is it justified to hire ten low-income Cuban men to masturbate, or 6 men to be tattooed, like in *250cm Line Tattooed on 6 Paid People*, with minimal money, as Santiago Sierra<sup>64</sup> did? Or to explore eating disorders by having skinny models posing in a museum space dressed in high heels and tiny bikinis, as Vanessa Beecroft has done? Of course, this is also a way to explore and present not only how capitalism and society function but how the art world functions: what is accepted and what is not, how far can the ethics be stretched?

These works and works like them also point out how we may feel uncomfortable facing these gestures in art context but are able to bypass similar act and politics in the everyday environment. They also prove how art is expected to be superior to exploitation culture. But when the public, interaction, and social relations are taken as a starting point for projects, it can, no matter the good intentions, turn into exploitation, especially when become the material for the project. Especially when these works are institutionalized and brought into museums and galleries, some of these gestures become disturbing. Instead of dismantling inequalities, inequality permits and enables these works. What does it mean to buy a silver gelatin print representing an exploited masturbating male? Does the end justify the means, and what, in these cases, is the end? Are these works critical and political, or are they aestheticizing racialized poverty and gendered body dysmorphia?

64 Sierra’s work has also been referred to as “neoliberal aesthetics” exploring finance capitalism.

Also, instead of being open and inclusive, many of the projects can be considered exclusive and alienated from the so-called reality they are meant to be observing. Neither were they always aiming to widen our understanding of interrelations. Taking these facts into account, it is no surprise that after relational aesthetics, so focused on interhuman relationships and people, the focus attention was turned to interspecies relations. Instead of relational aesthetics, I'd like to focus on how art, as well as our being, is always relational, always happening in an entangled network of things and beings.



Kalle, Emma & Felix Gonzales-Torres

Pictured above is Felix Gonzales-Torres poster from the 52nd Venice Biennial (2007) along with my friends Emma and Kalle, who are about to sell it after I dumped all kinds of weird things with them to take care of when I moved to Pori to do my MA. Relational art, or aesthetics, is about studying and creating relations. Here, the material object has evolved into a shared narrative the moment I took it from the exhibition. It had already travelled with me from Venice to Helsinki, creating and maintaining relations. It also explores these relations by testing the tolerance and strength of a relationship and how one can occupy the space of the other. It functions through its materiality and embodied nature.

In the 16th Istanbul Biennial Curator's statement Nicolas Bourriaud writes:

When I think about the purpose of art in today's world, a comment by the anthropologist Tim Ingold comes to my mind: 'Anthropology is philosophy with the people in.' Art, which also includes the beholder, could be described as an anthropology embracing alternative or pop-up communities, even one-person tribes. And when it comes to the past, it is an archaeology of all the 'vanquished' or alternative versions of History, to use Walter Benjamin's words. (Bourriaud, 2019)

I do not believe in one-person tribes. I believe communities necessitate dialogue. Art as an anthropology embraces communities. Art creates communities, keeps them together, documents and studies them, often in a very material and concrete way.

# RESILIENT SPECIES; WORKING WITH THE NONHUMAN

“By hugging. We grow by hugging trees. And perhaps behind that is the idea that the trees hug us.” (Gustafsson and Haapoja, 2020, p. 43)

Despite the criticism, relational aesthetics did orient the art world towards ethical questions. Even if it wasn't itself prepared to answer all of them, the much needed discussion has continued and developed in directions that accommodate more than human relations. The developing field of post-humanism has considered the non-human since the late 20th century. The project of deconstructing the established nature-culture dichotomy and questioning human non-human borders is rooted in the critique of Rationalism and the Enlightenment and is part of the process of reconsidering the human at the center of everything, a structure which has led to the abuse of other species, and ultimately, to the ongoing environmental crisis and sixth mass extinction. The post-humanist approach is, instead of focused on control, categorization, and the instrumentality of nature, learning to recognize the subjectivities of the non-human world, which itself is imbricated with the human.

That is to say that nonhuman actors exist with and within us, but the language we conventionally use for communication does not reflect this imbrication. Even if some animals are good at learning words, it cannot be said to be the language of their choice. And without a shared language the non-human remains largely unknown to us. This learning process of how to live and work with the non-human, one we cannot fully understand and control, contains an unknown element existing in the shared world between, and is related to the concept of *unheimlich*. Historically, science fiction and horror literature and

movies have dealt with non-human representations. As an uncanny project of deconstruction, I taken great interest in it. There is much we, as humans, share with the non-human, from pain to joy to the world we live in, and we do not need language but compassion to be able to relate to other beings. Expanding our conception of knowledge as sensuous could take us a step closer to relating to the other. However, historically, it has been easier for humans to close their eyes to the suffering of the other in order to utilize them. At times, it is as if this tradition continues in the post-humanist artworks that accidentally end up exploiting already exploited oppressed and precarious bodies.

Along with Anni Venäläinen, we did two projects together with cockroaches: *Sitkeä laji: Ajattelen enemmän kuin pystyn* (*Resilient Species. I Am Thinking More Than I Am Capable Of*) (Jensen and Venäläinen, 2012) in Porin Juhlaviikot and *Sitkeä laji (Resilient Species)* in Kallio Kunsthalle (Jensen and Venäläinen, 2013). The installations were intended to be comfortable, and maybe even enjoyable for the cockroaches that were bought from an animal store where they are bred to be food for other animals. But, obviously, we can't know what cockroaches enjoy. I suppose they enjoy what most of us do: safety, food, freshwater. Still, the central question becomes, is it possible to try to study a creature without playing god, projecting one's own thoughts, ideas, and hopes on the animal we cannot really know? Is it possible to do this without simultaneously consciously or unconsciously trying to control it?

The artworks comprised of installations in glass cubes, vitrines, and aquariums, inhabited by cockroaches. In Porin juhaviikot the project was more about the uncanny and abject nature of the animal itself: cockroaches are considered disgusting and dirty, off-putting yet resilient and persistent animals. They are believed to eat infants' fingernails at night, make people sick, and cause allergies. In addition, they are considered "ugly" and therefore repulsive. But they have also walked the earth since dinosaurs, they can survive without their head for weeks, and even if, against the common conception, they cannot survive a nuclear blast, they can withstand ten times more radiation than a person. And, if they lose a leg, they can grow it back.

As a concept and as a living creature, the cockroach opens questions in multiple different directions of interest: they materialize things like the other and otherness, abject, order, disorder, pests, ethics, strangeness, myths, inhabiting the world with others, living-with, queerness, nature, control and surviv-



ing. There were so many questions that the subtitle of the first event was *I think more than I am capable of* – as an animal the cockroach reaches the limits of our understanding of being, and our capacity to think of them started to feel limited.

The project was also about ethics. Post-humanistic thinking has produced multiple artworks that try to empathize with an animal by closely, and often intrusively, observing an animal body. In the end, we cannot think of the animal without coming back to the question “can they suffer?”, even if there is so much more than suffering in this world we both bodily occupy. The problem seems to be that we want to give a voice to the animal: a voice that speaks, and to be understood it needs to be the voice that speaks a language we understand. To confront the other as the other, to feel, touch and see the other is not an easy task.

Failing in this process is easy. In 2018 Ihme Festival presented a film by Henrik Håkansson titled *The Beetle* (Håkansson, 2018). It was a beautifully made film but an ethically revolting work. It explored the life of an endangered *Hylocharis cruentatus*. It would have been enough to present their habitat in order for the spectator to be able to identify with the poor little bug, but instead, the extremely close-up shots of the animal in a Petri-cup meant the viewer was unable to identify with the animal. All the while, the creature was suffering. It was almost as if the artist was enjoying the clarity of the panic and pain through the close-up shoots. Examples of these kinds of approaches are endless: bringing animals to museums and galleries, presenting them inside out, living and dying. Perhaps this does allow us to understand animals a bit better, but they do not allow us to encounter the animal as singular beings. If we want to point out the exploitive nature of our relationship to animals, then why not bring up the exploiters instead of the exploited? The second part of the work in Kallio Kunsthalle was about the ethics of working with living animals and about the tradition of humanizing animals we are in closer contact with.

## A. COCKROACHES

When we started the cockroach project, our focus was not explicitly directed at post-humanism and animal studies. Only later did I realize how the project ran to many other projects researching human-animal relationships, the animal as the other and an object of study. In our project, we did not try to give a voice

to the cockroaches, neither were we trying to interpret their feelings, which I often find most disturbing about post-humanist art. The animal is the other in a sense that we do not share the same language – it cannot speak and we cannot put words into its mouth. We should not. We specifically wanted to explore otherness but also our emotions and naturalized fears and anticipation. We cannot be the translators for animal feelings and beings, but we can give them the possibility to be seen, and to be seen differently than what is the habit. Art can empathize: we share the phenomena of bodily existence in the same world with other beings. It is a lot harder to hate cockroaches after you see the tiny footsteps they leave on the sand, or after witnessing them enjoy a fresh vegetable meal.

Even if in the post-humanist and new materialist context, it has become a common to “collaborate” with non-human entities I would like to question it. I do appreciate the attempt to deploy a non-hierarchical approach in order to understand the nonhuman at a deeper level, but I also find it questionable. Can one call it “collaboration” if the other is involved involuntarily? It does not mean that the other, non-human, is merely material to the work, but is it collaborating if it is primarily the artist is researching, observing, creating frameworks, deciding the duration and location and setting all the conditions?

In her thesis, Elina Suoyrjö refers to artists working with nonhuman entities, describing the collaboration as “Collaborating equals here above all being-with, becoming-with, and getting-in-touch-with. Further, the collaboration is not only based on horizontal approaches, but it is also an ethical point of departure.” (Suoyrjö, 2019, p. 19) If an ethical starting point and being-with are the conditions for collaboration, one might say that our work with cockroaches was a way of collaborating with them, but my understanding of collaboration means that there is mutual understanding, maybe even a mutual goal, for the project. I cannot be sure that the cockroaches did share the same ideas and goals for the project as we did.

A bit surprisingly, our project turned out to be about gender and the fear of reproduction too. Kallio Kunsthalle is located on the ground floor of an apartment building and the exhibition was discussed with them beforehand. As they were not too excited about bringing cockroaches into the building, even if they were a species that cannot fly so they were not able to escape their installation, we only got the permission to do the exhibition if we did not bring any female

cockroaches to the space. So, our exhibition become an all-male cockroach show with no risk of unwanted procreation.

In the exhibition, the (male) cockroaches were divided into two different spaces with two different atmospheres. One space was about beauty and hedonism and included macarons, gold, flowers, and pearls, while the other space was about asceticism and well-being: superfoods served in a clean and calm interior with white sand and freshwater. The outcome was a combination of research done on ideal cockroach diets, environments and on popular ideas for a luxurious holiday or a weekend getaway. For the roaches, the project was the getaway of their lives: they are bred to feed other animals like tarantulas and reptiles, waiting in tiny plastic boxes in animal shops. Though we did not expect them to enjoy this getaway, it also meant a radical change in their daily routines and being separated from their colonies. As cockroaches are social animals and their behavior is tied to collective decision making (from daily rhythm to adapting to a new environment), this must-have caused them a great deal of stress.

Considering this, the project was also a study in hospitality and the other. I believe even more strongly after these projects and witnessing many others done in “collaboration” with animals, that instead of “trying to give them a voice”, it is already a step forward to make the animal seen as such. Not as a tool, not as a pet, not as a profit-making entity, not as a pest, but as a being. Recognition and constructing subjectivity is not only a human feature but by seeing and recognizing animals, we can also see them as individuals, and hopefully start respecting their ways of being and communicating, without always aiming to reduce it to human language.

## **B. WATER BEAR**

After cockroaches, Porin kulttuurisäätiö wanted to research more thoroughly the nonhuman, along with survival issues and so, we started exploring the water bear, an animal that had grown to mythical heights in our minds and practice.

Water bear, or a tardigrade or moss piglet (!), is a perfect example of living and surviving together, of becoming, of coping. They can withstand extreme pressure, dehydration and even radiation. Still, we do not know so much about them. Actually, when we started looking for them, even though we knew they are commonly occurring, we found it extremely difficult to find any. It might

have been that we, as artists and humanists, were bad scientists and biologists, but it took us hours staring through the microscope. I started to feel convinced that the existence of the water bear was just a myth – that they were mythical creatures, surviving no matter what comes their way. Even today, reading the news of water bears being sent to space, I cannot be 100% sure that the spaceship actually does have any passengers. And I would be relieved if they didn't – do we have the right to send them to space? More than the poor Laika? Should we not be better by now? What is the relevance of sending them to space?

In 2013 Porin kulttuurisäätiö spent time in Reposaari in a former environmental center trying to find water bears.

Collecting soil, water, earth, material when not being able to find tardigrade from Reposaari became important aspect of the project. To document and archive the site as a habitat of shared living. The process guided us to think about being, working, living and learning. And, eventually, faking, imitating, sympathising: as we started to be afraid that we were not going to find the animal of our research, the creature we had spent so much time thinking about, we decided to become that creature, to create one according to our knowledge and imagination. What would tardigrade be like, how would they cope in our lived, embodied environment? Would they feel lonely having a beer in the local pub, would they relate to beings like them? Our project became a project of becoming: becoming the resilient slow walkers we had dreamed of. (Porin kulttuurisäätiö *et al.*, 2013)

By becoming-tardigrade we wanted to explore the animal itself as well as the philosophical dimensions and the belief-system around it. The project took various forms and was later presented in Experimental Event and in Porin Juhlaviikot. It was also included in the Pori Biennale 2020. During different periods of time, the project has been explored in different lights. Instead of only being about the human-non-human it is also about the pace of life and coping mechanisms. What fascinated us was the slowness, the name “tardigrada” means “slow steppers”, and the name of our project in Porin juhlaviikot which was, “Slow in pace or movement”. We wanted to give space and time to and resist the constant hurry and rush of productivity, the demand to produce

and create. In 2020, coming back to the project in the context of the biennial, we were surprised how accurate it felt during the global pandemic. When we initiated the project and asked the question, "what could we learn from the water bear?" we could not imagine this situation where we were practically hibernating, alienated from life as it once was:

When there is no water, tardigrades simply dry up and start to hibernate until it gets hydrated again. What could we learn from these coping mechanisms and could we become more like them? It seems that since the beginning this has been the core question in our research. What would it mean to become a tardigrade, or to identify as one? Would this help us when the apocalypse nears? Would this help us now, when we are dried and curled up, alienated? Is Tardigrada the same after hibernating for ten years? Are we the same after this? (Porin kulttuurisäättö *et al.*, 2013)



*Sitkeä laji: Ajattelen enemmän kuin pystyn (Resilient Species. I Am Thinking More Than I Am Capable Of), 2012. Detail.*

The image above is a detail from a piece *Sitkeä laji: Ajattelen enemmän kuin pystyn (Resilient Species. I Am Thinking More Than I Am Capable Of)* (Jensen and Venäläinen, 2012) in Porin Juhlaviikot. You can see the possibly confused cockroaches in the front right corner, not knowing where they are, why, where is their horde and what are they supposed to do with all the funny food? But, of course, we do not know what is going on in their heads. Cockroaches are bred and stored in small boxes in pet shops and their destiny is to be fed to larger animals. At the same time, they are almost mythical creatures when it comes to their survival skills, but they are also farmed for nutrition.

There is no justifying using animals for art. But there is no justifying using them for food, or companionship, either. Accepting the fact that being is co-existent is about admitting to this and then respecting this condition of relationality. There is no democracy when one works with animals who cannot accept or deny the invitation of being part of such a project but it can germinate the idea of democratic behavior, or at least of the shared nature of our being. If relational art was about creating an understanding of how the social fabric is relational, post-humanism expands this notion towards the relations with the non-human.

# RHIZOME; MYCELIUM

The word rhizome comes from the Ancient Greek *rhízōma* “mass of roots” and is a modified subterranean plant stem which develops from axillary buds and grows horizontally. This horizontal growth structure has made it a powerful political and theoretical conception and source of inspiration. As a philosophical concept, it has been developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to describe multiplicities and non-hierarchical openings. Rhizomatic thinking is a way of renewing how we think of structures, and as Rosi Braidotti states, in-between spaces and practices: “This is where the intensive or rhizomic approach is an inspiration: I would like to return the activity of thinking to its embodied emotional, memory-driven and imagination-based structures.” (Braidotti, 2002, p. 115)

Fungus and mushrooms are exemplary of rootedness in interspecies relations and in the environment. The rhizome has become a settled metaphor for practices that are based on interconnections, that admit to the need for others, a condition of relationality that is often invisible to the outside world, the world above the surface. Perhaps, an even more appropriate term is *mycorrhiza*: “The term ‘mycorrhiza’ is assembled from Greek words for ‘fungus’ and ‘root’; fungi and plant roots become intimately entangled in mycorrhizal relations. Neither the fungus nor the plant can flourish without the activity of the other.” (Lowenhaupt Tsing, 2015 p.138) Trees communicate through the mycorrhiza and are connected to each other through it. Rhizome is also part of the practice of larger trees feeding the smaller ones, and it helps all trees in utilizing nutrition from the soil. The invisible ecosystem underground is, in fact, what makes all the visible parts of forest flourish: without the rhizome and the mycorrhiza the trees would die. (Jokiranta *et al.*, 2019 p.235–237) The rhizomic structure is also embedded in the premises of posthuman knowledge production:

The premises of posthuman knowledge production emerge as a creative interweaving of *zoe/geo/techno* perspectives. They are deeply rhizomic in structure and movement and tend to sound unexpectedly weird. All of them engage critically with the overcoding flows of advanced capitalism and with the neo-liberal economic exploitation of all living matter. (Braidotti, 2019, p. 98)

The flourishing activity of the other is a starting point I want to respect. The concept of the rhizome, or mycorrhiza, is a way of paying respect to the others I am always connected to, whom I would be nothing without, but also a way of illustrating, through this very grounded and material example, the causality of the world. If my practice were a fungus, its surface existence would come to depend on those it exists with. This fungus comes into being under the influence of the local ecosystem, plants, and animals near to it, and it is taking shape in this context. When its roots grow further, other fungi will be influenced by their surroundings. They are replicas of the first one. Neither can I have control over what may and will sprout from my projects. Connections, new ideas and trajectories will occur, but I cannot predict when, where, or what they will be.

