

Before the I



# Before the I

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# Between thought and deed, me and you

The first thing that we must be able to accomplish, as artists, is to find a way of communicating to others — perhaps other artists, or people who might provide support with a project — what it is that we are actually trying to do. I say ‘the first thing’, but of course there would be no communication were we not already engaged in some sort of private process of intellectualisation, formal rationalisation, evaluation... if we were not already engaged, in other words, in trying to give form to our ideas, through the means and media available to us *as artists* (as distinct from the means at the disposal of writers, or dramatists, or salespeople). So, yes, that interior origination of an artistic concept must come before we are able to communicate it to others; but the first time we assume a public role as ‘artist’, with any given project, is when we begin to explain what it is that we might want to achieve, how, and therefore what resources we might need, what challenge we might be undertaking.

There’s a strange conceptual circularity about this process, and the artist who is at this point of departure with a new idea slips back and forth between verbal and non-verbal forms of expression: between imagining the formal ‘language’ that the work will inhabit, and giving the kind of descriptive, illustrative account that is necessary in order to explain to others what one is attempting, and why one is attempting it this way.

This movement, between private formal-conceptual experimentation, and description and communication, is difficult. It quickly becomes clear that not all concepts can be communicated simply, that not all decisions or intuitions have a clear rationale — they cannot be reduced to the operations of a scientific experiment. Even after a piece of work has been completed and exhibited it is often the case that one only becomes fully aware of the resonances and readings it contains when one returns to it, or when others respond to it.

This publication is not a book ‘about’ the process of putting together an MFA thesis exhibition, and it is not about the individual works that the 13 artists in that exhibition have produced.

It is a document that comes out of the space between the private formalisation of an idea, and the public rationalisation of it. It is, then, a record of the attempt by these artists to find ways to talk to one another about what they do, to initiate support structures and collective research processes, in order to more fully situate, and contextualise, and then realise their work.

During the course of the year, the students formed a number of ‘inquiry groups’. To begin with there were a large number of these and many people were members of more than one. Gradually, through a fairly natural process of reduction and assimilation, three distinct subject areas began to emerge: materiality and the body (the ‘Handbrain’ group); questions around language; and issues relating to ‘relationality’ — the ways in which audiences are moved from static ‘reception’ or consumption of an artwork to participation in its production.

These are still pretty expansive areas of research, and all the participants, in each of their groups, has had to work to define the areas of commonality that exist under these headings. This has not always been a smooth process or one marked by absolute consensus; but any attempt simultaneously to define a space for deliberative collaboration, and to occupy it meaningfully, must necessarily be complex. Contestation and argument, which may include sustained disagreement, are part of the process.

I suppose there might be some readers who could conceivably ask, why don’t you just let them make their work and stop bothering them with all this? And I would guess that my answer to that plea must already be clear from the way I’ve framed this short text. Helping these artists to situate their practices intellectually, in relation to their peers and their surroundings, helping them to articulate clearly the processes that they themselves are innovating, means helping them to develop skills that they’ll need to draw on throughout their careers. This is absolutely central to our task as educators; indeed, it may be the only real task that we have.

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# In conversation: Don't touch the artwork

Laura Darbutaitė / Danielle Heath / Katxerê Medina



In the following discussion Laura Darbutaitė, Danielle Heath and Katxerê Medina consider the relations between their developing practices, art institutions and audience. As well as the projects they have undertaken as part of the Valand Academy MFA: Fine Art thesis exhibition *Bad Timing* at the Göteborgs Konsthall.

In site specific installation Laura Darbutaitė focuses on architectural element in the premises of Konsthall. A fire exit in the main gallery is reconsidered as a trait of the site being a bearer of the historical changes of these premises. Danielle Heath has created an installation employing video and performance. She embodies a trickster character to encourage behaviours that are futile and absurd, creating moments of spectacle carried out by the audience themselves as they perform tasks instructed by the trickster. Katxerê's video project investigates the effects of neo-liberalism upon the Swedish welfare state based on her own experience of unemployment where she was led to apply for a work at a cruiser ship. Her video installation rethinks themes such as motherhood and labour, immigration, language and the place for art in contemporary society.

**LD** Laura Darbutaitė

**DH** Danielle Heath

**KM** Katxerê Medina



Fig. A. Danielle Heath.  
*Twist, Delude, Dissemble and Flimflam (The Trickstar's Guide)*.  
Performance in development.



Fig. B. Katxerê Medina.  
Still from the video *Run Around*.



Fig. C. Laura Darbutaitė.  
*Exit in a permanent location*.  
Work in progress.



Fig. D. Laura Darbutaitė.  
*Exit in a permanent location*.  
Work in progress.

**DH** I think we should discuss this idea of the artist as an agitator in relation to the audience and then the artist as agitator in the institution, as defined by Martin Irvine.<sup>1</sup> He defines the institution, in our contemporary society, as schools, museums, galleries, commercial market systems, and professions. Irvine also suggests that the interdependent relationship of these institutions generates a dominant narrative of what is recognised and validated as art and what is not.