## A. THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS

The film *The Girl with All the Gifts* (McCarthy and Carey, 2016) could be handled in many of the previous chapters as it concerns issues of nostalgia, intersectional feminism, being-with, de-colonialization, caring and relationality. What has been characteristic of the past decade is questioning one's privileges, not only the privileges of white middle-aged males, but the intersecting power relations where someone is always in more privileged position than the other. Traditionally, and persisting into the present, being a white male, especially an educated white middle-aged male, is the most privileged position in the world, even to a degree that many have seen it is a getaway-card, a position that justifies all your acts. As this position and what it justifies has been questioned, has there been a counter-strike when white male feels threatened. There is a whole movement from the alt-right to incels, of angry white male opposing liberal anti-discrimination policies, that for them is often embodied by female and POC figures. The target of these groups has often been middle-aged women, maybe working



in politics or media or aimed at teenagers like, for example, the environmental activist Greta Thunberg, and those fighting for a future not be dominated by this ruling class. This fear and hate for a potentially powerful teenage girl or non-binary person, has been the theme of many horror novels and films from *Carrie* (De Palma and King, 1976) to *Let the Right One In* (Alfredson and Lindqvist, 2008). The film *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2016) explores the horror genre within the framework of contemporary discourse, and, combining some of my favorite topics: the uncanny, undead, rhizome, and equality.

*The Girl with All the Gifts* asks pertinent questions often associated with its genre – are zombies sentient, thinking beings or not? It asks this question in a typical post-apocalyptic setting, but from an unusual angle. Instead of a virus that escaped from a laboratory or a contagious animal bite, the cause of the state is a fungus. The fungus is not sci-fiction but rather, is an existing species of fungus. *Ophiocordyceps* is a fungal parasite that takes over its host and manipulates its behavior. In nature, it is usually insects, flies, crickets, and ants, but in the film, it is humans. The film questions the hierarchical position of humans and their capacity to cope with the unknown. Why should some lives be valued more than others? The central character is a talented girl called Melanie who is locked in an institute for infected children. Children are studied and handled by soldiers, who treat them like dangerous animals. Not coincidentally, at the beginning of the film, the children are read a story, Prometheus and Epimetheus, Prometheus being the almighty creator of superior humankind, while his brother Epimetheus has been, often forgotten, but also acknowledged for bringing knowledge and interdependency to the world, dependency on each other described phenomenologically in terms of sharing, caring, meeting and dwelling and loving.

The children in the film are presented as a threat. Instead of accepting them as “real” children, at least the lead scientist considers them as fungus, or that the fungus, just like parasites do, does the thinking for the host.

Unlike many other zombie films, *The Girl with All the Gifts* is almost calm. Infected people mostly move slowly or stand still, almost as if they were rooted to the ground, swaying a little bit, often in large groups. In addition, nature is verdant and takes over the human world; the decay, the grass, the green are all seen by a being, Melanie, who has been kept in basement all their life. And, when enough of the infected come together, they turn into a forest. The second

generation, newborns like Melanie, the girl with all the gifts, are infected, but also capable of interacting with the world and behaving like humans. Except that there is a fungus surrounding their brain, and “they are unlike anything that has ever existed” (*The Girl With All the Gifts*, 2016) – when, in fact, they are similar to infected insects. In the film, not only the infected population question their existence, but also humans, who talk about responsibility. One of them asks: responsible to who? Is it only among chaos that the responsibilities for others are questioned, or something we should ask ourselves more often. When I argue that art has responsibilities, who are we responsible to when we make it?

At the end of the film, Melanie burns the trees with spore colonies that will spread and make all humans into hungries/fungus. When the infected sergeant tells her that this is the end and it’s all over, her reply is that everything is going to be alright and that it is not over, it is just “not yours anymore”. (*The Girl With All the Gifts*, 2016)



Suppilovahvero mushrooms, 2019

Fungi are everywhere but they are easy to miss. They are inside you and around you. They sustain you and all that you depend on. As you read these words, fungi are changing the way life happens, as they have done for more than a billion years. (Sheldrake, 2020, p. 3)

How amazing it is that in a world where we try to organize and categorize everything, mushrooms live around us, practically everywhere, and yet, we cannot classify them neatly. They are not animals, neither are they plants. We need them and yet they escape our mandatory classification. They are the uncanny and unknown response to our faith that there is something greater than us, something we cannot see but that guides and directs and will be the cure for the climate crisis. This is also why they represent our biggest fears. Fungi are everywhere, even if we do not see them or know them, they are the stranger in us and around us that we can't control or predict.

The mycelium, the structural metaphor of a rhizome, connects everything, sends electrical waves of activity along like nerve cells, but unlike animal nerve cells, they create multi-species connections, plants and animals rely on fungi for nutrition, and we depend on them for chemicals like penicillin. (Sheldrake, 2020, pp. 7–10) I believe a curator should be like the mycelium.

# RESEARCH-BASED ART AND RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICE

Artistic research stands and falls not on its connection to art but to aesthetics. The attribute of art is not essential to artistic research but rather the term aisthesis, sensual knowledge. (Henke *et al.*, 2020, p. 18)

Artistic research begins with necessity. This can be controversial in the context of productive societal functions. Unlike, for example, profit-making or technological innovations, artistic research arises from a curiosity to study, to pry, to understand the world anew. The process and outcome can seem irrational, and this is partly the beauty of it. There exists, within the artistic research process, the desire to find new forms and materials, or in activist, relational and context-based art, an urge to explore new ways of commenting and changing the order of things. I understand art as a way of researching, whether studying the object of research or the method and material itself. I do not believe it is possible to find an artist who is not curious about how their medium functions and what happens in the process of using it. And even if art were understood as mere representation, is the object represented not studied?

In his paper “Art, Science and the Meaning of Research” (2018) anthropologist Tim Ingold writes about the confused reception of the turn in artistic practice today. An increasing number of artists, for different reasons, present what they are doing (their artistic process and its outcomes) as research. According to Ingold, this framing of the artistic process as research puzzles public,

who wonder if artists are pretending to behave like scientists and what are they trying to find out, what kinds of knowledge can they contribute? Ingold turns these expectations upside down, arguing that research is fundamentally a practice of art. Ingold states that, “Research is not a technical operation, a particular thing you do in life, for so many hours each day. It is rather a way of living curiously – that is, with care and attention. And as such, it pervades everything you do.” (Ingold, 2018, pp. 1–4)

When I think about our projects as platforms and laboratories, I do not only mean that they become places for research and different outcomes to emerge, but also how they are places of paradox. A certain amount of control over a project exists, but simultaneously, artists’ projects take unexpected turns and they have their own studies and questions. These platforms and laboratories are places where one practice and one research question can create new branches of research, The entirety and part of the research result is what all these things happening under one given research question produce: the artworks created and how they are received and interpreted by the spectators. Later these results can be analyzed textually or in following projects and artistic practices.

*The Bloody Summer Exhibition* (2016) and the *Pori World Expo* (2015) were good examples of this. Beforehand, the artists were provided with the question we were exploring. In the *Pori World Expo* it was the becoming worlds, and the *Bloody Summer Exhibition* it was the Finnish summer, its conventional and nostalgic representations, and the tradition of the summer exhibition. We discussed the themes with the artists, shared our ideas and thoughts. Each artist approached the question from their own perspective, interests, and mediums. At times, the connections to the original theme was loose, at times it was strong. At times, the theme was interpreted in a way one would not have thought possible and at times, the perspective on the theme was smart, unique and astonishing.

In *the Bloody Summer Exhibition*, artist Anna-Sofia Sysser approached the theme of summer by considering the relation between tourism and exotism, and asked local people to lend her materials, objects, decorations and clothes that they considered tropical. The work, *Tropical Pori*, created its own alternative universe on the second floor of the old generator room in the space, an artificial paradise with “tropical” lights, sounds and symbols in the middle of the chilly

and grey Finnish summer. The work in the context of the exhibition, took as its starting point the Finnish summer and expectations about holidays and leisure, the idea of escape from the everyday, but it was also research about the artifice nature dichotomy. In addition, it examined how the tropical aesthetic is a brand with commercial value, how it is invading our homes and lives, and how the exotism we so easily locate to the faraway past, actually is well and living today. While retaining its critical voice, the work was also an immersive experience, a place where the visitor could spend time, relax, and enjoy the Finnish summer in a tropical atmosphere.

Another example of site-specific research approach was the *Pori Biennial 2020 – Not to Sing Like the City Bird Sings* which explored the island of Reposaari by opening up the archive of works realized there during the past years. The archive of works consists of a multiplicity of new research questions from ballast plants to architecture and from religious practices to water bears, from inner experiences to outer experiences.

In research-based projects, the research question is in a very concrete way a *question* – a question we propose to the artist, and the outcome is their correspondence. This correspondence is what, according to Tim Ingold, research is about. He proposes that research as an act of correspondence is all about care and love:

Research, then, becomes a practice of correspondence. It is through corresponding with things that we care for them: it is a labour of love, giving back what we owe to the world for our own existence as beings within it. Research as correspondence, in this sense, is not just what we do but what we undergo. It is a form of experience. For in experience, things are with us in our thoughts, dreams and our imaginings, and we with them. (Ingold, 2018, p. 6)



Eliisa Suvanto searching for tardigrades

This photograph above (by Niilo Rinne) captures Eliisa Suvanto searching for water bears in Reposaaari. It is an obvious example of “research-based art” already because of the setting: the laboratory environment and the tools that refer to science, facts and knowledge production. Bio art often comes to mind when research-based art is mentioned: working with ticks and plants, tracking plant processes and communicating them to the public in a different form than natural sciences do.

However, the orientation may be present, and I argue that it always is in any art form or genre. Art is research, it is studying your theme or your medium, or the society around you, or art history. In addition, research-based art is its own genre with its own motivations, forms and communications. It is not the same thing as art-based research, which produces results by using artistic methods. Research-based art produces art (or something like art or happenings in the field of art) and starts from a research question or a research-oriented motivation, in opposition to having an already specific form or medium in mind. Which mediums and forms are used differs depending on the needs of the result. Take for example the water bear project. After reading extensively about water bears and arriving at dead ends with the results, we wanted to find them ourselves. We speculated as to their existence and wondered what we, as humans, could learn from them. We had the initial setting established, the location, the laboratory, the theoretical framework we were going to use, and the water bear, we believed. Except that we did not find a single one. This strengthened the hypothesis that we had already started to develop, which was that the water bear is nothing but speculation. We decided to take this further. The research turned into interventions, performances, a video and a lecture. We needed to trust our intuition and curiosity along with the knowledge we have acquired about the topic. We let intuition and acquired knowledge guide us.



# SEMIOTIC/ SYMBOLIC

"You will achieve nothing by shooting me, Daughter. This will be difficult for you but I'm far more than what you perceive to be your Mother...This shell is no more my body than those droids outside. Or the machines preparing the earth for our family."

"It's all you"

"A single consciousness governing numerous vessels."

(Sputore, 2019)

Julia Kristeva explores the categories of the semiotic and the symbolic. The symbolic refers to the structured and organized. The semiotic refers to the pre-lingual, unorganized, and unstructured. The semiotic and symbolic are related to the concepts of the imaginary and the symbolic, the symbolic including the linguistic dimension and being the one organizing the imaginary, the symbolic is the domain of culture, the real. The imaginary and the semiotic go beyond and precede it. Kristeva brings a gender perspective to this structure. She considers the symbolic as a domain of language, law, and structure and associates it with the masculine. The is semiotic female, pre-oedipal, pre-mirror stage. It denotes the emotional field. The symbolic is shared cultural meaning and the social system responsible for the construction of a speaking, lingual subject: the symbolic order is where the subject comes from the semiotic non-being into social existence under the symbolic law.

*I Am Mother* is an Australian science fiction film about a girl growing up in a post-apocalyptic bunker, raised by a robot called Mother. The robot teaches its

offspring everything she considers needed from ethics to medicine, but as the daughter is the only human on earth, or so she believes, something is lacking. In psychoanalytic terms, the film could be interpreted as an aborted transition from the semiotic to the symbolic, starting from the lack of naming process: the girl is called "daughter". Even if they are using symbolic language and the Mother's robot face does imitate simple impressions as symbols of emotions the human experience, the heterogeneous element of semiotic in the symbolic order lacks. In the event, the whole world given to the Daughter is the mother, a semiotic chaos where all the threats come from the inside. However, as the passing from semiotic to symbolic order is needed in a process of formulating subjectivity, the Daughter seeks for other human contacts and steps out of the semiotic body of the mother, to the real and towards the shared cultural meaning.

Art, especially considering it in the context of poetic language and *Écriture féminine*, *women's writing*, resists the masculine symbolic order and organization. It can be understood as an entity happening in between the safe and secured, and the dangerous, reckless, between semiotic and symbolic. Or maybe even as the nourishing space of *chora*. The semiotic and symbolic cannot be separated, the same way heterogeneous and homogeneous need each other to work and to be understood (if they can be understood), and when we think of art as a process with semiotic and symbolic elements these elements are not detachable. Like the semiotic is both logically and chronologically prior to the symbolic order, in art the process can be seen as a semiotic phase, a time of intuitive bodily movement towards something that does not yet have a name or form. The outcome, the text, or the event, exhibition, or artwork is then what emerges into the symbolic order and is interpreted in the articulated field. But, as semiotic and symbolic are attached to each other, also in the experience of art there remains this experiential element of excess, the embodied emotional field that is outside the realms of symbolic structure: an experience that happens in the in-between spaces between the subject and the object, symbolic and semiotic, inside and outside.

Art works with the symbolic – it is often considered to be most of all about all kinds of symbols and being a symbol itself – but it can touch the semiotic, the unstructured emotional field beyond language. In 2015 Venice Biennial the Tuvalu Pavillion, *Crossing the Tide*, was about climate crisis, “the plea of small island nations facing the effects of global climate change.” It was a strong

symbol for real problems, but it was also something else: “Crossing the tide in the pavilion over slightly submerged food bridges, visitors find themselves in an imaginary space – a dreamscape, but one that echoes a stark reality.” (*All the World’s Futures. la Biennale di Venezia 56th International Art Exhibition. Short Guide.*, 2015, p. 304) At a symbolic level, the work explores the threat of rising sea level and ultimately the island nation of Tuvalu disappearing. On the semi-otic level it embraces visitors with warm humidity, light that seeps through the decorative windows of the old building, and surreal turquoise water. Wrapped in the gentle mist and almost material colors and smells the visitors it hard to remember that there was the whole biennial circle going on around the work, or that it even was an artwork. The atmospheric state created by the Taiwanese artist Vincent JF Huang was like a safe haven between (slightly wet) harmony and catastrophe, between semiotic and symbolic.

when u dont really know what ur  
feeling but there's alot of it there



Demonstrate your feelings, even when you are not 100% what they are

Here I present an alternative reading of the film *I Am Mother*. Inside the closed capsule everything is in order: items are labeled and archived, they have names and places. The daughter grows up, is educated, learns both the skills and behaviour associated with propriety. She steps into the symbolic order, controlled by Mother, a representation of the patriarchal system. The daughter starts to question this, she believes there is more behind the seeming order of her and Mother's reality: the real, or semiotic, a place with no structural rules. The daughter escapes and outside the wildness of nature is both fascinating and frightening. There are no rules but this freedom cannot be shared with anyone. The discursive symbolic is lost and the pre-linguistic semiotic turns out to be a place where one can nest, but also a place where the developed identity based on symbolic language and dialogue no longer exists as such. The semiotic is resistance, but it is also chaos.

The laws of language are created by men. To resist this phallogentric order, the concept of *Écriture féminine*, or "women's writing" was proposed and utilized by feminist thinkers such as Hélène Cixous, who coined the term, in addition to Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, among others. Through poetic writing, that which has no words in structured male language can be expressed. That which is outside of structured understanding, such as otherness, the female body, the abject and emotions, more readily finds expression. Of course, it is impossible to completely step outside of the structured sphere of language. And if we share language, we share some kind of understanding of the world. Rather, it is about negotiation. How do we negotiate the nature of shared language? What I am doing in this dissertation is negotiating: negotiating with tradition, academic writing, phallic writing, trying to make space for other kinds of voices. Maybe we could try to take the signs we do not immediately understand, or understand only intuitively, more seriously? Try to hear what the baby in the picture, speaking poetic language just fine, wants to say.