In my work, there is a desire to agitate, to see what the world looks like from a different position. In relation to this I have researched the trickster, who throughout mythology has functioned as a character to upset, but also to re-establish the prevailing order of the village, tribe, powers that be, or we could go so far as to say, the institution. Using the idea of the agitator within an artistic practice works as a catalyst or an instigator of change, or an anti-authoritarian figure. At the moment in the Bristol art scene in the UK there is a growing movement called #wedontneedgatekeepers<sup>2</sup> which is protesting how the city's art institutions are getting the majority of art public funding rather than individual artists. I also think this movement is a traditional way of thinking of artists as agitators in opposition to institutions whilst still having a very codependent relationship with them, well not necessarily that traditional but certainly connected to the post-1960s when artists started having this idea of rejecting the white cube and the introduction of performance as a political act etc. This way in which artists are agitating from this post-1960s era all the way to the contemporary day generates a kind of cultural capital for the institution, so this just succeeds at being another spectacle for the institution. However the example of the Bristol #wedontneedgatekeepers movement pushing for a different distribution of funds, at least from individual artists, suggests a desire for a redistribution of power.

**LD** This idea of the artist agitating and simultaneously depending on the institution points to the complicated interrelated nature of the two. Following on from the artistic approaches triggered by the rejection of the white cube, that you mentioned, another example could be artists conducting

<sup>1</sup> Irvine. *The Institutional Theory of Art and the Artworld*. Georgetown University, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> #wedontneedgatekeepers twitter feed.

site-specific interventions in institutional settings, that emerged around the same time. In the first chapter of *Triple Bond*, Wouter Davidts<sup>3</sup> follows a historical lineage from the '60s to more recent projects (made in 2008) by artists Daniel Buren, Santiago Sierra, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Doris Salcedo, who are disturbing the art institution by *intrusive* actions in the form of alterations of the space. As Davidts points out, the aim of these artists is to cease the regular functions of the institution by testing physical capacities of the building where the institution is based. In these cases, the co-dependency between the agitator and the agitated place can exceed extreme gestures. An example of it can be illustrated by Santiago Sierra's *Removal of a Museum's Glass Windows*,<sup>4</sup> when after the removal of the artworks from the gallery space, the artist dismantled the windows and doors of the museum by taking out the glass panels, furthermore, disconnecting the security equipment and leaving the building bare.

Emerging around 70s, these radical interventions, reconsidering the architectural properties of institutional sites, were met by different approaches to intervention — artists working with the museum's collections. In 1989 Kirk Varnedoe, chief curator of MoMA (New York), introduced the Artist's Choice Series<sup>5</sup> inviting artists to work with artefacts from the museum's collection, in order to 'select, juxtapose and comment.' This type of intervention, in comparison to the examples mentioned before, comments rather than agitates and is directed towards the re-contextualisation of the items in the collection by making subtle alterations to the institution. In these two examples the institution invites the artist to work within the site, therefore, the possible agitation is discussed and agreed upon by both parties. Thus my recent involvement with a site-specific strategy of working is driven by dialogue with the institution rather than agitation.

**DH** I think you work on the basis of building up a relationship with the institution, gallery or museum. You do this by asking people how they feel about the place, interviewing, researching, examining the archive and discussing it. Then using these methods with the institution/site as source

**3** Davidts. *Triple Bond*, 2017.

**4** Exhibition at the Museum Dhondt Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium, October 3-November 7, 2004.

**5** Jeffrey. *The Artist as Curator*, 2015.

material. Maybe the concept of the artist as agitator is perceived as aggressive but who is it being aggressive towards? Is it the institution, the art world beyond the individual artist (defined by the interdependent network of institutions), or the audience? There is the idea of agitating to make something happen, and I think this is at the heart of a lot of artists' practices, to make something happen in society, maybe to bring down the institution, I believe that for some artists bringing down the institution means literally getting rid of all of the systems in contemporary institutions and starting afresh, but for others it is reducing their ranking in the hierarchy and changing the way they relate to artists. I think you can see this when an artist, or curator for that matter, tries to create a work around community interest, which maybe the institution is seeking to legitimise because it recognises it has cultural value. However, the interest of the institutions seems to have limitations. Let us take the recent example of the Queens Museum's President and Executive Director Laura Raicovich and her resignation.<sup>6</sup> She wanted to take the Museum into socially responsive areas such as becoming a kind of sanctuary space that connects immigrants with social services. This was allegedly met with a lack of interest from the rest of the board. There are contradictory statements from the board and from Raicovich, about whether she resigned or if she was invited to resign. And the story and continuous disagreements continue to unfold around the leaving of Raicovich from the Museum.

**LD** It seems that the aim of the artists and curators is directed towards socially engaged practices in order to question the uses and meanings of the museum as a civic space. To make it communal, as not just being a place to display the objects but to reconsider alternative uses that these spaces can provide for the audience. This makes me think about your practice, Dani. It seems that your practice is not socially engaging per se, but there is a strong emphasis on involvement of the audience. The invitation for a play with the audience. Is there an agitation towards the audience? Or the institution?

**DH** Well, we could say the institution relies on the agitator

**6** Pogrebin. Politically Outspoken Director of Queens Museum Steps Down. *The New York Times*. 18-01-26.

as a form of renewal, in that they are in a codependent relationship and that the spectacle of agitation gives accreditation to the institutions. I don't aim to bring down any institutions, in terms that either demolishes it or changes its hierarchical position. It is more to bring focus on to unacknowledged systems of behaviour showing up in particular sites, such as patriarchy propped up by bureaucracy.