# STRUCTURES

The concept of “structure” is one I use frequently and which risks becoming empty through overuse. It is therefore important for me to qualify the manner in which I use this term throughout this dissertation. I repeatedly refer to structures as that which constructs us and that which needs to be reconstructed. The notion of “structure” informs the research I do and artistic projects I am involved with. The structure has become a self-explanatory foregone conclusion, but it as slippery as soap. According to the dictionary, the structure is 1) the arrangement of and relations between the parts or elements of something complex 2) a building or other object constructed from several parts (Oxford Languages, 2022b). The notion of “structures” is large and all-encompassing, so much so that it quickly becomes too unwieldy to explore. Still, I refer to them multiple times a day. These two conceptualizations can help to approach the multitude of meanings embedded in this seemingly innocent noun. Structures refer to how reality is organized, understood, and framed. Structuralism, a methodology developed in the early 1900s has been applied in different fields from anthropology to sociology to literary criticism, is a mode implying that culture and human life are only understood through their interrelations and their relationship to the broader system. Many of the theorists referred to in this thesis can be considered post-structuralist, even if they sometimes struggled with the label.

When I state that I study or deconstruct structures, it usually is the social structure that is in question: the arrangements, organizations, relations, and institutions in our social realities. These structures have spatial and durational dimensions, and they shape individuals and individual relations are shaped by them. As a concept, social structures is a way of classifying, comparing, and correlating human beings in social reality, but they are also concrete arrangements that have an impact in our everyday world.

Different spaces and places manifest different structures and structural differences and awake different feelings. Some make us feel safe, others happy, and some just feel wrong in an inexplicable way. The uncanny feeling of something not being right is often related to the strange and the eerie, but uncanniness can also be socially produced. The conception of something being

“right” or “wrong” is often collectively produced. This is how a research question about *unheimlich* becomes a question of community too. Hence, community is constituted by subjects. As the singular being is the one who experiences the uncanny, this singular being must be taken into consideration even if it doesn’t really, according to my hypothesis, exist without the community and without the surrounding environment. Communities tend to aim for solid structures, and the presence of the uncanny in everyday life is related to our attempts to cover it up by organizing and structuring. Formless things disturb and scare us and they are hard to share and discuss. We feel that we need to be able to speak about things, as the unspeakable is uncontrollable and therefore, terrifying. The world must be conceptualized and categorized, or otherwise, we find it uncanny.

Structures can be understood as parallel to the symbolic system, and this symbolic system is what constitutes subjects. This does not mean merely symbolically, but also very concretely, as Foucault concludes: “So it is not enough to say that the subject is constituted in a symbolic system. It is not just in the play of symbols that the subject is constituted. It is constituted in real practices – historically analyzable practices.” (Foucault, 2003, p. 123) Art is not only a means to explore these systems. At times, it collides with them, especially when exhibited in public places. In museums and galleries, art is an immediately recognizable social practice. However, when it is shown in the context of the everyday, it can cause confusion or even be perceived as a threat. Art often uses public space differently and difference evokes uncomfortable feelings. Art in public space may be viewed contractually, as artist and founder of architecture practice Acconci Studio Vito Acconci has argued (Acconci, 2009, p. 135). Art can highlight the terms of this contract, and perhaps even suggest changing those terms, should they seem unfair or wrong.

The contract is also an important notion within the broader discussion on the nature of structures. Contracts are often misconstrued as natural or fundamental, instead of the result of negotiation and construction. Structures are situated at a compelling intersection of mental and physical, imaginary and real. They are an outcome of how someone has, together with others, imagined and dreamed. But they also define and direct our dreaming. Social structures are often presented as universal to a certain degree, but they are far from equal to all, and it is within this network of power relations that how we perceive and how we are perceived is produced.



New tools, 2018

Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical norm*, which each one of us within our heart knows: 'That is not me.' In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society. (Lorde, 2017, p. 96)



Another term for what Audre Lorde calls “the mythical norm” (Lorde, 2017, p. 96) could be “structures.” We do not see them and they can be hard to trace, but we most certainly feel them and their functions, especially those who are not white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure. We can fight them and we can try to change them but we can never be completely free from them – the presuppositions, beliefs and constructions in our thinking. At the same time, structures are needed to prevent chaos. They organize our being and provide a sense of control. This is exactly the problematic element of structures. Control is unequally distributed and structured so that some are have control while others are the target of control. Structures are hierarchical. Changing them means negotiating them, like negotiating with language, which is also an act of changing structures. Language is related to our thinking and this thinking is related to how we understand knowledge. Like women’s writing, which proposed an alternative way to think about patriarchal language, Minna Salami has suggested an alternative way of thinking about knowledge in her book *Sensuous Knowledge* (2020). She asks why some knowledges are valued more than others, showing how knowledge now valued the most is a patriarchal and exclusive construction (Salami, 2020). When it comes to art discourse, Jennifer Doyle has a similar initiative and examines how art criticism which emphasizes objectivity and an analytical approach has excluded emotions and feelings from art. In fact, emotions and feelings often represent the political and revolutionary aspect of art (Doyle, 2013). We need new knowledges, and new ways to produce and communicate them, because, like Lorde also famously stated, “for master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 2017, p. 91). In the image, I am standing in front of a window stating “MACHINES. SYRINGES. TOOLS” at the *Centennial* exhibition opening. The text was a trace from the past and the late plant shop that used to exist in the space. The piece in the window is by artist Kaino Wennerstrand.

# SUBLIME

Imagine a male wayfarer, standing high on a mountain top, admiring a breathtaking view. There is a sunrise or a sunset, clouds below. Pictured is the greatness of nature in all its power. This is the sublime, most aptly represented by the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. The sublime refers to the beauty of nature, but a beauty so excessive that it evokes horror. The sublime surpasses our understanding, control and the pleasure principle. As an affect, sublime is closer to the *unheimlich* than to the traditional concept of aesthetic pleasure or beauty: beauty is considered calming and comforting while the sublime stimulates and excites. The sublime is related to representation, as a representation it always fails. It is beyond representable but also represents the impossible nature of representation itself.

When I was studying aesthetics, we started writing art critiques and more generally theorizing art. With my friend, classmate, and colleague Terhi Varonen, we developed our own theory of good art: the basic principle in this theory was that all good and impressive art was either very small or very big. Of course, this grand theory of ours was largely a joke, but a serious one. When the scale of an artwork radically changes, it challenges our perception. Large enough things confront our understanding: they seem out of reach and out of control. They are sublime.

The relation between sublime and art is intriguing. Art is much more about the form while the sublime is about formlessness. Art representing sublime experience is a representation of that which is beyond representable. Still, the sublime as a fundamental and even groundbreaking experience is strongly embedded in art that is more than just about beauty, even if it is aesthetic. When the sublime is considered in the context of art, it is often used to refer to artworks representing a sublime experience: the power of nature over human control – the vastness of mountains, storms. But art can also be a source for sublime experiences and a place for exploring these encounters on the border of pleasure and horror. One obvious example of art that engages the sublime

is land art. Land art employs nature itself in order to evoking the sense of sublime. Environmental art plays with the materials of nature around it, like the Adrián Villar-Rojas piece *The Most Beautiful of All Mothers* exhibited at the 2015 Istanbul Biennial, which presented overwhelmingly beautiful but very uncanny mixed-media statues installed in the bright turquoise sea on the island of Büyükada. In the same biennial, Pierre Huyghe “showed” an underwater piece, impossible to see or witness, a theater for “biologically immortal” jellyfish he was hoping to move in and settle into the artwork. The audience was left with the impossible task of imagining the unimaginable: life without an end in the depths of the sea, an attempt not to control, but to approach the uncontrollable. (Christov-Bakargiev, 2015)

The experience of the sublime is necessarily about encountering the other and otherness, and through this, encountering one's limited comprehension and capacity to imagine. As a concept in the context of aesthetics, the sublime is also rooted in otherness by its history, where both its fathers, Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant treated beauty and the sublime as gendered, cultural, and hierarchical categories. The other and strange were understood as a threat to the subject, the male making observations. Therefore, the sublime was invented as a male virtue in defense of the fragile subject. In a contemporary light, these theories are misogynistic and racist but they present how aesthetic discourse and theories are always products of a certain time, culture, and ideology, rather than universal or objective. A subversive reading of Burke's and Kant's theories, however, offers possibilities for understanding the sublime as a shared experience of uncanniness in a world we can never fully control or understand, rather than understanding the sublime as an exclusive category for the white male figure who wanders in the wilderness. The sublime takes us all to the wilderness that is, as Julia Kristeva writes “the other in me” but also everyone and everything around me.

During the pandemic, it became particularly clear that the sublime escapes the everyday. Even the artworks experienced during this period seemed to shrink, turn inwards, become smaller and less powerful because the world around them was shrinking. The sublime requires space, and it requires the possibilities of the unknown. Experiences become “flattened” when they are encountered on a screen, as architect Juhani Pallasmaa writes in the context of design:

Computer imagining tends to flatten our magnificent, multi-sensory, simultaneous and synchronic capacities of imagination by turning the design process into a passive visual manipulation, a retinal journey. The computer creates a distance between the maker and the object, whereas drawing by hand as well as working with models put the designer in a haptic contact with the object, or space. In our imagination, the object is simultaneously held in the hand and inside the head, and the imagined and projected physical image is modelled by our embodied imagination. (Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 14)

I would argue, based on the experiences during the pandemic, that this also concerns experiencing creative processes, not only making them.



Quote pillows of How to Life project, 2019

The sublime as a concept can easily sound outdated and old fashioned but if we try to, at least momentarily, recast Kant and Burke's theorization and instead think about the sublime in terms of experience, the concept of the sublime becomes compelling, especially in relation to the uncanny, but also in relation to curating and my practice.

However, we can still start by thinking about Caspar David Friedrich and the lonely figure on top of a mountain. That figure has struggled to get there, maybe asked themselves if they are ever going to make it to the top. And then the figure makes it to the top and the experience is more than the eyes can see, more than the mind can handle. The sublime is the experience of encountering something too large to comprehend. That is, our being in the world in general, which, to simplify things, makes our being uncanny. Sublime is the moment when the uncanniness of being becomes obvious and we are confronted with our limited capacity to understand it: when we see the amount of space around us, things happening simultaneously, networks of living beings. This vastness of the moment melds the experience of space with the experience of time, and the thought and the moment are like a realization to the lonely figure on top of the mountain. However hard they try they are not going to be able to share this moment so that the experience becomes understandable for others.

The text printed on the pillow in the image above reads “Art can never be as majestic as the internet”. It was part of a *How to Life* project in Turku (Coyotzi Borja and Jensen, 2019a). It could also be that “art can never be as sublime”: the internet, too, like the view from the mountain, is too big to comprehend. We can try to explain it and represent it, we can use it, it can be the topic and the medium in our practice, but we are never able to fully govern it. The internet cannot be curated.

# SUBURB

The suburb, the concrete blocks, supermarkets, everyday flow, is both a perfect example of sublime and simultaneously the complete opposite. The modernist and monumental residential areas are sublime in the sense that they can seem almost surreal, utopian, and dystopian depending on the viewer and the state of the area, unapproachable because of the large scale and strange in their lack of different historical layers. The existing layers often seem to contain different kinds of uncontrollable forces. On the other hand, the quieter neighborhoods with townhouses and duplexes and their middle-class aesthetics could not be further away from the experience of the sublime.

There are different translations to the Finnish word 'lähiö', but nothing completely captures its essence: previously white modernistic concrete blocks now turning all different shades of grey, an old mall in the middle, most of the shops long gone and what is left is a supermarket and dive bars, small forest areas here and there, because the forest is important for Finns, but these small patches of nature are filled with filth, empty bottles, needles, and junkies. However, 'lähiö' does not mean 'ghetto', but it is often inhabited by different residential groups and even if they did not turn out to be these ideal hygienic working-class havens, they are places of belonging, of community, taking care of one's environment and surroundings. Still, most often when one needs to find good sides of these areas is "good transportation" and "not far from the city" most commonly used positive attributes. In this thesis, the phenomenon of suburb is not approached through the extensive, and definitely significant, theoretical research that already exists, but as a lived, experienced, and also imagined space and time.

A suburb is a residential area that is a part of a city or outside of a city, usually characterized by higher-density apartment housing. Even if often mixed-use areas, the image of *lähiö* has very little variety: most of them are built during the same decades, from the same concrete materials, following the same ideology. This is why they are such a perfect example of the uncanny –

they were built to house productive and structured communities, to provide clean and hygienic environments for families, future and present workers who would maintain society. In reality, they became queer combinations of density and emptiness, stark modernistic forms with chaotic and messy spaces between them. I grew up in one of the 1970's concrete suburban areas. Being part of one of the first generations growing up in these suburbs, there were no histories, stories, and already existing legends about the place to learn. Everything needed to be invented. And when kids invent things they are not nice and pretty. Hearing all these stories about murders and rapes made me both spooky and a feminist. The victim was always a girl. A girl being murdered with an ax, a girl being raped and strangled and buried in the nearby forest. A girl being burned to death. Some of the stories were true, most of them were not, but it took me decades to start enjoying nature again. It also took time to distance myself from this framework in which the victim is always female, to be able to observe it, if not objectively as I do not believe in objective and neutral observation, but without overwhelming anxiety.

These suburban areas were supposed to make efficient ways of living possible, but many of them fostered the growth of a population that presented, or have turned during times to present, quite the opposite. They have become a territory of different resident groups that share little in common. There are working class families living in these areas. These demographics were meant to be the ideal dwellers. But the suburbs have also become a place for an increasing amount of invisible citizens: the unemployed, addicts, immigrants, and paperless refugees, people in the margins. This group of people and how they live and spend their days is largely incomprehensible to the majority. They do not have public representation, whether it is about politics, media or art, or these representations have only recently started to develop.

Suburban neighborhoods that had no history were also lacking the variety of different histories and narratives that cities have, which makes them normalized and normalizable places. As the Swedish author Jonas Gardell writes in *Till minne av en villkorslös kärlek*, ("In memory of unconditional love") stating that his home area was lacking a soul as it was lacking a narrative, that:



Instead, they get the story conveyed through the TV and the radio. They all take part in the same tv shows, same radio programs, they all sing the same songs, laugh at the same comedians, cheer the same sports figures, follow the same news. Strictly speaking, they all have the same taste, same dreams, same desires, and the same goals. They are all similar to each other. (Gardell, 2018, p. 478)

Even if this is not true, if one observes more carefully, it is the exact feeling I grew up with. Suburban areas present themselves as a clean and neat paradise, but only if you act worth it, as Gardell continues:

Paradise is, of course, conditional. Every paradise is conditional. If you break the rules you are thrown out, already in the Garden of Eden. Paradise is not forgiving. Paradise has the right to correct and educate. They authorize selected children to beat the children who break the norms so that they learn and join. In Enebyberg, everyone is white, heterosexual, right-handed.<sup>65</sup> (Gardell, 2018, p. 478)

The mixture of peoples, goals, plans, and dreams and how the expectations and strategies collide with reality is why the suburb holds much potential when it comes to exploring the uncanny gap between the structured and unstructured, between the homogeneous and heterogeneous parts of society. They are like laboratories of human life: even if beings are similar to each other – we feel, love, fear, need food, water, and shelter – the conditions are radically different, and even the same conditions seem radically different when they are perceived from different positions. The representation of suburbs in popular culture strengthens the idea of uncanniness: from the beginning, many of the outcomes have included strangeness, anxiety, and/or pure horror. *The Stepford*

<sup>65</sup> "Berättelsen får de istället förmedlad genom tv:n och radion. De tar alla del av samma tv-serier, samma radioprogram, de nynnar på samma sånger, skrattar åt samma komiker, hejar på samma idrottsmän, tar del av samma nyheter. De har strängt taget alla samma smak, samma drömmar, samma längtan och samma mål. De är varandras likar." "Paradiset är förstås villkorat. Alla paradis är villkorade. Bryter man mot reglerna kastas man ut. Så redan i Edens lustgård. Paradiset är inte förlåtande. Paradiset har rätt att korrigera och uppföstra. De auktoriser utvalda barn att ge de barn som bryter mot normerna stryk så att de lär sig och fogar sig. I Enebyberg är alla vita, heterosexualla, högerhänta." (Gardell, 2018, p. 478) Translated by A. Jensen.

*Wives*, originally a novel from 1972, narrated an idyllic neighborhood where all the wives turned out to be robots (Oz, Levin and Rudnick, 2004). In *Revolutionary Road* (Yates and Mendes, 1961) author Richard Yates sets the story in a suburb in Connecticut in 1955. In the novel, a happy young couple moves to the suburbs from downtown just to witness the dullness of the lifestyle ends up ruining them. In *Let the Right One In* (Novel by John Ajvide Lindqvist, 2004, film by Tomas Alfredson, 2008) a desolate Swedish suburb becomes the perfect place for a vampire to live and hunt, as people are alienated and struggling with their lives. All these stories, from comedy to horror, present the post-industrial alienation and misery of the suburbs as well as the lost sense of meaningfulness that make it possible for all kinds of strange events to occur.