7 Fraser. From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique, in *Artforum* 44, 2005.

- KM** Down with the patriarchy! (*laughs*). I just want to place here the idea of “outside of the institution”, that maybe this “outside” or “inside” doesn’t exist. We all are inside, in one way or another. As Andrea Fraser says “the institution is inside of us, and we can’t get outside of ourselves.”<sup>7</sup> I see clearly that there is no outside-inside the institution, and that institutional critique is institutionalised. This is already a dated idea as we are in, what I suggest we can think of as *post-institutional critique era*. Questions like how can we do alternative forms of institutional activity is a common terrain in the critical management of art organisations today.
- LD** It seems that similar questions — inside vs. outside and public vs. private are also raised in the consideration of public spaces as well. Who controls the public space? What agency does a public actually have in the civic space? Tensions regarding these questions are very present in the recent case in Vilnius, Lithuania, where an open call invited artists to propose a project for a memorial in one of the main squares in the city’s centre. The winning project was to be chosen by a group of experts and a public vote. After both groups of voters made the decision, local politicians started raising question as to whether the winning project was actually a memorial at all. Finally, the decision made by experts and the public was suspended. This case is still under discussion.
- KM** Maybe they need now some agitator artist to protest that. Not long ago I talked with someone about a massive protest against the political attempt from five years ago to close down Göteborgs Konsthall. We have been facing governmental cuts in culture since the financial crisis

resulting in art centres, institutions, museums, galleries and organisations being positioned into a delicate position of uncertainty. I think that your project, Laura, is very interesting because it draws attention to these tensions.

How do you see the tension in the fact that Göteborg Konsthall is moving? And does this relate to the fact that they are probably moving to a so-called industrial area that is now in the middle of a gentrification process?

**LD** Multiple attempts to close Göteborgs Konsthall and public opposition to these is a big part of the history of that institution. Although it is not entirely clear where the institution is moving to, the determined date for this is 2020. So, if we take into consideration the timeline of this site, it was originally built for city's 300-year celebration and on the moving date, it will be one year shy of the 400-year celebration — the organisation and the architectural site were inseparable for almost 100 years. Thus when facing this future separation between organisation and site, tensions may arise when an official decision on why and to where the institution is moving is announced. On the one hand, the relocation might be seen as instrumentalisation of art for urban planning purposes; but on the other hand, the building where the institution is currently based is obsolete and the relocation seems to be needed. Yet, there is a lot unknown factors in the current situation of Konsthall and these uncertainties stir interest.

**KM** I think for you, Laura, the artist is more of a *questioner*, the one who comes in and questions the relation between space, history and time.

**DH** And in your case, you use a site-sensitive point of view, you are aware not only of your physical relationship to the site but to that of others as well.

**KM** And “to go about seeking”, what is this place (Göteborg Konsthall)?

**LD** To begin with, the whole concept of the Scandinavian konsthall is a very specific cultural institution (and even in Scandinavia each konsthall probably differs). I couldn't identify any articles regarding the nature of these

institutions, but it doesn't fall into the category of being a museum because it doesn't have a collection; and it is not a gallery because it doesn't handle sales. In a sense, it is a contemporary art showroom focusing on emerging artists and temporary exhibitions and is free of an entry charge. Moreover, in the case of Göteborgs Konsthall the architectural dominance of the building is overwhelming and, in my opinion, even uncomfortable. So I am interested in the architectural properties of this Konsthall; and how these affect and govern human bodies in a public space.

- KM** And going back to the idea of artist as agitator: as Dani suggested, I don't generally see the artist as an agitator. I think that we cannot separate the representation of the artist and the person, with their own background, political views, and social engagement. So we are here looking at the world and then we are attracted to certain things, themes, topics or even problems that somehow we think need to be dealt with, worked through, solved or pressured. It is a constant search for what we want to do here in this world. I think that art should not just be about the self-expression of the artist but rather function as a device for criticising and reflecting upon the social world encountered in everyday life.
- DH** Do you feel there is any responsibility to be an agitator? I feel like there is almost an art history pressure that encourages the idea of the artist being an agitator, from Fluxus to Paul McCarthy to Rachel Maclean.
- KM** We definitely have the potential to be agitators. Putting our finger where it should not be. Rebels are agitators, activists are agitators. I am going there and I am picking up this and saying, "Look, this is wrong in society, we need to look at this and rethink it. Look how we define and think about ourselves. We have been shaped or even colonised by certain ideas that we don't even think about anymore". In that sense, yes, artists have some responsibility to be an agitator.
- DH** But do you think that it is the responsibility of the institution to host an agitator?

**KM** Speaking for myself, I don't want to do something that won't make any difference at all. I am inspired by Tania Bruguera's concept of "Arte Útil", where art is understood as a task of practising the future with, as she says, "a different society in mind".<sup>8</sup> Connecting this idea with our conversation on art institutions, specifically the museum, Tania's project with the "Museum of Arte Útil"<sup>9</sup> also challenges the way art institutions continue to be ruled by modernist ideas and asks for the reinvention of a museum that is more suitable to addressing the urgent questions of contemporary art, such as usership, social value etc. Theorist Stephen Wright has an important role in that project too.

**LD** As well as suggesting the shift from the conventional author-spectator relation to initiator-user mode, that prompts the communication and collaboration between two. I think it strongly reflects in your practice, Dani, that your project seems to question artist-audience relationships and codependency of each other — who is the maker, and who is the observer? Who is responsible for whom? Katxerê, your project employs ethnographic methods, you invite the audience to follow the narrative of what you have experienced as a woman, as an artist in relation to bureaucratic systems.