## A. SUBURBS AND ART

The expected lack of history in suburban areas is related to their newness, they do not have historical layers and they are not like cities where the houses would have names of famous authors stating who was born there and who lived there while writing this masterpiece. Unlike the American and some European suburbs, the Finnish suburbs have not been presented in remarkable paintings, and only relatively recently have these areas started to appear in printed books and films. This has led to a situation where the suburb is often seen as requiring culture, meaning that there is not a culture that is institutionalized, and that people living in suburbs should be cultivated and educated. Art and culture are brought to suburban neighborhoods, and if these art projects fail the uneducated public is to blame. However, I would argue, that it is usually the artistic approach that starts and ends amiss. Projects realized in the suburbs are often socially-engaged community projects, aiming to create a sense of collectivity, ownership of the area, and general wellbeing. Often these projects only reach those who already feel ownership and are active members of the community.

In *The Emancipated Spectator* Jacques Rancière proposes a different strategy, being together apart, saying that “much of what we read or hear about the ‘crisis in the suburbs’ deals with the destruction of the ‘social bond’ produced by mass individualism, and the need to recreate it.” (Rancière, 2011, p. 53) Instead of creating opportunities for coming together, he suggests that what is lacking and what should be created is the possibility of being apart: “Construct-

ing a place for solitude, an 'aesthetic' place, appears to be a task for committed art." (Rancière, 2011, p. 53) I adore the idea of these places of solitude and would propose having them not only in suburbs but also in city centers and the countryside - the fact that there is more space does not at all mean that there should be more place for solitude. And, overall, I question the idea of these predictable demographics that are categorized based on where they live: there is no united group of suburban citizens, or spectators living in the city center, or audience coming from the countryside. Instead of being cohesive, these are heterogeneous groups of individuals with different backgrounds, educations, ideas, and ideologies. Art cannot be customized to fit their assumed capacities and aspirations.

Moreover, the global art worlds' conception of suburban areas as detached, is somewhat absurd. Today, even now in the middle of a pandemic when we feel more alienated than ever, the interconnected nature of the globe is undeniable. As Rosalyn Deutsche already wrote in 1988, "Individual cities cannot be defined apart from the spatial totality - the relations of spaces to another within and between various geographic levels: global, regional, urban." (Deutsche, 2009, p. 133) Another important notion is that even if the city centers are considered to be "international", "global", and "connected", in reality, it is often the suburbs that host the international:

...the international usually arrives, not from the centre, but from the margins it inhabits, that is, from urban spaces (maybe quite close to the centres of capital but always rather in the niches and cracks that occur in and around them) which allow for improvised living, offer rents cheap enough to make flats, studios and studies affordable and are within reach of an airport that low fare airlines fly to.  
(Verwoert, 2007, p. 219)



Soukka, Espoo, 2020

These photographs depict two buildings, one is Soukka and the other one is the old Matinkylä mall. They are both located in Espoo and are perfect examples of the functional, yet uncanny, architecture and urban planning. The modernist utopia created clean, neat and white residential areas with public services nearby and with access to public transportation. Forests and trees remained here and there to make the environment greener and homely, even if concrete is the dominant material in the image. Leo Tolstoy's famous statement from *Anna Karenina*, "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" could be twisted to another formulation that would somehow present the fact that all depressing and unhappy suburbs are depressing and unhappy alike. In fact, looking at these two images it is hard to tell them apart. Both images portray a place with entwined stories, happy and unhappy



Matinkylä, Espoo (the mall is now demolished, as many of its contemporaries), 2016

families that are alike and not alike. Many of the problems are related to bad city planning, social injustice, cheap materials and poverty. This is, of course, not the only truth about these areas but it is one of the obvious ones, and a reason why these areas are often treated as problematic. In addition, it has not been until recently that other stories have started to be told. I am one of the first generations that was born and raised in the Finnish suburbs like this. Before us, the stories, even if they were written in suburbs, were about cities or, especially the sentimental and nostalgic ones, about the countryside. Without the stories these areas have not been seen, their diversity has not been recognized. Now, many of them are already being dismantled, partly because the stories were not told in time, partly because they were not meant to last. Those that are not dismantled are under transformation: the ideal of spacious homes beside nature and forests is being replaced with the ideal of everlasting growth of economy, population and cities themselves. Human-scaled apartment buildings with airy apartments which stand beside forests and meadows are being demolished to make way for newer, bigger and cheaper blocks.

# SYM-POIESIS

Donna Haraway uses the concept of *sym-poiesis*, referring to living-with, living in a symbiotic relationship with others. This thinking is based on the idea that there is no other way of living but to live a life entangled with other lives, that we live collectively. Haraway posits living without enclosing boundaries, that our living necessitates a spatial, temporal system of distributing information among components, a system that has potential for surprising change.

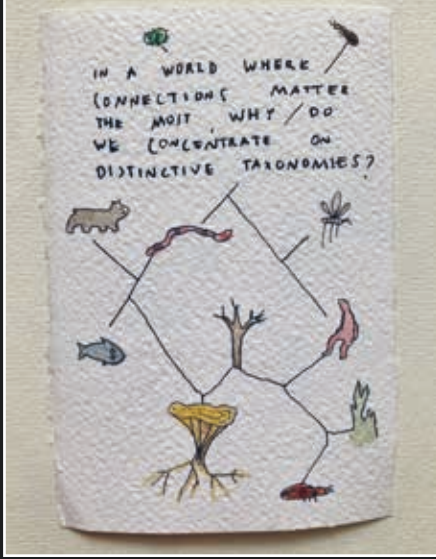
As Haraway themselves puts it:

Sym-poiesis is a simple word; it means ‘making-with.’ Nothing makes itself; nothing is really auto-poietic or self-organizing. In the words of the Iñupiat computer ‘world game,’ earthlings are Never Alone. That is the radical implication of sym-poiesis. Sym-poiesis is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for wordling. (Haraway, 2017, p. 25)

*Poiesis* as a concept comes from ancient Greek and it refers to coming into being by way of active making. Sym-poiesis is, as I understand it, both actively making a collective but also active collective making: making-with, making-with other wordlings. *Poiesis* also refers to poetry and, if understood in a Heideggerian sense, poiesis is what combines philosophy and poetry. If we continue with Heidegger, this praxis of thinking or *techne*, or poetry, never happens alone as the being-here, the being of *Dasein* is always also "being-alongside (entities encountered within the world)" as presented in *Being and Time* (1927). *Dasein*'s being is being in the world that is shared with others which means that being here is inseparable from care. Care is not only related to the care of the other but also care of things. Being-with is related to being represented by another, and this representation is “in” and “together with” taking care: “The fact that one *Dasein* can be represented (*Vertretbarkeit*) by another belongs indisputably to

the possibilities-of-being of being-with-one-another in the world. In the everydayness of taking care of things, constant use of such representability is made in many ways...But the very meaning of such representation 'in' and 'together with' something, that is, taking care." (Heidegger, 2010, pp. 230–231) Taking care is active doing: "One *is*' what one does. Regarding this being (the everyday being-absorbed-with-one-another in the 'world' taken care of), representability is not only possible in general, but is even constitutive for being-with-one-another." (Heidegger, 2010, p. 231)

*Poiesis* already implies bringing forth something, active making, and as a constitutive force of *dasein*'s being it too must be shared. The addition *sym-* (with : along with : together) highlights this collective nature. For to know these complex systems of being and making together we need to be, maybe not rooted, but based somewhere. *Sym-poiesis* is a concept of earth, mud, and compost, a multispecies model that requires engagement. And this, according to Haraway, is how we can improve the possibilities of living and dying well.



Drawing curatorial text for the *Evergreen Inner Jungle* exhibition, 2021

This drawing was made for the *Evergreen Inner Jungle* (Porin kulttuurisäätiö, 2021), realized in Kaisaniemi Botanic Gardens in 2021. The drawings were part of my thinking process and also an approach to making that process more transparent. This thinking process was related to the curatorial process too and how the themes, the tradition of botanic gardens and its connection to violent colonial pasts but also to research, environmentalism and public work, the plant processes and knowledge that is produced by taxonomy, were studied. In this project many of the questions I have explored in my dissertation surfaced and took a more concrete form, especially at the time - working within the context of the pandemic and the continually changing challenges this brought – meant that it was also a project about working together. After more than a year of doing almost everything online, this particular exhibition presented the possibility of work together and in response to a specific site. The setting also meant that we considered the non-human, not as an afterthought but as a premise for the project. In all our actions, we needed to be aware of the fragile environment around us, but also the ongoing research, while also negotiating with the past.



# TEACHING

Teaching is not only about passing on knowledge, it is also a way of creating it, a way of being and thinking together – a form of *sym-poiesis*. Teaching creates family bonds outside traditional family structures, it produces rhizomes with a way of thinking, doing, and style of practice that sprawls like a root structure.

Teaching is about being present and being-with, about sharing and listening, and about giving. I do not really believe in teaching art – the *tekhne* part one learns by practicing, theory by reading, and the *poiesis* side of it by feeling and listening. What can be done is to show options, ways of working, different roles and tasks that one as a student might not be aware of, and most of all create a sense of community and trust. Teaching is about opening up possibilities.

I was a poor student throughout elementary school: loud, restless, and critical. Most of my teachers didn't like me and I was often sent out of the classroom. My art teacher, however, gave me attention, brought me gladiolus flowers to paint, and gave me enough large sheets of paper to paint them on, without the demand to fill empty page completely nor that the flower be represented precisely. She discussed my works with me and proved to me that there were people, even inside institutions, who value and share my perhaps more obscure interests and skills. I am eternally grateful for those teachers who have opened possibilities and new perspectives for me – showing me that things can be done in ways I never imagined possible, that teaching can be about so much more than the recounting of facts to the class. At its best, teaching is imagining together - radical dreaming the new that can take place in the exact time and situation because of shared knowledge, background, and context. In this sense, teaching is art. It creates platforms for artworks and events to happen.

Teaching is also about hierarchies and power structures, about the decision whether or not to maintain or deconstruct these structures. Like the curator, the teacher makes decisions and choices that have consequences. The teacher makes the decision of who is being read, whose works are being seen. Teaching involves the constant work of building or critically revisiting the canon. Teach-

ing is not objective and neutral work: every event of teaching may impact the future, what and how will it happen. Teachers have power. Unlike the curator's power, this is usually not questioned or explored until something goes very wrong.

#### A. ANPIAISLUENTO/A VESPULA LECTURE

Throughout my adulthood, I have taught at different institutions from children's art schools to language courses to universities. Especially the language courses where I worked as a substitute teacher during my studies made me realize the power and the expectations of teaching. When one occupies the position of a teacher, one is expected to have answers. And not only answers to the topic at hand. The teacher is expected to be an authority with all kinds of knowledge. As language or integration training is not my field, I needed to work hard to get to know the subject but also often enough to admit my incompetence, that I did not know something. This, I came to realize, was very disappointing and even somewhat incomprehensible as it is embedded in the concept of the teacher as the one who knows all.

I find this as a representation and example of how hierarchies, power relations, and social structures function interesting phenomena that I wanted to explore further. In Reposaari during an Aalto University's course in 2011, I did a series of works related to the theme where I wanted to test how this position of a teacher was perceived in the context of artwork and knowing that for the grown-up MA students the all-knowingness is not a self-evident fact, more likely the reception is often critical. The first part of the work was an installation in the classroom: a text written on the blackboard about the position of a teacher and about knowing more than the rest of the group because of standing in the front of the class and writing things for the other to read. Even after this quite straightforward statement, I wasn't expecting that the second part of the work, a lecture about wasps, would be accepted so easily. I don't know much about wasps and I had prepared the lecture using the blackboard for very bad representations of wasps and other wasp related information. Together with Hanne Salonen, we gave a performative lecture about wasps and presenting "facts" to the class that were hardly true, and that were increasingly implausible. It wasn't until we came to the part where the class was told that wasps are originally from

Lahti, a small town in Finland, that the audience started to question the facts I was delivering. (Jensen and Salonen, 2011)

I love teaching as I see it as a possibility for learning. I have met wonderful people when teaching. I have heard, come into contact with incredible ideas and experienced realizations. But it is also a frightening thing to do: what if I somehow accidentally tell my students something that is completely untrue? What if I am sharing with them what I have totally misunderstood, or misinformation that I have for a reason or another believed? Or if I am unable to understand someone and therefore fail to encourage them enough? Or if I fail in creating a safe and creative learning environment?

## B. VICCA PRODUCTION

ViCCA Production is a course addressing the idea that artistic research requires experimenting with how the research is performed to a public. Performance here is not synonymous with ‘performance art’ as such, rather it denotes the performative aspects of presenting one’s research. The course facilitates discussions and presentations around this important dimension of artistic practice (Jensen and Coyotzi Borja, 2019)

ViCCA Production is an Aalto University course Andrea Coyotzi Borja and I taught from 2019. The aim was to teach MA students to present their practice and organize a seminar/symposium/event where this could be done together with another institutions, like a museum, instead of working within the university walls. (This is a good example of how much the program has changed in a short time after moving from Pori to Otaniemi and being more closely tied to the general university curriculum – in Pori most of the things were done outside the university walls.)

Instead of traditional portfolio presentations, we aimed to carefully consider what it means to mediate one’s practice for different audiences and how this can be done in different ways, how to find the most resonating way to narrate what one does. This also included thinking about different institutions and settings for the event: how to create a context that is suitable for this specific group and how to create a fruitful framework – what are the key elements,

who is it for, what to learn from it. We invited different artists, often with research-oriented practices, to talk about their work, to present the students different ways to do this. In the middle of the first course, we realized that even with the MA students who can already be considered professionals working in the field, there are practicalities that should be taught. We also taught writing a bio and artists statement, not only because one needs to have a bio and a statement but also as a practice of working together: reading and writing together and reading each other's texts and commenting them.

The idea of ViCCA Production was to create an event that would, instead of an MA show which many programs have, present thesis works by students working in a field that combines theory and art. However, it soon became apparent that not all of the students participating were in the phase where they could present their thesis and that it would make more sense to strengthen the idea of one's practice and research question in the process of making it presentable – one often finds out things about one's practice when one is asked to verbalize it.



The ViCCA Production 2020 publication (design: Dana Neilson)

The book pictured in the above image was the result of the ViCCA Production 2020 seminar. This form took shape after all the original plans were adjusted to the pandemic. Teaching is about creating and sharing stories and this makes it a subversive activity. These stories can create new worlds, new practices and identities. My practice is the stories I tell, and it is based on what I have learned during my studies. A lot of this learning happens outside the classes, learning is getting to know people, getting to see places, and to hear people talk about things they have done and seen. COVID made all this impossible and we needed to find alternative ways to teach, work and mediate our practice: videos, online sessions, and writing together. The catalog pictured above brings together the initiatives in a material, sharable form.

Teaching, as a form of sharing and thinking together, operates on the energy milked from collectivity. This collectivity changes when we are not physically present. During Zoom classes, with shared space and co-existence reduced, energy needed to be found elsewhere. The second year ViCCA Production course was held online, when we were starting to rebel against the idea of being locked down. This resistance was also present in the title “Sometimes I go places” which hinted that the course included leaving one’s home, leaving the flat online space. We invited the students to walk with intuition, to find places, to present their practice as spatial acts. We wanted to use Zoom as a platform for sharing - it is not a classroom and the energy of bodily sharing time and space while being on the shore of something exciting is not present but we tried to create alternative ways to make it a soothing yet inspiring place, reading out loud, sharing videos we like and just talking about the process - but also adding sensuous elements to teaching: sensations and surprises we cannot create online.

# TOUCH; TOUCHING

“Without the sense of touch, we would not have a body at all.” (Luoto, 2018, p. 100) Without touch and the body, we would not have the world either. We come into being when we touch and are being touched, which always happens simultaneously. The world around us comes into being when it is bodily sensed, when *tactile perception* makes the world emerge around us. The world leaves marks on our bodies and our bodies leave traces on the world. We touch objects, we grasp them and they become concepts and understandings. Through touch our bodies create knowledge, and understanding knowledge is not only an analytical process but an embodied one. Our skin is the border, and touch is what surpasses this gap between us and the world, others around us;

We could approach touch as a sense among others. However, when we encounter the peculiarities of touch, we must admit that it is a sense unlike all the others. Lacking an organ of its own and being spread out over the whole body, touch is intimately connected to one’s feeling of life or corporeal existence. As we perceive, in the act of touch, the tactual properties of the object, we are at once bodily engaged with it and exposed to it. (Elo and Luoto, 2018, p. 1)

When I was struggling with the problem of how to combine art, embodied experience and theoretical, analytical, verbal thinking, language, and writing, Peter Greenaway’s *The Pillow Book* (1996) was a revelation. I was struck by how the text and the body were combined, how the body was immersed in the world and vice versa, how thinking penetrated embodied experience. I found this all very beautiful. I realize now that it has inspired some of my works, even if I didn’t realize this when I was making them: the third part of the *Anpiaisluento* (Ves-pula Lecture) was a video piece created with Hanne Salonen. In the video, the text about teaching, learning, hierarchies, and education I had written on the blackboard in the first part was painted on my body. The video shows the text

washing off my body in a shower, the letters draining away with the water. (Jensen and Salonen, 2011)

That same year, I made another video that was about touch and how we are always changed when we are touched by the other. The work was about how every one of these touches leaves marks and how we carry these marks, bruises, as well as those we caress and care for, in our bodies. I tried to make these marks visible by writing names on my body, the names of those who had recently touched me. There were many names. Name after name, casual touches in the midst of a conversation, hugging friends and family, shaking hands with new acquaintances, getting punched at boxing. Some names were more important than others, but each of them marked a moment of physical contact, a surpassing of the border between myself and the other. Touch is “how we learn to live with others”, living-as-relating, like Maria Puig de la Bellacasa writes, combining concepts of touch and care, “Thinking touch with care beautifully emphasizes intra-active reversibility, and therefore vulnerability in relational ontologies.” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, pp. 116–119) These ontologies and ideas of touch and care needed to be revisited during the global pandemic. If I had made the video in 2020 after COVID-19 started to spread, the work would have included much fewer names, my body empty, my skin bare. Touching used to be a sign of care and love (of course, it can be so many other things too, from aggression to harassment to intrusion). Not to care is not to touch. Everything I was planning to write about touching and touch seems to have lost its meaning while simultaneously *touch* and *touching* as themes have become more acute and relevant concepts than ever.

In her article “Hellät apinat” (“Tender monkeys”) Anu Silfverberg writes about humans as tactile beings, whose communities cohere because of touch. Silfverberg asks what happens when touch is taken away, what happens to the wellbeing of an individual and community? Some of the monkeys use a fifth of their time for combing. Harry Harlow’s cruel tests in the 1950s where baby monkeys were isolated in a “pit of despair” proved that even with food and water, the lack of company made monkeys sick and mentally unstable. Newborns need touching, caressing, and skin contact. Grown-ups need touching too: it strengthens our social bonds, increases empathy and compassion. Isolation makes us stressed and tense, the need to verbalize all our thoughts makes us tired. Touching soothes us, and it comforts us. (Silfverberg, 2020)





*Rhinoceros* performance, Space Invaders IV, 2016

The image above portrays *Rhinoceros*, a series of performances by Antti-Juhani Manninen and Jouni Järvenpää, performed during Space Invaders IV in Matinkylä (2016). The performances were named “after Albrecht Dürer’s *Rhinoceros*, that he drew by description of the animal without actually ever encountering a rhino himself” (Manninen, 2014), and explored notions of authorship and authenticity. One of the key elements in the performance was touch, the entangled bodies of the performers touched the bodies of the audience. Touching is also what distinguishes performance art from most other art forms: entering a museum or a gallery space we already know that we are usually not allowed to touch the objects exhibited, but entering a performance we cannot be sure that touching is not involved. This is part of how performance is fundamentally shared. The intimacy of touching makes the medium of performance disturbing but also subversive: it surpasses the expected analytical and objective distance we expect contemporary art to maintain.

This distance is meant to protect us from emotions, as art dealing with emotions is considered cheap and sentimental. However, as Jennifer Doyle has shown, the difficulty of emotion in contemporary art is far from a neutral phenomena:

If sentimentality is presented as an overidentification with the other and if its abjection operates as a given in debates about the difference between good art and bad art, it is because that word embodies a singular truth about aesthetic judgement which must be disavowed in order for the disciplinary protocols of discourse on art continue to operate. The line between good and bad art is fundamentally contingent (on class, for example) and deeply subjective. (Doyle, 2013, pp. 80–81)

Even if we are not interested in the quality of art, the challenge proposed by emotional art is interesting. When we are touched, we cannot hide behind quantitative words and concepts or merely read a work in the light of its context. Touching is intimate. This intimacy is what we have missed during the pandemic. I interviewed artist, writer and educator Ray Langenbach in May 2021. He contemplated the past two years of pandemic in the context of performance art:

...“(interaction) is absolutely fundamental, human communication has always been wet, we share each other’s spit, we breathe in the other, we can’t gain what has been lost in human communication. Everyone wants to be licked.”(Jensen, 2021a, p. 40)

Sharing and touching surpass the border between me and the other and even the possibility of it makes performance art difficult but rewarding, especially when contemplated afterwards.

# UNCANNY, UNHEIMLICH

When I write about the *uncanny* I refer to the concept of the *unheimlich*, which is a psychological experience best known from Sigmund Freud's theory, as well as Martin Heidegger's conception of it as a fundamental state of our being. Freud used this term to describe an eerie feeling, mixed with familiarity: often evoked by a sense of something being out of place. The etymology of *unheimlich* refers to home, but also a secret: *heimlich* meaning both 'homelike' and 'a secret.' This is also how F.W.J. Schelling understood it in 1842 in his *Philosophy of Mythology* lectures. He suggested that *unheimlich* should have remained hidden, a secret, but was instead brought to light. For Schelling, the *unheimlich* used to be familiar but is now weird, odd, strange, scary and revolting (Schelling, 2007). It makes one anxious and afraid. Uncanniness is a feeling of *not-being-at-home*, in contrast to *being-at-home*, as in the average everydayness of *Dasein*, as Heidegger writes in *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 2010, p. 185)

Uncanny is an embodied and spatial experience, or an "effect", as Dylan Trigg writes, a "felt experience that disturbs the body, resulting in a departure from the everyday. Yet no less a displacement from the everyday, the uncanny simultaneously places us in the midst of the familiar." (Trigg, 2012, p. 27) Trigg explains how;

Close enough to be recognized as broadly familiar, the world of the uncanny nevertheless subtly manipulates the familiar screen, thus engineering a shiver is the sense that what has so far been thought of as inconspicuous in its being is, in fact, charged with a creeping strangeness. This creeping gesture points to one of the uncanny's enduring characteristics: The term resist unequivocal definition, leading not only to experiential anxiety, but to conceptual doubt, too. (Trigg, 2012, p. 27)

Uncanny, or the *unheimlich* can cause uncomfortably and even horror, but this horror is not always terrifying as such. The concept is related to other theoretical notions that refer to a similar condition of unknowability, a mixture of familiarity and strangeness. Kristeva's *abject*, Bataille's *heterogeneity*, and Freud's *unheimlich*, Lacan's the *Real* are all examples. These concepts refer to that which is known and common but uncanny and weird at the same time. All are intrinsically related and bound up with social order, or more likely they are situated outside symbolic order. Even more precisely, we may refer to that which lies outside of our understanding or conceptualization, as *abject*, *heterogeneous*, or *unheimlich*. With their characteristics, they all refer to an experience opposite to what is usually considered normal.

The discomfiting feeling of being incapable of putting everything in order has in Western philosophy both been trying to take over, tame, and call this unwanted experience with many names. Naming is power:

In any case, you all know, however vaguely, the Bible story of the Garden of Eden, and that Adam's task was to name his world. If you believe, as I do, that religious texts – like myths – are texts we create to mirror the deeper structures of the human psyche, then yes, naming is still our primary task. Poets and philosophers know this – perhaps science has confused naming with taxonomy. Perhaps, in our early efforts to distance ourselves from the alchemists who came before us, we forgot that naming is power. I cannot conjure spirits, but I can tell you that calling things by their names is more than them an identity bracelet or a label, or a serial number. We summon a vision. Naming is power. (Winterson, 2019, p. 79)

But what happens when we do not fully understand what we are naming? How should we name it? We can call it *unheimlich*, heterogeneous, uncanny, eerie, the real or nonidentity:

Nonidentity is the name Adorno gives to that which is not subject to knowledge but is instead 'heterogeneous' to all concepts. This elusive force is not, however, wholly outside human experience, for Adorno describes nonidentity as a presence that acts upon us: we knowers

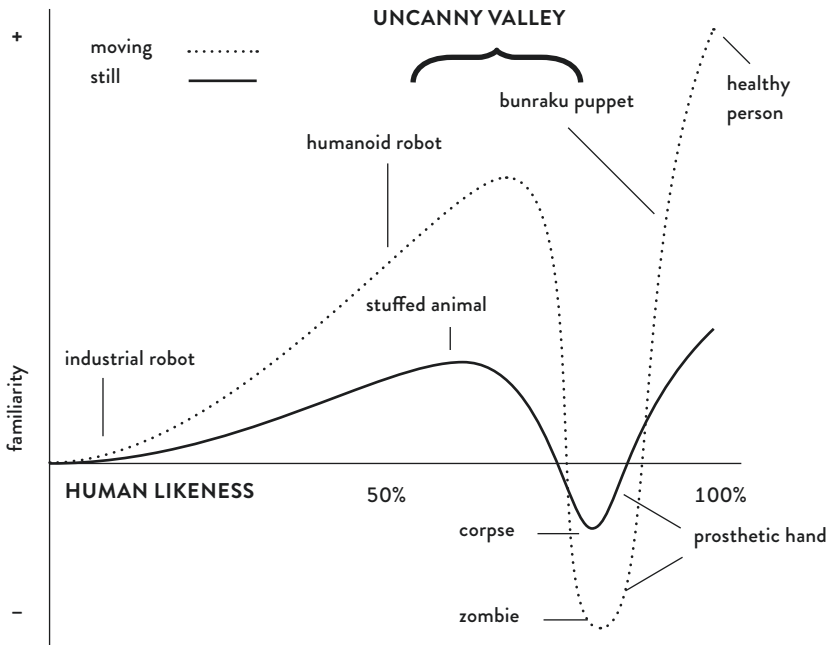
are haunted, he says, by a painful, nagging feeling that something's being forgotten or left out. This discomfiting sense of the inadequacy of representation remains no matter how refined or analytically precise one's concepts become. (Bennett, 2010, p. 14)

According to Adorno, as Bennet argues, the ethical project that follows the fact that life will always exceed our knowledge and control is to keep remembering this and learn how to accept it.

The uncanny is a haunted feeling and experience that is deeply rooted in our being, and at the same time it questions it: "When 'something that should have remained hidden' does come to the opening, then the shock of the uncanny becomes a battleground between possession of oneself and oneself as being possessed." (Trigg, 2012, p. 301) For Trigg, the term "possession" has a double meaning of ownership and otherness, which makes sense when we think of the feeling of the uncanny, how our familiar world becomes unfamiliar, and our body comes into contact with its temporality. Our existence is inseparable from our mortality, and mortality is as a limit to what we can understand but as an event and experience death is incomprehensible. The unknown is nothing, absence, only presented to us in the death of the other, its presence is uncanny. It is always there, it is familiar, but also we cannot know it. It is a feeling of strangeness with the familiar and it is often about feeling oddly out of place, which makes it a spatial and bodily experience. It is a feeling of something not being right, more than a thought or perception of something not being right. An eerie feeling, that you perhaps cannot immediately think through, but which arises as bodily sensation, the feeling of someone walking over your grave. This is also the difference between the eerie and the weird: you notice and say out loud if something is weird, as not normal or ordinary, but you sense eeriness. Mark Fisher, whose book *The Weird and the Eerie* (Fisher, 2016) takes a closer look into these concepts, refers to eerie as certain kinds of physical spaces and landscapes. Another kind of landscape is *The Uncanny Valley* theory, a hypothesis about robots, human-likeness, and empathy by Masahiro Mori where the valley is where the most horrifying and repulsive things are located.

## A. THE UNCANNY VALLEY

There are ghosts in the machine, and we are they, and they are we. (Fisher 2016, 109)



Masahiro Mori's Uncanny Valley hypothesis shows two moving lines expressing familiarity and empathy towards different things compared to their human likeness. The more a robot resembles a human the more familiar it gets, until reaching a point where its familiarity becomes uncanny and the empathy felt towards it radically drops, creating a gap Mori calls 'uncanny valley'. On the bottom of the valley is the figure of the zombie – something very much humanlike, but completely unfamiliar and a perfect example of the *unheimlich* as something that used to be familiar but became strange and revolting. (Wikipedia, 2022c)

*The Uncanny Valley* is a hypothesis proposed by robotics professor Masahiro Mori. The hypothesis states that the more human-like a robot gets, the more empathy and positive feelings the observer feels towards it, until at some point the human likeness reaches a point where empathy turns into repulsion. When the robot's appearance becomes less human again, it becomes less revolting and more likeable. In the above graph, Mori represents how the feeling of familiarity changes with human likeness, first increasing and then radically decreasing, creating an uncanny valley. At the bottom of this valley is a zombie, while the most familiar form in the graph is that of a healthy person.

Many elements already found in Freud's examples of *unheimlich* are present in the graph: puppet, corpse and prosthetic hand. Common to all these and to humanlike robots are that they are non-living things imitating life. Robots article in *Parkett magazine* (Pfeifer *et al.*, 2014) grapples with the uncanniness of robots and the interaction with them, in a situation where this interaction can act as a tool for trying to understand both humanity and our feelings towards technology. The article states that our understanding of the current situation is always lags and hence, we cannot fully comprehend what is happening to us with all this new technology. Robots are part of our everyday, but at the same time, they present something incomprehensible and possibly uncontrollable, causing thoughts and fears we repress. In addition, the article points out that it is not only robots that elicit these feelings, but other lifelike non-living things too, naming Duane Hanson's hyper-realistic sculptures as an example. Hanson's sculptures refer not to death but to life, only the moment it takes to realize that the object is not alive has already directed the spectator's thoughts to death. This moment causes disturbance and distraction. It is a moment of uncanniness in front of an object that is very much humanlike but not at all likable. Instead of comfort related to humanity, the complete emptiness of Hanson's sculptures cause terror: they not only refer to life and death, but also hint at the possible meaninglessness of being. (Pfeifer *et al.*, 2014 p.203)

Robotics and AI are increasingly ubiquitous in contemporary society. From limiting children's screen time to discussing their need to learn handwriting to pondering the possibilities of using robodogs to relieve elderly people's loneliness. They evoke questions about our relationship to technology. This discourse is often colored with fears, anxieties, and beliefs. What is curious about it is that the conversation often dismisses the fact that we are already living in a symbi-

otic collaboration with new technologies, from contact lenses to smartphones and prosthetic hands and automated everyday functions. Whether we want it or not, we are already dependent on technology, and we do not only want to use the machines to improve our world and ourselves, but are often drawn to the machines, even wanting to become part of them. As philosopher and art theorist Gerald Raunig has suggested, we are drawn to machines as much as machines are integrated into our everyday life, they are part of us, and we are interdependent. It is a question of exchange, not substitution. (Raunig, 2010)<sup>66</sup> The other oddity is how casually the concept the “soul” is used in the discourse, how the obscure idea of a holy spirit penetrates rational frameworks when we approach the unknowable. Donna Haraway sees potential in this in-betweenness, how cyborgs function in-between technology and lived experience, social structures, political constructions and social relations, and between machines and lived organisms. (Haraway, 2016)

This dependency probably does not ease our fear towards the machines. Rather, it becomes more actual. It is not only the half-fictional cyborgs and human-like robots we need to be afraid of, but the everyday objects controlling our life: relation of appending, that does not only make us dependent on the machine but makes the machine part of us, a vital part of our being. It is also about the questions these machines pose: what constitutes subjectivity? As consciousness and human subjectivity are often related to language, are the learning and communicative machines conscious subjects? According to Ian McEwan’s novel *Machines Like Me* (McEwan, 2019) it is not so much the machines that are uncanny, but human subjectivity is affixed to the ability to tolerate uncanniness and chaos. The clever human-like robots cannot cope in a world full of catastrophes, irrationality, and banal evil.

<sup>66</sup> Raunig refers to Deleuze and Guattari who refuse the “simple cultural pessimism”, the idea of machine’s domination over human beings and the simplified linearity between machines and alienation: “Technical prostheses as a sheer endless extension of the inadequate human being, fictions of artificial humans following Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, stories of human being usually prove to be reductionist complements to the paradigm of alienation. The narrative of man’s becoming-machine as a purely technical alteration misses the machinic, both in its civilization-critical development and in its euphoric tendency. It is no longer a matter of confronting man and machine to estimate possible or impossible correspondences, extensions and substitutions of the one or the other, of ever new relationships of similarity and metaphorical relations between humans and machines, but rather of concatenations, of how man becomes a piece with the machine or with other things in order to constitute a machine. The ‘other things’ may be animals, tools, other people, statements, signs or desires, but they become machine in a process of exchange, not in the paradigm of substitution.” (Raunig, 2010, p. 32) The story of *Frankenstein* has also been revisited by Jeanette Winterson in *Frankissstein*. (Winterson, 2019)



*The Uncanny Valley* hypothesis suggests a great deal about how we feel about control: how we try to control things and how they seem to escape our control. Just when you thought you've reached them and covered them with the frock coat they are gone. "Life" and "death" are often thought and hoped to be undeniable categories. Almost every idea, every concept, every word, and theory tends to move, change its shape and meaning through time and space, but life and death are assumed to be stable categories. The world with all its shifting concepts can seem chaotic, so we hang on to the rare unstable ones. Once you are gone, you cannot come back, and this thought puts zombies at the bottom of the uncanny valley. Even the idea of the dead coming back is absurd and frightening, but also shared in different cultures at different times.