**KM** I would say that my project takes an auto-ethnographic starting point to develop its content and concerns through various performative and documentation strategies. But anyway what about you Laura?

**LD** My project employs forms of immaterial investigation to acknowledge the physicality of the building, site, place and choreography of our bodies moving in these spaces.

**KM** I also think that we have in common a bodily investigation of space. I agree with feminist theorist Donna Haraway that a situated and embodied perspective offers interesting viewpoints on unacknowledged issues.<sup>10</sup> What is specifically highlighted in my perspective is the relations between art and unemployment. I also address problems about the way we are living today and our relations in more general terms. The idea being that my experience of unemployment opens a critical reflection about various social issues such

**8** Bruguera. Reflexiones sobre el Arte Útil, in *Arte Actual: Lecturas para un espectador inquieto*, 2012.

**9** To see more about the project webpage: <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/museum-of-arte-util/>

**10** Haraway. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective, in *Feminist Studies*, 1988.

as bureaucracy, capitalism, nationhood and gender.

- LD** Well I think it all comes back to the relations, us as artists in relation to subjects and objects of interest. And then to the audience.
- KM** It would feel very utopian and hippie if I say that I want to change the world (*laughs*). But if I can make one person reflect on something that is at stake in my work, it's already enough. And if the audience, passenger, user, "paddlers and swimmers"<sup>11</sup> (*laughs*) create new thoughts, connections and associations through my work then even better! I can't hide the fact that I do these works to change something in the way that we relate to each other, and with the world at this moment in history.
- DH** So you are an agitator (*laughs*).
- KM** Well, I think you won. What I really want is to make people question the way mainstream political and media discourses shape their minds. You know, when I started to reflect on my personal experience I asked myself things like, "Why is this important? Who cares?" I think my answer now is that we should really start knowing things with our senses, and therefore also in a more poetic way before we start judging them. And this is very clear to me in the case of unemployment. The former Swedish prime minister Fredrik Reinfeldt who initiated this campaign against unemployment, which led to the present situation in Sweden, where unemployment is seen as an individual problem rather than inherent to the capitalist system, was once asked whether he had ever met anyone who had lost their job. Of course, he hadn't! Well, mine is indeed a very classical feminist approach to artistic research, placing the emotions of lived experience against patriarchal ways of perceiving the world.
- DH** There is also another very feminist example that is the taking up of space, Greenham Common an all-female peace camp that was protesting nuclear weapons for many years for example, and you see this in some artists' work in relation to the white cube. I have seen Ann Hamilton completely dominate a space before. It is also the awareness of your physical position in relation to the gallery or

<sup>11</sup> Here is reference of the terminology that Göteborgs Konsthall use to identify different audiences.

institution, because the behaviour of the audience when viewing artwork in a gallery or museum has changed over time, and their perception of appropriate behaviour towards artworks has also changed. There is limited research into this relationship of how we move around a gallery. However, scientists such as Henry Adams<sup>12</sup> have started looking into this. Personally, I do relate to the physical presence of the audience in my current project, in which I am trying to create a level of unease that we both feel. But also, the audience's perception of the gallery or institution is key in thinking about how we slip into behaviours because the institution generates normative ways of viewing artworks.

12 Adams. *What a Physics Student Can Teach Us About How Visitors Walk Through a Museum*, 2012.

**LD** The particular behaviours in these environments. Don't touch the artwork! (laughs)

**DH+KM** Yes, don't touch the artwork! (laughs)

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# Cartographies

André Alves and Oscar Svanelid



Cartographies are methods of rendering territories visually. To understand how things are positioned to one another in space, mapping how they distinguish and relate. In this sense, a cartography is always a double movement of understanding translated into vision.

With these artistic cartographies, we aim at capturing artistic processes as a map. We do not want to confine artistic identity in a finished and stable work of art. The artistic cartographies of Danielle Heath, Katxerê Medina and Laura Darbutaité draw forth themes and bubbles of interests that we see processed in their research. Just like the map is not equal to the territory, these cartographies do not unfold but chase the whole artistic process to achieve some level of specificity. By identifying and drafting a constellation of terms suggesting both singularity and connectivity we provide a map that may be used to explore these artists in further depth.

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**Oscar Svanelid** is a doctoral candidate in art history at Södertörn university.



HIGHLIGHT



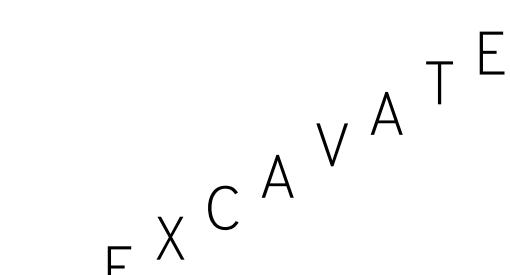
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MATERIAL