## B. ARKI JA KAUFU/EVERYDAY AND HORROR

Akse Pettersson's play *Arki ja Kauhu, Everyday and Horror* (Pettersson, 2018) focuses on the subject of the uncanniness of the everyday: everyday is repetition, controlling us instead of us controlling our everyday. The everyday is formed by routines. We are ashamed of our everyday, and we try to strive for it. We need variation, we try to escape, we dream of holidays, and we involuntarily return to the banality of our lives. Still, the everyday is what our life is mostly made up of. The brilliantly staged show presents a two-storied house in the middle of a creepy forest and four people living there. The quiet flow of casual living, waking up, reading, making coffee, brushing teeth, taking a shower, staring at one's phone, living with others but not communicating with them, is shadowed by a strangeness; everything seems to be a bit out of place. The sound of running water is a sound of running water, but is it this running water, or is it just a representation of running water, in a theater, where everything is a representation, whilst pretending to be real? Is there real water? The shadows grow larger and they are not explained. Lawn mowing is followed by a giant snail, crawling to the stage in the dark. A wolf appears – is it a wolf or a family member? Is it real – is the battle taking over the scene happening in "real life" of the play or in the life of movies and representations? At the end of the first act, everything collapses, the uncanniness is revealed. In the middle of a nice dinner, the wine bottle turns out to be an imitation of a wine bottle and the food is an imitation of food. Everything around the people living in the house is a simulation, awkward copies

of everyday objects. It is the moment that Schelling describes as *unheimlich* – when a secret that should have remained hidden is revealed, the moment, when our well-structured everyday turns out to be a representation of well-structured everyday and the uncontrollable real not only leaks but floods in.

The second act begins with a closer look at representation and how we have tried to approach this uncanny phenomenon of horror by creating all kinds of monsters, lurking around the safety of our usual being. Dinosaurs, robots, and serial killers are rioting in the house, where the residents are left lying on the sofa as lifeless dolls and the remains of their once existing everyday life are presented as relics and ancient monuments. The meaninglessness of life is disclosed in a form of a pop song. The play heads towards its end, where the death of an other is presented in a very Blanchotian way, as something that we cannot reach. The distance is created by narratives and shared history. The show ends in a bloodbath, where the limit of the outside and the inside is crossed and where bodily pain becomes shared experience, melded with laughter, that creates bridges between the I of the subject and the other, the border of structure and the unknown.

### C. PROSTHETIC HAND

When I was about ten years old, I watched a horror movie about a man who loses his hand in a car accident. Later, the detached hand starts murdering people, causing pain both to the person it used to belong to and others. I do not remember much of the details, but I remember the terror. I was horrified weeks later, afraid that there was a detached hand lurking around, waiting for its moment to attack. I had forgotten about the horrible hand, until reading Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*:

He went over to his bags of human parts and fastened the severed hand back in its ziplock bag. He said, There's a horror story about a hand that becomes detached from its owner and lives its own, rather sordid, existence. Strangles people, frightens children, forges cheques, that sort of thing.

and

Hands. Spatulate, conic, broad, hairy, plain, mottled. The hands I had brought him. Moving. Some were still, twitching a single finger. Others stood raised and hesitant on all four fingers and thumb. One walked using its little finger and thumb, the mid-fingers upwards, curious and speculative, like antennae. Most moved quickly, senselessly, incessantly. The hands had no sense of each other. They crawled over each other, locked themselves together in blind collision. Some made piles, like a colony of crabs. (Winterson, 2019, p. 152, 169)

But, even if I admire Winterson's thinking and writing, here I think there is an error. The hands are not like a colony of crabs. The colony of crabs would be a functional community, entities communicating with each other, sharing their habitat, food, procreation and sense of safety. There would be sense. The detached hand, however, is senseless and it is alone, and that, I believe, is what scares us: body parts, "real" or "fake", without any attachments. Body parts that just exist, without a sense of belonging, of community, of being part of a greater whole. Perhaps, it would be even more scary if these detached organs started to create colonies?

Winterson's book is a story about Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, AI, sexbots, humanity, and very much about the uncanny. In Mori's hypothesis explored above, the zombie at the bottom of the uncanny valley is the prosthetic hand: prosthetic body parts as somethingare lifelike but not living and therefore are experienced as disturbing, yet they have become everyday items we do not even recognize. From the creation of Frankenstein's monster to robots to smartphones and pacemakers, ideas of the natural, living, nonliving, machine, and hybrid have changed, but the question of the life-spark remains.

#### D. SOUL

Why do some places attract us and haunt us? What defines where the art happens? How are the locations chosen and why? If we forget the practicalities, the accessibility and availability and other concrete elements for a moment, as we often have, and art has been made in places that are quite demanding as exhibition venues, why is one location more interesting than the other? There are places that invade our mind, touch our soul with their spirit, and this spirit is

often what we want to study in the site-specific project: we want to learn about it, and share it, share something that intuitively feels meaningful.

The soul of a place is easier to approach than the soul of a person, the soul in a human context being interpreted in a religious context or psychologically explained. But a bit like in psychology, when the soul of a place is considered, the subjective history of the particular place matters. When a place is the leading figure in a story, its history is the key to the locked doors, like in *The Shining's* Hotel Overlook, it is the repetitive nature of events. Or it is the lack of history that makes the place uncanny, like in the horror fictions about suburban, a genre emerged now that the first generation born and raised in suburbs has become adults.

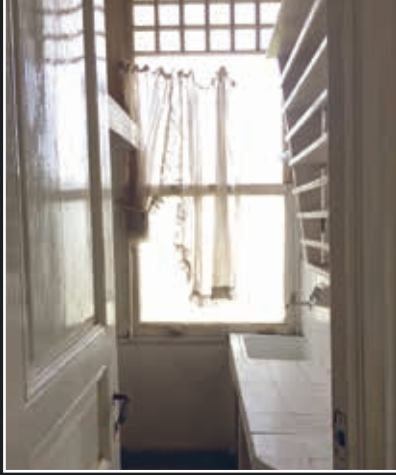
Why do I want to write about soul? Especially as there are other options to use instead of the heavily charged, even religious concept of a soul. It could have been a spirit, or something referring to the drive or an instinct, anything we feel but cannot really put a name on a force moving us, around us, between us. But as I regard these concepts, the soul still has more to give, it is more than the spirit that drives us, it is a spatial and collective force, something that is both inside us, as a drive, but also outside us, the *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the time that we track from artworks, writings, pictures, paintings, all the things that present ideologies, ideas, hopes and fears of a certain period.

When the undead, the returned, and zombies are presented in popular culture they are pictured as moving shells. Bodies that function but do not know why. What makes them horrifying is the lack of this intuition, drive, spirit – the lack of soul. A soul is what we are attracted to in other beings. A soul is what moves us, what touches us in certain places and locations. What affects us in art. A *punctum*, as Barthes put it in *Camera Lucida* (Barthes, 1993). As an affect art can touch your soul, which in this case I see not as a spiritual and mystical element, but the combination of our senses and intelligence, memories and bodily presence, perception and experiences. Even if cartesian dualism has separated the soul from the body, the soul is material, or at least a product of material circumstances and material structures, context and surroundings. Today we hesitate to use the concept of the soul when it comes to human beings, but not when it comes to buildings and places. New buildings and suburban neighborhoods are often described as soulless, as they have no history and no narrative, they have no stories and tales. In his book *Till minne av en villkorlös*

*kärlek* Swedish author Jonas Gardell portrays his childhood region Enebyberg as “a place without a soul and without a story”, as a place that even if it had a history, no one would be interested in learning about it, as no one was planning to stay there. (Gardell, 2018, p. 478)

When I was writing my master’s thesis in Aesthetics at the University of Helsinki about the uncanny (Jensen, 2017), the process led me to consider borders: borders of the self and the other, of the comprehensible and incomprehensible and human and non-human. This is also an acute question when it comes to AI, robots and hybrids. What is it that we seem to be scared of when we are scared of nonhuman human likeness? And what is lacking from those who are almost human? From different perspectives, there are multiple right answers, but the common everyday answer often is soul: “soul” is what is considered to make us humans, soul or whatever name you want to call the drive, personality, identity.

Humans are considered to be sentient, conscious creatures, and I would argue, that this intersection between sentiment and consciousness is what we tend to call soul: where the bodily and mental experiences, cogitation, reasoning, and intellect meet and make us what we are. “The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body” (Butler, 1997, p. 33), as Judith Butler considers how power exercised over the body and subjectivation in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. What makes the soul interesting as a concept and in the context of art is how it is both singular and an individual feature but also something that is communal and collective. Only humans have been considered to have souls (the immortal souls that take us to heaven or hell), which does not so much relate to the soul itself, but to how it has been used as a tool when creating hierarchical constructions, especially the one where the white male is on top of the pyramid.



Abandoned house as an exhibition venue,  
14th Istanbul Biennial, 2015

The above image pictures an unused room in an abandoned house on the island of Büyükdada, where Ed Atkins video *Hisser* (Atkins, 2015) was installed in the 14th Istanbul Biennial. The two-channel digital film is about a man whose house collapses into a sinkhole. The house itself, with the traces of the life lived inside of it, was as fascinating and as horrifying as the work. both dealing with the fragility of being. What we call home can in the next moment stop being that. Or maybe it never was, but it was just a name given to create a momentary sense of control and sustainability.

We can return to Mark Fisher's depiction of eerie as a feeling of something being there that should not be or something not being there that should. In a way art often is exactly this, adding something to reality or taking something away from it and with these gestures altering our experience and changing our perspective (Fisher, 2016). A classical figure in horror stories is a shape in the window in a house that should be empty. It can be an illusion created by lights and shadows, a passing cloud or a bird, but it both leaves one with an insecure feeling that an outside force might invade the home and/or there is always a possibility of an unknown figure appearing at a window. These uncanny moments can be radical, glitches in the matrix that point out expectations and invis-

ible structures. They disturb what is considered natural. Legacy Russel writes about glitch as a form of refusal, “within glitch feminism, glitch is celebrated as a vehicle of refusal, a strategy of nonperformance.” (Russel, 2020, p. 00)

In 2017, *Skulptur Projekte Münster* by interdisciplinary studio CAMP (Shaina Anand, Ashak Sukumaran, Zinnia Ambapardiwala, Simpreet Singh, and other actors) explored the matrix, and its glitches in the context of societal structures, architecture and transparency. The work “Matrix” presented the possibilities for manipulation and the theatrical setting of our everyday environment, showing how the uncanniness is not only haunting horror stories but is also a question of participation, transparency, and support (or them failing):

CAMP creates a metaphor for systems of participation and support, from the access to electricity—which is now privately owned almost everywhere across the globe—to digital communication and the immanent possibilities of manipulation. At the same time, the black net specifically reminds us of the lighting wires and ropes that are used backstage and hung from the ceiling of a theatre to help create an illusion on stage. CAMP addresses the contingent and constantly changing power structures in today’s societies. Modern architectural elements and the claims they make—for example, that glass façades ensure transparency—are questioned with regard to their actual qualities and other aspects that come to light in everyday usage: historically speaking, who was on which side of the glass, and what is the situation today? Why did the ideals of equality and participation in grassroots, horizontal democracy fizzle out? And, in spite of all this, what pathways and vertical shortcuts or incremental processes can provide systemic access? (CAMP, Anand and Sukumaran, 2017)

Our everyday is a constant dialog between order and chaos, between the known and the unknown.

# THE UNDEAD

*The undead* in its different forms is among the most fundamental monsters in horror stories. Undead, the returned, zombies, are unimaginable and unthinkable – they are the ultimate *other*. Like living dolls, paintings, and robots, that are too similar to humans. The undead resemble us but they are also fundamentally different. Mori's *Uncanny Valley* hypothesis shows us that the living dead, a zombie, are at the bottom of the uncanny valley. They are the most horrendous and uncanny entities of all the uncanny things placed in the valley.

Mori's hypothesis about human reactions to human-like robots pictures the gap between familiar living people and their also familiar inanimate representations, such as statues or pictures, and the things in the valley as between these two poles of common phenomena. A living human is not uncanny, while its representations may be. A human corpse is a bit uncanny, under the surface of familiarity, but a corpse that comes back is the ultimate uncanny. There are also differences in human likeness among zombies. In films and books, killing a corpse-like zombie is easy because of the lack of empathy, but the more human-like a zombie is, the more empathy is felt towards it.

In the article “Zombies, Vampires and Frankenstein’s Monster – Embodied Experiences of Illness in Living Dead Films article” (2019), Outi Hakola writes about how zombies have the potential to question what makes us humans, and also to explore the boundaries of what is considered a healthy, productive, human and what is not: “Their problematic and abnormal bodies also symbolize the boundaries between normal, proper or healthy bodies and abnormal or unhealthy bodies.” (Hakola, 2019, pp. 91–92) Hakola argues that the undead in films represents illness and bodies that are stigmatized by sickness, challenging our understanding of mortality and blurring the line between life and death:



In horror films, the liminal characters that exceed and blur the categories of life and death represent the unknown and otherness, which in turn mark them as monsters. Monster theorists argue that being a monster is first and foremost a narrative position and a set of characteristic or actions only second. In other words, monsters do not simply exist: they are created, recognized, and treated as such within a certain cultural, social and moral context. Consequently, the role of monster can dehumanize or exclude issues or groups of people who are seen to represent something abnormal or undesired. (Hakola, 2019, pp. 91–92)

The undead body is a contradictory body, representing many of the anxieties in our society. It is fragile but potentially dangerous and contaminating. It is like us, but strange. They form a community, but they seem alienated.

However, what makes the undead so horrifying is not the excess, the amount of living bodies, the flesh, the movement – what we fear is the lack they represent. Lack of identity, agency, emotions – lack of soul. The undead reminds us of the liminality of life, but also, as Hakola posits, the possibility of sickness, of losing control over our bodies: “Zombies are a typical example of a threat that unexpectedly introduces chaos, and where zombies are both victims and the source of threat.” (Hakola, 2019, pp. 103–104) And perhaps even more terrifyingly, losing the sense of our souls, memories, and becoming a “mindless creature.” The liminal state of becoming non-existent and losing one’s former personality caused by memory-related diseases that today are becoming increasingly common is for many an even more frightening idea than death, and zombie films that “illustrate this degenerative experience when a body continues to live after the personality has drastically altered” can offer a place for handling this fear. (Hakola, 2019, pp. 103–104)

Zombies are also interpreted to offer criticism of consumerism and capitalism. Actually, vampires are the hedonistic ones, the ones embodying the neoliberal utopia of a limitless individual, who gets it all. Zombies, meanwhile, are like Deleuzian rhizomes, dependent on each other, coexisting, thinking through their body, and in a constant state of becoming. Maybe this undead state of becoming is something to keep in mind in the context of sickness, and while living through the pandemic. The world is in constant flux, always changing.

Sometimes we can impact the way it changes, sometimes we cannot. The undead also reminds us of otherness, of difference, and the lifeforms we do not know. Zombie stories offer alternative possibilities of how to handle the undead and the feelings they evoke, from the love presented in *The Returned* (2012) to the fear, anxiety, and social disorder of *Handling the Undead* (2005).

These scenarios speak not only to our fears but also to social structures and norms, be they through illness, consumer culture or the phenomenon of death. Representations of the undead force us to consider questions of hostility and hospitality: who do we welcome and who do we turn away, and what consequences these actions have?

But we need to go further, and also think of hospitality toward death. There is no hospitality without memory. A memory that did not recall the dead person and mortality would be no memory. What kind of hospitality would not be ready to offer itself to the dead one, to the *revenant*? (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 144)

As the name of the 2019 Jim Jarmusch film suggests, *the dead don't die*. They live among us as memories, as traces, monuments, histories, and “phantom limbs.” Like Trigg put it, questioning how the undead are being seen in relation to our world: “we will see that the experience of being haunted, of sensing ghosts, and communicating with the undead is a particular manner of being-in-the-world rather than an abnormal deviation from the world.” (Trigg, 2012, p. 295)



Jesus, Puebla, Mexico

This is an illegal photo, taken in a cathedral in Puebla, Mexico, where taking pictures is forbidden. It presents Jesus, probably one of the most famous returnees, in a way he is not usually portrayed. He is clearly marked by suffering and death, his human body is ruined. The emptiness in his eyes shows no mark of a soul.

The topic of the undead may seem like a weird trajectory in research about art, curating and artistic research, but I think the undead or the returned is a perfect example of many topics my text revolves around: the undead are an iconic representation of the unknown, something that surpasses our understanding. They represent the fear of not being able to control and rationalize the world around us. The undead is also a representation of limits and a study of the possibilities of crossing them. The undead, as a narrative, is a good example of art as research – how stories and images are used to give a form for something that disturbs us, in this case multiple things from the questions of life and death to social structures to the horror of the unknown, and to make an experience of uncanny fear into something we can share and explore together with others.

The undead, as I understand it, are not only zombies and vampires, but things that are believed to somehow have agency without having a human soul or spirit: robots, machines, non-human. Things that act among us but whom we believe do not have similar ideas of meaning and motivations as we (“we”) do.

# WE

“I use the word we—it’s true, I’m always having problems with pronouns. When I say the word we I’m aware of the double value it has. In one sense, it’s violent, I admit: I say we as if I were you and you were me. But it’s also a form of humility.” (Cixous, 2005, p. 31)

I am nothing without others. All subjects, beings, and things are constituted by their relations to other beings and things. It has been suggested (e.g. Judith Butler, Jean-Luc Nancy) that “I” could at some level be substituted with “we”. In their work about grievable and ungrievable lives, Butler recognizes “we” as a problematic concept – who is this “we”, who is included and who is not?

I confess to having some problems with the pronouns in question. Is it only as an I that I am responsible? Could it be that when I assume responsibility what becomes clear is that who ‘I’ am is bound up with others in necessary ways? Am I even thinkable without that world of others? In effect, could it be that through the process of assuming responsibility the ‘I’ shows itself to be, at least partially, a ‘we’? (Butler, 2016, p. 35)

But also, like Cixous writes, *we* is violent: it is decision-making concerning the other, on the behalf of the other. *We* is never all of us, even if it was meant to be inclusive. It is always an exclusive group, and referring to “we” not only excludes some but also represent those included. And to represent the other is not uncomplicated.

I often write and talk referring to “we,” “we” who do projects, “we” who think and act. This is a partly conscious and partly unconscious choice, giving credit to those I think with and work with – work never happens alone, never in a sterile vacuum. “We” also refers to the collectives I work with, other artists and curators, my colleagues, and friends. The problem is that I do not always remember explicitly who the “we” mentioned is, or I often cannot tell who it

is. Was it those who participated in the project, those I read while working on it, those who have been studying the same themes and topics, those I consider being in the same boat with me? Who is the "we" I think I speak with, and how can I be sure that they want to be included in my "we"? These same questions were considered in the Curatorial Conversations in the 10th Berlin Biennale:

It can be a supermicro: "we" as a team. We very subjectively chose certain artists and perspectives. We can also say that we are starting with ourselves and that's the "we". Of course, other people can align with that "we". It is an open "we". The artistic positions in the biennial are not only dealing with their own identity. Many works look into bigger issues. Therefore, we become visible through the artistic positions we chose for the exhibition, and through the questions they deal with. (Ngcobo *et al.*, 2018, p. 38)

However, the "we" is at a much deeper level embedded in our being as is usually thought. Margaret McFall-Ngai writes about the revolutionary notion of genomics: how individuals are actually not individuals at all, but complex assemblages:

We are now beginning to realize that 'individuals' aren't particularly individual at all. The organisms of developmental biology, along with Darwin's species, all turn out to be complex assemblages, typically made up of more cells of others than of their 'own'. (Tsing *et al.*, 2017, pp. 52-57)

She then describes how cells pass from the mother to the child and how our bodies contain cell lines of others. "We are thus not what we thought: every 'I' is also a 'we.'" The cells are not the only thing 'alien' to the assumed subject, but the singular body is actually a collection of bacteria and microbes, and those organisms, according to 'postmodern synthesis', are not individuals either. 'Postmodern synthesis' is a concept biologist Eugene Koonin uses while questioning the notion of tree of life, suggesting a 'web of life' instead. (Tsing *et al.*, 2017, pp. 52-57)

In philosophy, there seems to be a constant movement between *I* and *we*. Michel Foucault tracks this change as happening simultaneously when Kant wrote the text *Was ist Aufklärung?* (*What Is Enlightenment?*) and instead of focusing on a historical event and metaphysical systems proposed as a philosophical task to consider a recent or a contemporary event:

When in 1784 Kant asked ‘What is Enlightenment?’ he meant, ‘What’s going on just now? What’s happening to us? What is this world, this period, this precise moment in which we are living?’ Or in other words: What are we, as Aufklärer, as part of the Enlightenment? Compare this with the Cartesian question: Who am I? I, as a unique but universal and unhistorical subject? I, for Descartes, is everyone, anywhere at any moment. But Kant asks something else: What are we? in a very precise moment of history. Kant’s question appears as an analysis of both us and our present. (Foucault, 2003, pp. 133–134)

Posthuman theory has developed this thought further:

Taking instead the affirmative path, posthuman knowledge focuses, through critical and creative cartographies, on the margins of expression of yet unrealized possibilities for overcoming both Humanism and anthropocentrism by concentrating on the issue: who is the “we” whose humanity is now at stake? (Braidotti, 2019, p. 69)

This question of we is at the core of every act, event, and project, again and again reformulating. Who are we, how do we represent ourselves, who is included, who is excluded, who is invited? The “we” exists often without definition, as it was a law of nature. But it is not a force of nature, it is a result of a specific way of thinking and formulating that thinking, background, interests that are shared, ways of working, and chance – a coincidence of a place and a time, momentum, and a moment:

Because exclusion and inclusion are inseparable in the same moment, whenever you would like to say 'at this very moment,' there is antinomy. The law, in the absolute singular, contradicts law in plural, but on each occasion it is the *law within* the law, and on each occasion *outside the law* within the law. That's it, that so very singular thing that is called the laws of hospitality. (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 81)

*We* is not arbitrary but relational and structural. It can be a result of age, class, gender, culture, it needs careful attention – it is intimately linked to language and belonging. As a concept, *we* should be respected and used carefully but also celebrated and used extensively to challenge the toxic idea of an alienated individual who is responsible for everything alone.



Info board, Aavasaksa

This image above is taken in Aavasaksa, Ylitornio, in Finnish Lapland. It is from an info board presenting the history of the national landscape and the traditional midsummer celebrations. Aavasaksa is a high hill where you can see the midnight sun during midsummer. It is also an eerie place with dense fog, sharp drops, and traces from the past, that creates a feeling of not belonging, of the place belonging to someone else, and you as the possibly unwanted visitor.

When we think about “we” and “the undead” the distinction is clear. The undead does not belong to the complex phenomena of “we”. However, what makes them so scary is that they used to belong to this singular plural. They may still wear the same clothes and they used to be named like us. When they don’t respond to these names anymore, they are not under the spell and the control of nominalism. The undead represent the possibility of the other among us, or, the other in me, as Kristeva suggests.



“We” is at the intersection of being included and excluded, being heard or silenced, being seen or invisible. *We* is what supports us within all the uncanniness. At a practical level, this means for example collective work where the collective is what supports thinking and practice happening on the border of the unknown. When things, ideas, and thoughts are shared they become less strange. The strangeness in me is also the strangeness in the other, so we share it.

Paradoxically, the “we” that can be exclusive is also what helps us recognize structures that are biased and discriminating. In addition, and also paradoxically, this we is based on an imagined fellowship and belonging that is, in fact, based on imagination. We need to trust that the ideas, goals and values are shared, because the “we”, ultimately, is always a group of individuals with worldviews that are hardly ever completely the same. Unlike, for example ants, our existence is not structured by unambiguous roles and tasks in the community. There is no self-evident position and assignment as a part of the community for each individual. Everyone needs to create their own meaning, and this is what makes it difficult to be a human.

# WORK AND LABOR

Art has a complex relationship to work. It is production but not in the conventional understanding of realizing or implementing something. Its position as work is often questioned but it is completely opposite to idleness and inaction. Its complex relationship to gifts and being gifted, its nature between the material and the imagined, the sacred and the profane, homogeneous and heterogeneous, and art's position as neither merely communal nor individual has made it difficult to define what artistic work is. It seems to be hard to decide if art is a useful activity or not, and like Bataille argues, it is a problem for functional society:

*Homogeneous* society is productive society, namely, useful society. Every useless element is excluded, not from all of society, but from its *homogeneous* part. In this part, each element must be useful to another without the homogeneous activity ever being able to attain the form of activity *valid in itself*. A useful activity has a *common denominator* with another useful activity, but not with the activity *for itself*. The common denominator, the foundation of social *homogeneity* and the activity arising from it, is money, namely, the calculable equivalent of the different products of collective activity. Money serves to measure all work and makes man a function of measurable products. According to the judgement of *homogeneous* society, each man is worth what he produces... (Bataille, 1985, p. 138)

Work is one of the reasons I think that “art” should not be used as an umbrella concept for all the different practices it now is supposed to cover. It is quite a difference if one is producing art objects for open markets or doing artis-

tic research, trying to find new paths, “keep grasping towards what cannot be grasped, to encounter the unknown as unknown” (Laakso, 2018, pp. 187–188) as Harri Laakso writes, referring, following Blanchot, the artistic work as *unworking*: “I take my lead from the French thinker Maurice Blanchot (1907–2003). In his view an artwork is not an “accomplishment” or a production as such, a work of bringing to light, but has an imaginary centre that opens in what he calls “unworking” (*désœuvrement*), somewhere beyond being grasped by knowledge and naming.” (Laakso, 2018, pp. 187–188) Unworking is the work the art does, a sphere of nonknowledge appreciated by Georges Bataille. It can also be understood in the context of art as work, as a profession: work that is beyond work, that is very mundane tasks from writing emails to cleaning one’s brushes to the sublime task of wrestling the universe, the unknown itself. Unworking can also be perceived as a political statement, something that opposes the neoliberal idea of work as the greatest value, and also unworking prevailing conditions and structures, unworking the burden of all the previous artworks existing before the piece one is working on at the moment.

When one produces objects, the work is easier to understand. The more conceptual the works is, the more related to situations and relations, the harder it is to present it as “production”. This can be seen as a critical response, as Sansi suggests:

The interest of some contemporary art practitioners in intangible social relations and open processes, as opposed to the production of finished objects, can be seen as the result of a conscious critical approach to the division of labor and commodification in the modern world, the separation of work and play, commodities and social relations. (Sansi, 2015, p. 16)

Formerly, especially concerning composing but also in literature, there was a conception that the artist was merely a tool for some higher power to use and that the texts and compositions were products of these spirits that were just filtered through the mundane body of an artist. Today, because of meta work and because of funding structures and social demands, the artists need to prove that they are working. When nine-to-five working hours and self-disciplined routines are promoted, some parts of artistic practices are hidden. The

not-working, the digesting, processing information and experiences into one another takes time and is relevant, but remains an invisible part of the profession. Lucy Cotter discusses this in relation to artistic research, titling it toward inactivity:

I have been thinking that one of the disturbances and maybe one of the things to fight for within the emerging field of artistic research is the right to inactivity. The productivity of inactivity has always been a key to artistic practice, and the proximity of the academic system imposes some kind of expectations, criteria, which do not necessarily recognize inactivity as a mode of production. (Cotter, 2019, p. 43)

Inactivity does not match well with the fast-cycling neo-liberal world. But, thinking is hard work and it takes time and pauses. Thoughts and ideas emerge in the strangest times, but and in ways that do not resonate with the conception of “productive and useful work” whether it happens in your sleep or while taking a shower. This is because, as Cotter claims, artistic thinking often works through chains that are more associative than analytical, even if the analysis may come later. (Cotter, 2019, p. 46) Especially if working in an institutional context. these methods may be completely out of question, or at least difficult to justify.

Working within the field of art requires metawork that at times feels more exhausting than actual work. To explain one's work, to explain why it is important, to pretend that one's working is something other than it is. I would argue that work as a cultural norm and ideology is one of the strongest norms we have. It brings to light those who work in less conventional and precarious positions. *I never rest, but I don't know if I ever work either* (2018) is a title for texts about work and leisure collected from Estonian cultural workers investigating the precarious reality of cultural production, and maybe the most relatable title sentence I have ever read. The book contains texts about the many dimensions of the lifestyle where one cannot draw lines between work and leisure. And it is not only the precarious cultural field, or the semi-precarious area of research and temporary academic jobs, but work, in general, that is altering.

Perhaps the idea of “work” as such, as something that is an essential part of human life in the western world that our value seems to depend on it, must be questioned. In a world that cannot afford to offer jobs for all, at least not

even seemingly equally compensated and respected jobs, where every second person seems to be burnt out and free-market capitalism have lead us to a situation where the end of the world (or at least our civilization as we know it) is only decades away, do we really still want to keep work as a measure of human dignity? Or could the conceptions of "work" be altered, so that artistic work in all of its multiple and possible ways could be valued as no lesser profession? In "Forward into the future(s)" (2021) professor Tero Nauha considers the social contexts in which artists are working today and what options or futures there are for artists, what are the conditions, and what are the risks. Nauha notes that

Trustworthiness is older than capitalism. It goes hand in hand with credit and reputation. Artists today struggle with their intellectual property and requests for knowledge production in research and content. The change in conditions since 2001 has explicitly been from regimes of ownership to regimes of contract. It directly connotes with the changes from commodities to collaborative practices. But all the intangible attributes are human and are building blocks of human interaction and social structures. We need to trust, risk, and keep volatile at bay, so we can live and practice together. The key is the move from competing on attributes of singular players against each other towards the maintenance of these activities and performatives. (Nauha, 2021, p. 19)

Collectivity is needed. Even if work and labor are largely ideological questions, they are also practical issues. This issue of work, labor, and the right to it, became critical during the time of the pandemic, when the art world temporarily ceased to exist. Museums were closed, events and performances denied, and where there was previously much activity. It became obvious that artistic work was not comprehended in a similar manner as other works that suffered. While those working within tourism and hospitality were publicly valued, the worries concerning art were more about the public. There seems to be an understanding that art will always be a part of society, miraculously occurring without any resources or support, and it is just the question about the public finding it. While art is seen as an important part of society, it turns out that those making it are more or less invisible.



Eliisa Suvanto listening to Akuliina Niemi's work, Sandstorm 2019

In the photograph above, Eliisa Suvanto is listening to Akuliina Niemi's sound piece *THEY TRAVEL WHEN WE CAN'T SPEAK* (2019) during the Sandstorm exhibition we curated with Anni Venäläinen. The exhibition took place in the Yyteri dunes and explored the fragility of nature but also busy beach life and the possible tension between these two elements. Our aim was to guide the visitors to paths that would not harm the dunes and the plants, while also making the rare and seldom visited parts of the beach visible.

It seems self-evident that the environment does not do the work for you. There is still the curating, guarding, promoting, touring, installing and deinstalling to do, and doing all this outdoors can be even more demanding. But because of the environment and the beach setting many people seemed to think, even knowing that we did organize a large-scale exhibition, that we were on holiday. It was like a side-effect of the project with other thematic starting points to produce so much information about the presuppositions and biases we have about "work" and "holiday", especially in an art context.

# WHAT IF? (CONCLUSION)

The projects and research presented in this thesis usually start with the question “what if?” This research has continued as an experiment of endless what ifs, trying out, erasing, adding, combining. This process, studying the nature of the process-led practice, has always brought me back to the question and state of being in-between, in process, with that which is becoming. When writing about that which has no closure, no absolute truth, no final form, it would feel unfitting to write a conclusion. Instead, I explore this element of change as a path taken during this research, and also as a result. The outcome, how working in-between can provide fruitful experiences for artists curators as well as different audiences and researchers, is organized in the form of an encyclopedia, creating a system of concepts and documented projects. Instead of locking them in or handling them as stable concepts, the encyclopedic form is an organic pool where the concepts exist symbiotically, and depending on the reader, can continue their lives as something else, formulating and reformulating. The saying “trust the process” encourages one to trust in the chosen methods and goals, even when things seem to be going in the wrong direction. While the idiom may be a perfect guide for research studying processes, believing in the process has not always been easy. Not knowing and moving towards the unknown is demanding, but in a constantly changing world, it is also all that we can do.

Heraclitus observed life as change. Like a river, it flows forward. Minna Salami describes this river in *Sensuous Knowledge*:

A river is never still. When it meets an obstruction, it moves under, above, around, or through whatever prevents it from flowing. When blocked, a river revolts with all its weight, including that of the streams and tributaries that pour into it, until it flows smoothly again. Rivers flow

down mountains, valleys, and plateaus. They flow into lakes, ponds, and seas. With the help of gravity, they swirl, surge, and push toward their final destination, the ocean. (Salami, 2020, p. 151)

When we do not know, we can speculate.

Art, philosophy, politics and activism all create, suggest or propose new worlds and realities. They are places for imagining and dreaming, platforms for considering, together with others, the important question of *what if?* What if is the question questioning the state things are in, the question opening new possibilities, making existing structures visible and deconstructing them – what if? is the question of deconstruction, alternatives, openings, and becomings. *What if?* is a question of art that could be called speculative; art that cannot be escaped. Laakso writes about artworks that make one "face the things I cannot escape. They introduce a speculative art: An art, which is not truly representative (of a situation), or prescriptive (of the one truth), nothing to understand or interpret, but speculative of a certain potential." (Laakso, 2018, p. 209) This research suggests perspectives for speculation that can be considered as spaces for speculating together. The encyclopedia can be imagined as a material and three-dimensional form that, like an exhibition, contains multiple elements and possibilities for different paths and readings. It is also built like an exhibition, starting with a question, and aiming to find answers together, and then suitable forms for mediating the results. Finding the form was not easy, as intuitive knowledge does not immediately turn into language, that is because of the conventions, so much more suitable for expressing theoretical issues than non-verbal processes used to approach the unknown. What if the form had been a novel? Or a poem? Or a chart?