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MEMORY



REVELATION



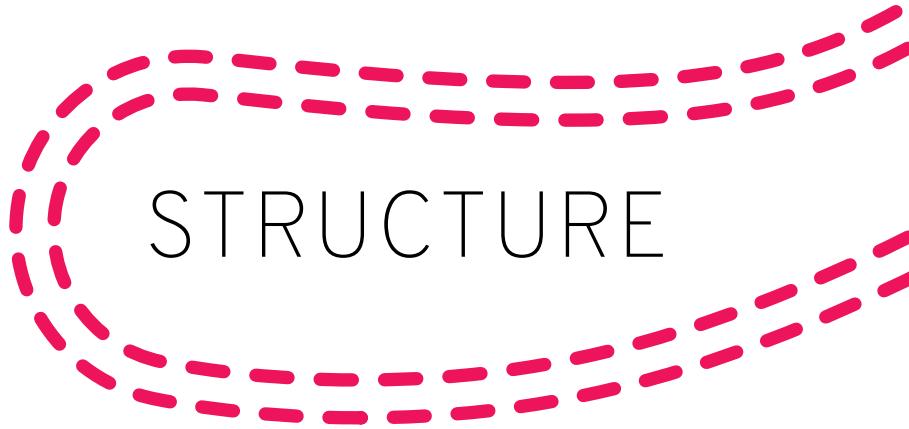
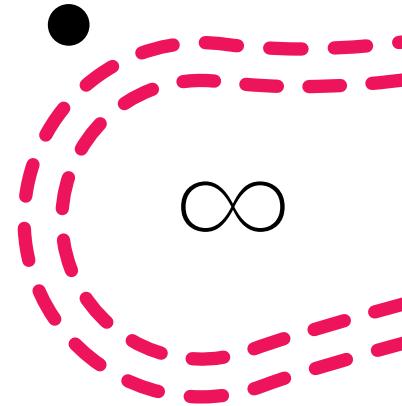
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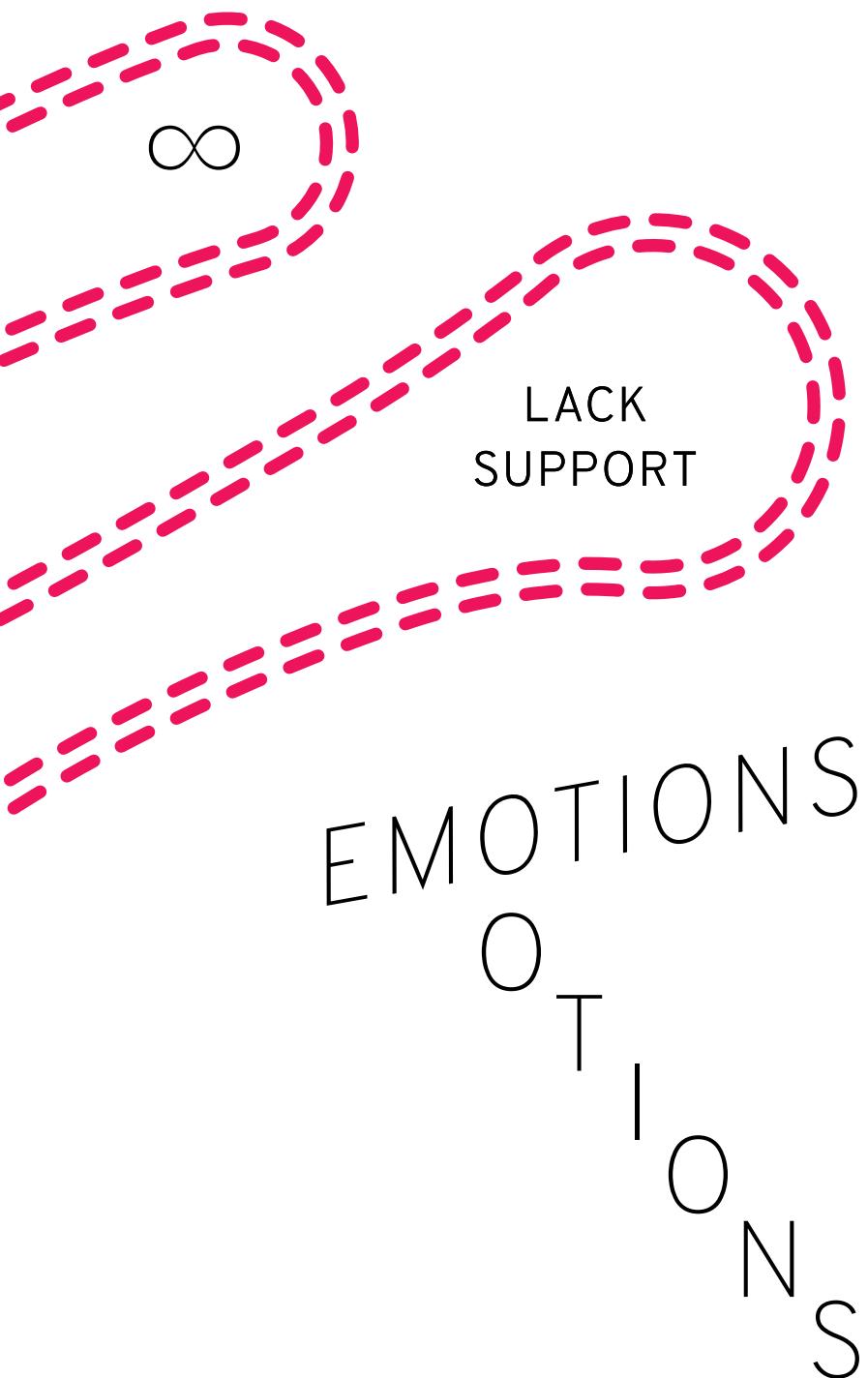
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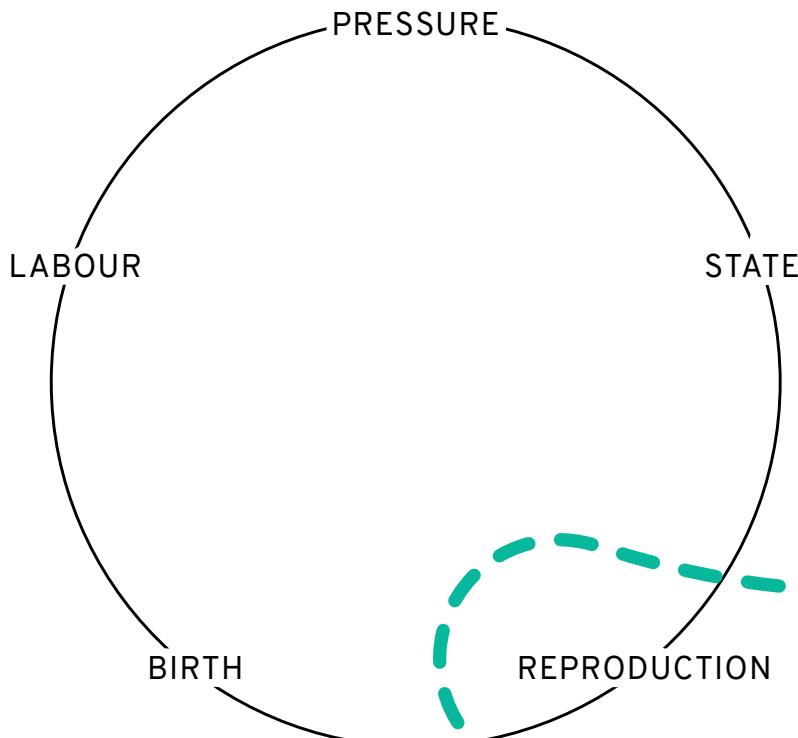