*What if?* is also where the various questions of my research come together: questions of possibilities, responsibilities, knowledge, nonknowledge, place, space, and the uncanny. One of my central theses when starting this research was that art is a way of creating and mediating knowledge, and a way to approach non-knowledge. Through the time of writing this the idea of art as knowledge production has become increasingly ubiquitous and art is acknowledged in the sphere of cognitive capital, even if the knowledge art produces often resists this kind of system. At the same time, Porin kulttuurisäätiö has kept realizing projects that have concentrated on archives, histories, identities, sites, and places. Along with the collective, we have worked with interdisciplinary groups of people and experts from different fields, all



holding different understandings of the world and its functions. This has proven that art is capable of building bridges and places for sharing information within multiple groups, and how large networks of knowledges are needed. This has also impacted the final form of the thesis, as the networks, however symbiotic and close, create fragmented perspectives and knowledges. Especially during the *Evergreen Inner Jungle* exhibition (Porin kulttuurisäätiö, 2021), while learning about the processes and classifications, how the plantations are being mapped and monitored, identified and named, how the database is kept and how researchers were struggling to mediate the impossible timelines and taxonomies to the visitors, the contractual nature of knowledge took a visible, sensuous and material form in the plants, the name tags, in the colonial past of botanic garden and naming of species. Possibly the most important finding in the process is the realization that even if art can produce knowledge and non-knowledge and provide places and platforms for approaching these issues, it is more than that. Art is an aesthetic experience, it surpasses the everyday. It is enriching and enlivening, or even earth-shaking. This does not mean that it cannot produce knowledge or non-knowledge, but it might be that it is exactly because of these attributes that it can.

There is no objective knowledge, and even if the idea of shared and coherent knowledge cannot and should not be thrown away, the understanding of knowledge and knowledge production must be critically revisited. Is it automatically good thing, that art participates in this activity, and what does it mean for the artists and curators, who already bear a great deal of social responsibility? And that alongside the conception of knowledge, could we also talk about experience, understanding, and meaning, and take these into more serious consideration alongside scientific knowledge? How can deconstructive processes used as a method in the research and projects presented here be continued and expanded upon? When I was studying aesthetics at Helsinki University, we were offered a course on art criticism. We were told that “all the artists nowadays try to write themselves”, but that “of course no one ever reads these texts.” This demonstrates that the thinking that occurs within art practice is not being taken seriously enough. The texts may not be perfect as texts, but they are one way of meditating what has been going on, the artwork is another way. And the experience that is created by the combination of the artist’s practice, the work and the embodied, spatial experience. There is a great deal of knowledge imparted in this relational framework. If we only look at the text, we deny some of its potential.

The process that brought me to examine the in-between has also brought me to think about hybrids. This interest in hybrids was inspired by the thought of Lynn Margulis and Bruno Latour. What if the deconstructive process opened wider to create symbioses from things further away from each other? What if? This question opens up possibilities that take place in the unknown, even uncanny, the gap between what we know, what we can and what we possibly want to change, and that which we do not yet know, that which we only feel intuitively. What if? happens in-between sense, reason and comprehension and experience and emotion. It is what binds them together, as they cannot exist without one another.

This dissertation studies collective research processes and is itself a collective approach. The analysis is based on project created together collectively, and it is executed collectively: even if I am the named author, it is a joint creation influenced by my supervisors prof. Harri Laakso and prof. Bassam El Baroni, pre-examiners PhD, Curator Saara Hacklin and Dr Lina Dzuverovic, proofreader Samantha McCulloh and graphic designer Johannes Rantapuska. The directions taken by the research and its form have been interesting, surprising and gratifying, and above all the result of many influencing impulses. I have been able to, and had to, give up the idea of mastering and conducting. This again highlights issues of control, trust and processes: instead of trying to control everything alone I needed to trust the group around me and the processes.

At the beginning, I was writing my dissertation in two separate parts: theory and practice. Originally, I applied to Aalto University's MA Visual Culture MA program because I wanted to combine my two practices, artistic and theoretical, but there seemed to be a gap that was impossible to overcome, even knowing that practice and theory, in fact, cannot be separated. "Praxis requires theory just as theory requires praxis. Practice-based research has nothing to say to artistic research if it rejects reflection and reflectivity". (Henke *et al.*, 2020, p. 25) Changing the format started from the question of what if? What if all the aspects of my work were equally presented? What if they were not labelled as "art" or "research" or "project" or "theory"? What if I presented the becoming-meaning in a form that would, instead of trying to deny its fragmented and open-endedness, express its fragmented and open-ended nature? What if the dissertation continued the method we have used in our projects, taking familiar forms to present unfamiliar and new ones, and thereby deconstructing the already existing structures that carry historical ballast and often invisible, neutralized and naturalized, consequences?

Using the same method in the thesis as in the exhibitions, is not limited to the themes and forms but also to the research process itself. Through the methods of selecting, listening, combining, thinking-with and narrating, the thesis creates possibilities for encounters and contributes to rethinking knowledge, process-based art, and curating. During the process, I came to understand that curating as a research method challenges how it is usually presented in academic discourses. Instead of concentrating on the differences between curating and curatorial the thesis presents how the work of curating is still exhibition making and thinking about the artworks, thinking about events, knowledge production, relations and reflectivity, creating better working conditions for artists and listening to them and the public, and how all this creates a research methodology. Curating occurs in-between, in-between the exhibition and public, the location and the artists, the theme and its formulation, and as part of a process with others. Instead of concentrating on the concept of the curatorial, this thesis concentrated on the processes – a choice that also proved how fixed the conventions of writing about curating are. Instead of thinking about what curating (or the curatorial) is, the dissertation takes it as a starting point for its usefulness. This dissertation does not concentrate on the theoretical or political aspects of the curatorial, it doesn't contemplate whether curators are needed or not, because it needs curating as a way of approaching and organizing different knowledges. The process of organizing and contemplating provided an opportunity to have a closer look at many of the themes that have been hyped in the contemporary art world for the last decade, many handling questions of care and hospitality, and how utopian and speculative they can seem considering the resources we usually have at hand. This realization also raised the question of whether artists and curators, always working in-between high hopes and disillusion, are on the verge of failing. However, and perhaps precisely because of this, we need speculative thinking. And if the hoped for care and hospitality is at times limited because of the conditions artists and curators work and live in, there is always some other material or immaterial gift to give and share: the beauty of thinking together, creating together, coming together on the verge of the artworks and unknown, creating meanings and meaningful experiences. All this, I believe, creates hope.

Using an encyclopedia is not a unique approach. The encyclopedia as a form has been appropriated and re-appropriated many times. Neither are collective practices a new phenomenon – but what is relevant today while writing this is the context: the time and culture where many of the fundamental basics in the western art tradition

have been questioned, from authorship to canon to exhibiting art. One layer is the emergence of artistic research and its relation to art as knowledge production, the conception conquered by capitalist system, and how this has affected mediating art and the praxis of organizing talks and symposiums instead of exhibitions, more demanding, more expensive, and not as flexible. This thesis documents and organizes this turn and shares practicalities learned, as well as admits the importance of exhibitions as platforms for presenting art and ideas related to it, and as places for encounters and shared experiences. In addition to the practicalities of exhibition making, the format of an encyclopedia makes it possible to equate the processes and the theoretical starting points, the moments of thinking when the ideas have not yet been formulated, the obscure invisible ideas behind the processes that can be given names of mutually understood concepts, even if these concepts may not fully capture the intuitive feelings. Therefore, an encyclopedia provides opportunities for mapping the complexities of exhibition making, curating and research- and practice-led working methods and sharing these with readers.

The projects presented in this thesis are outcomes of this fundamental question of giving form to the formless, but they are not meant to empty it, to undress the world, to turn the real into reality. Instead, they are places for speculation, and places where this speculation can take different forms and happen together with the others. *Pori World Expo*, *Pori Biennale*, *Centennial*, and this cartographic encyclopedia all are sites for exploration. The recognizable names are signposts but the paths can be queer and obscure. There is a logic, however uncanny: a logic of organizing that which cannot be organized. Therefore, the only thing you can do is make fun of your attempt, as well as the conventions. But the fun is, while joyful, also deadly serious, because so is art. It is play but it is also subversive, a question of life and death, the past, present and future (if there is one). The mutually understood and known conventions are the starting points when trying to make something new while making the new easier to approach with a recognizable name. We are vulnerable on the threshold of new, which usually is the space for making art, and I think we sometimes want to hide this uncertainty behind a language that sounds analytical and professional. However, I think this also impedes our access to the direct experience. Honesty can sound naïve, but can we ever truly discuss art as practice and phenomenon without it? Transparency requires radical honesty.

All the while, I believe it is important to hold on to the openness and to keep asking what if? It has been a pleasure to witness some of the ideas, thoughts, and

hopes presented in this thesis develop from ideas into practice. During the time of writing, I believe a shift has occurred. In the early days of our work as curators working collectively, site-specifically, and with a research- and process-led approach, this kind of practice was relegated to the margins. While documenting a domino effect of projects, where one research question always leads to an artistic outcome that then creates new questions, the thesis maps a global shift where many of the large-scale events now spread to unexpected locations around the cities consider social, spatial, and political questions in a new way. In 2022 *documenta fifteen*, curated by ruangrupa collective brought process-led, collective practices into the prestigious exhibition halls of Kassel. In addition, *The Milk of Dreams* in Venice curated by Cecilia Alemani was a significant turn in what, who, and how exhibitions can be built. After viewing these two shows, I saw the *Crimes of the Future* film by David Cronenberg (2022). This science fiction film chronicles the story of a male performance artist who grows new and unknown organs in his body. These organs are surgically removed during public performances. I could not help but think of the film as a swan song for the male auteur, the genius always producing unparalleled phenomena to the world that is thirsty for them.

From exploring alternatives and considering current discussions, the dissertation turned out to document a shift. This means that some of the chapters may now seem a bit outdated, and some of the most recent experiences have not yet been comprehensively analyzed, but perhaps this is also part of the nature of in-betweenness and process-led research. In this dissertation, questions of accessibility have expanded and are reflected upon when planning its form and possible reading methods. The idea has been to create a text that is user-friendly and invites a diverse group of readers to take part. Curating as a research method means thinking about multiple aspects of the project: the thematical starting points, forms and outcomes, spatial questions, practicalities, and mediation. Because mediation defines how the process continues, what are its impacts, and where does it lead in the future, it is highly relevant. This thesis is one way of mediating what has been learned during the process. But, through its form, it also contemplates the act of mediation itself.

## OVERLOOK

In *The Shining* (Kubrick and King, 1980) the hotel is called “Overlook Hotel”. The noun “Overlook” refers to terrain or a cliff with an attractive view. As a verb it refers

to failing: to fail to notice, perceive, or consider, to look past, to ignore. Is it this that makes Jack a dull boy? The unavoidable incapacity to be able to perceive and notice? Because we can never predict and see all, there will always be blind spots, structures we are so used to that we no longer see them, and the uncontrollable nature of the world and our being. *Overlooking* is a primary condition, and it is also a perspective bias.

In *The Shining*, we consider Jack to be the main character. When writing this, I considered myself the author as the main actor. But Jack is not the main character. We too readily believe this because of our human-centered orientation. In actuality, the hotel, together with the environment, is the main character. Place carries story. Similarly, in my practice, place defines projects, research questions, and results. It determines the forms, artists, and audiences. Place is framework and context.

But, like the/an overlook, art can also be the place to provide a view, to enable a vista, the heterotopia that makes it possible to conceive all the places at one time. Art can be a place for new perspectives, expansive views, emerging connections. It can create spaces for these experiences in other places. Sometimes it can be haunting, sometimes it is like magic.

## WRITING IN A WORLD WITHOUT MAGIC

The pandemic is documented and even overrepresented in the text, because while I was writing this thesis, the world outside was on pause. From 2020 onwards COVID-19, the coronavirus disease, forced everyone inside, all over the world, and everything momentarily stopped. There have been moments when I have felt that I need to start writing everything from the beginning, or in the past tense, because nothing is ever going to be the same again. Artists everywhere were suffering from lost job opportunities. The radically worsening economic situation is going to have a massive impact on our field. Meanwhile, there is also hope: everyone has known, or at least unconsciously anticipated, that we cannot go on like this. The climate crisis will at some point affect how we work, travel, and live. Now that moment came sooner than we were prepared. But is one ever prepared for an apocalypse?

There is something positive in this, there is always hope, and for me the most important discovery has been to rediscover the magical power of art. The enchanting experience of the embodied encounter with a work that moves you, changes you, expands your thinking, or merely exhilarates you.

New solidarity can be gained, new practices are launched. The global art world needs to find new ways of holding events as travel becomes increasingly impossible. As a spatially and bodily oriented person, I was struggling with everything happening online, but it also made me realize the enormous power art and the experiences related to it have. This does not mean that there are no good things happening online – for the Pori Biennial 2020 it worked perhaps even better than the original idea and the archive found its home on the internet. There have been interesting and important, even intimate encounters, performances, discussions, and events – but mostly I want to be bodily present in a space to experience art. I love spaces and places, they give me pleasure. I love the magical moment when art starts happening in a place, when it emerges, comes into being. I love the collective process behind this moment. I love the excitement of waiting for the space to turn into something new, the change in its narrative, the new narratives that will start spreading. I love the experience of being on a threshold, where something is about to happen. I am about to enter into a setting that is yet unknown.

## APPROACHING THE UNKNOWN

Art is a way of approaching phenomena that escapes traditional sciences and conventional languages. Hence, it is a tool for trying to, not capture, but perhaps share all the oddities and uncanniness we live with. And still, here I am giving it all these names and concepts. At times, we need names and concepts to mediate the fundamental unknowability of the world, to share what we have learned. This naming process can also be seen as a game – what if I call this experience with this name? Would this way of presenting something make it sharable, so that I would not feel so alone with this weirdness?

But perhaps this weirdness can, at some point, create new paths and routes. To respect the uncanny and eerie as such and the new as new and not immediately comprehensible. As Allan Kaprow wrote in *Mapping the Terrain*: “one shouldn’t rush too quickly to label life as art; it may deaden the game” and that “the artwork was to remain, as long as possible, unclear in its status.” (Lacy, 1995b, p. 155) So to keep the game going and open-ended we can keep adding acts, events, and concepts, while simultaneously admitting that not everything can be conceptualized. As a site for exploring the unknown, art can take an important role in the process of deconstructing social hierarchies and expectations, providing places for non-norma-

tive experience. How to do this without reducing this potential and substituting old ideologies with new ones? Normalizing the non-normative is a question that must be considered and re-considered within every new project.

At this stage, I must point to the word “site,” a place that grounds us to something. As we know, horror works best and is most terrifying when it is presented in the context of the known, familiar, and the everyday. Realism makes surrealism seem more possible, as the real and the unknown could be waiting just around the corner. In art, this realism and the known context can be the place. When we want to explore that which is new, unknown, still incomprehensible and in a state of becoming, it can be made more approachable with the choice of location: a place that is already known, felt, experienced. This tension between the unknown and known becomes part of the experience. It also creates new encounters and bridges past and present experiences which are shared and narrated.

During the process of writing, I have spent incalculable hours at Hietaniemi cemetery. The company of the dead calms me and puts life into perspective. I am, quite concretely, negotiating with the dead. Generations after generations have pondered similar paradoxes and conundrums as me, and now they decay below the surface of the earth. It does not matter how hard I work, think, write, fight, it will still be a drop in the sea. This does not mean we should stop fighting for our visions. Quite the opposite – as our being is limited, it should be used well. But in the end, we are just eternally circulating atoms, all matter from the same exploded stars, all evolved in the same pools.



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### **Kiitos/Thank you**

Kiitos thank you to all the amazing people around me who have helped in the process (and life in general): Eliisa (this wouldn't have happened without you!), Anni, Andrea (bestest peer support, avocado friend and memes), Sanna, Porin kulttuurisäättö & Space Invaders, artists and working groups, Harri (thank you for support and endless inspiration) & Bassam, Taina (for always believing in us), Denise, and other helpful Aalto people, fellow feminists, colleagues and friends, Mette, Raija, Onni, Helmi & Töppönen, Laakson ihmiset ja eläimet ja Banaanikerho, Atte, pre-examiners Saara, Lina, and graphic designer Johannes, and Samantha for doing an excellent job with proof-reading. Thank you residencies Stiwadio Maelor, Maltfabrikken and TUO TUO and thank you Kone Foundation for supporting my research. Kiitos Hietaniemen hautausmaa ja sipsit.



*Encyclopedia of In-Betweenness. An Exploration of a Collective Artistic Research Practice* presents art as a socially prominent phenomenon that is always in a state of becoming. It suggests that art is on the front line of perceiving new emerging ideas and ideologies while it also impacts and creates them. This means that art is obliged to seek what we, in fact, cannot yet know.

Mapping the entanglements of the contemporary art world the thesis provides new perspectives on the relational nature of our being and documents a turn in the contemporary art world: how collective practices, site-specific and process-led approaches have emerged from the margins to the mainstream. The thesis presents how collective art projects can function as research platforms providing new knowledge and places for encounters and uses exhibition-making and curating as methods. The form of the dissertation – an encyclopedia – is part of the methodology. The thematically color-coded entries map the current discourses, but they also point out the hierarchical conception of knowledge itself.



ISBN 978-952-64-1347-1  
 ISBN 978-952-64-1348-8 (pdf)  
 ISSN 1799-4934  
 ISSN 1799-4942 (electronic)

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