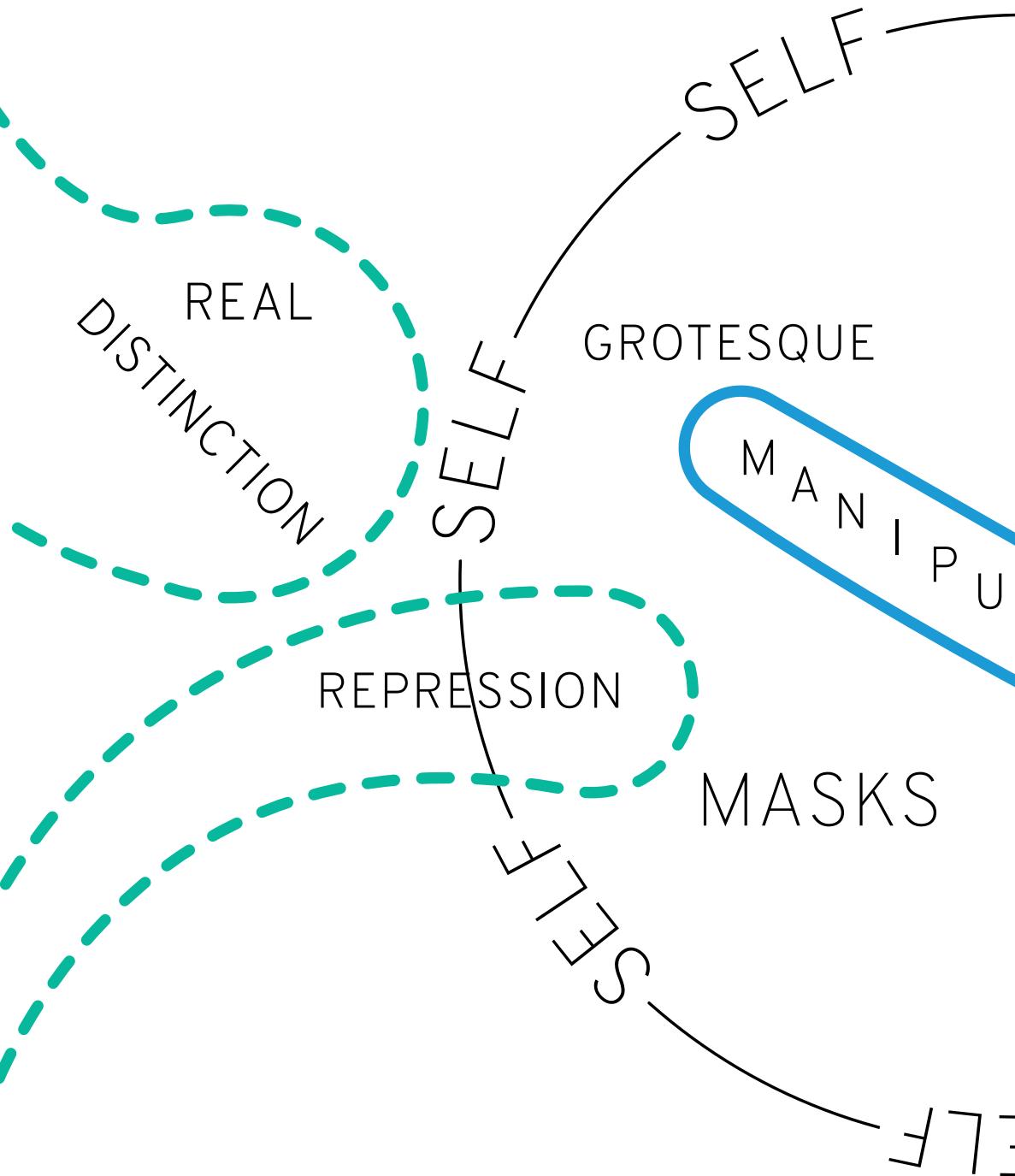


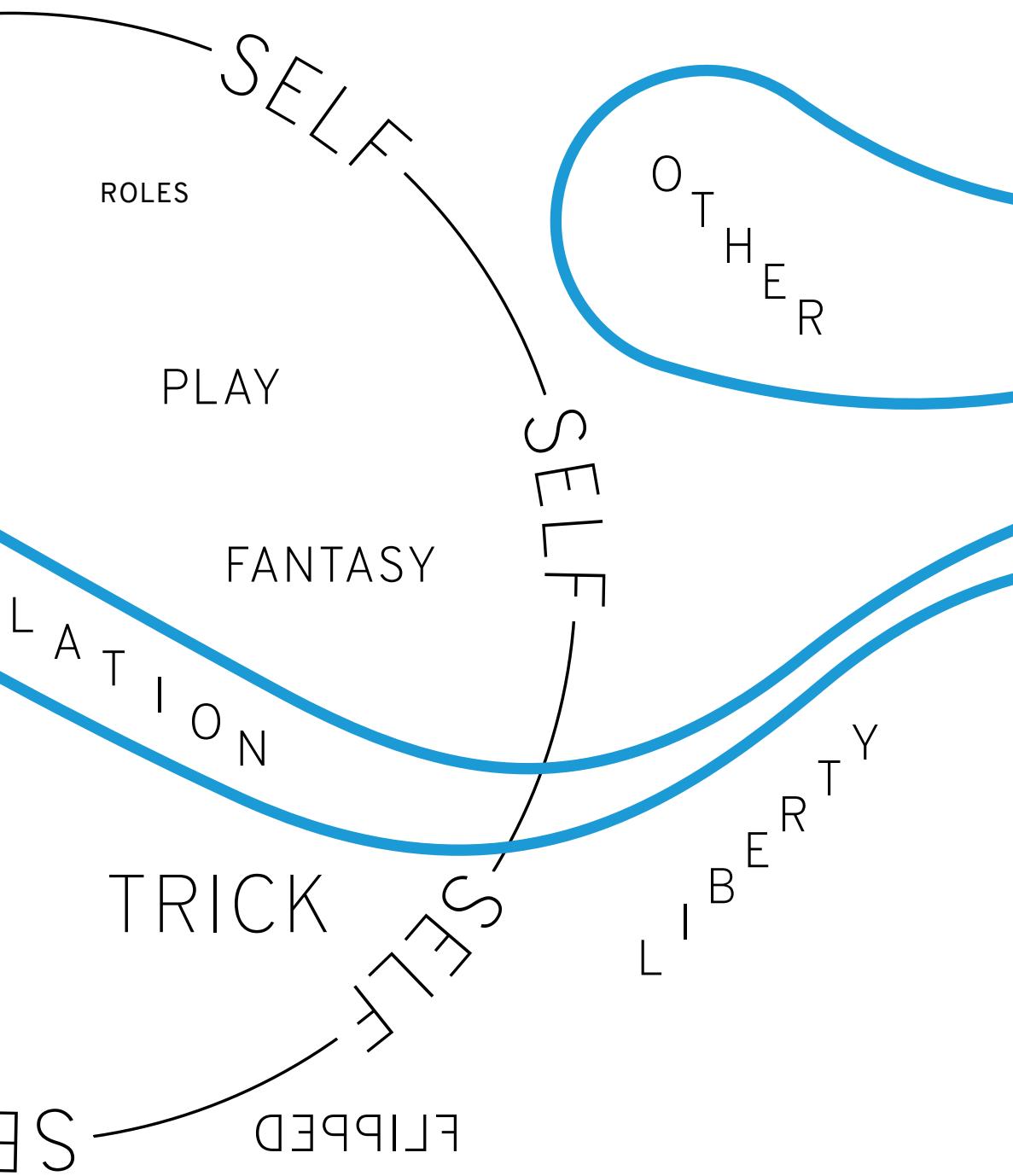
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# Figures

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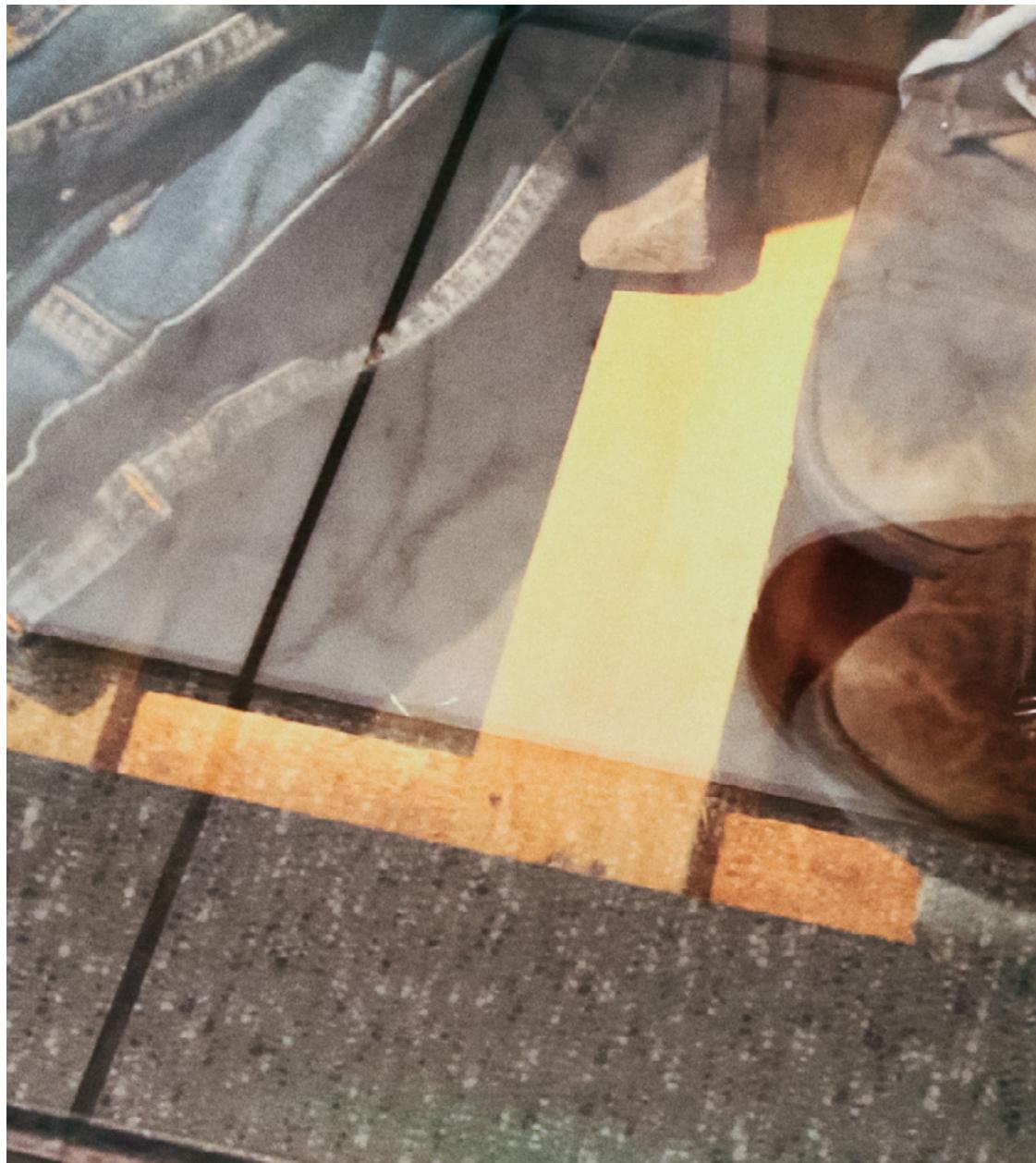
Danielle Heath. *Twist, Delude, Dissemble and Flimflam (The Trickstar's Guide)*. Performance in development.



**Fig. A**



**Katxerê Medina.** Still from the video *Run Around*.



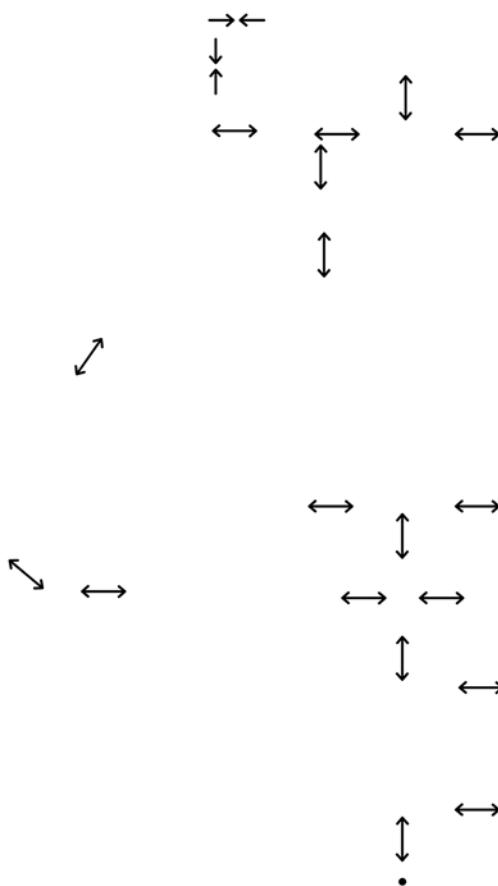
**Fig. B**



# Fig. C

Laura Darbutaitė. *Exit in a permanent location. Work in progress.*

1923  
Göteborgs Konsthall

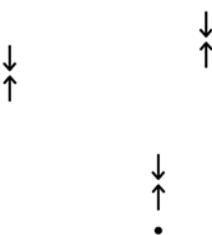


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# Fig. D

Laura Darbutaitė. *Exit in a permanent location.* Work in progress.

2018  
Göteborgs Konsthall



**Fig. E**

Image from the Handbrain workshop.

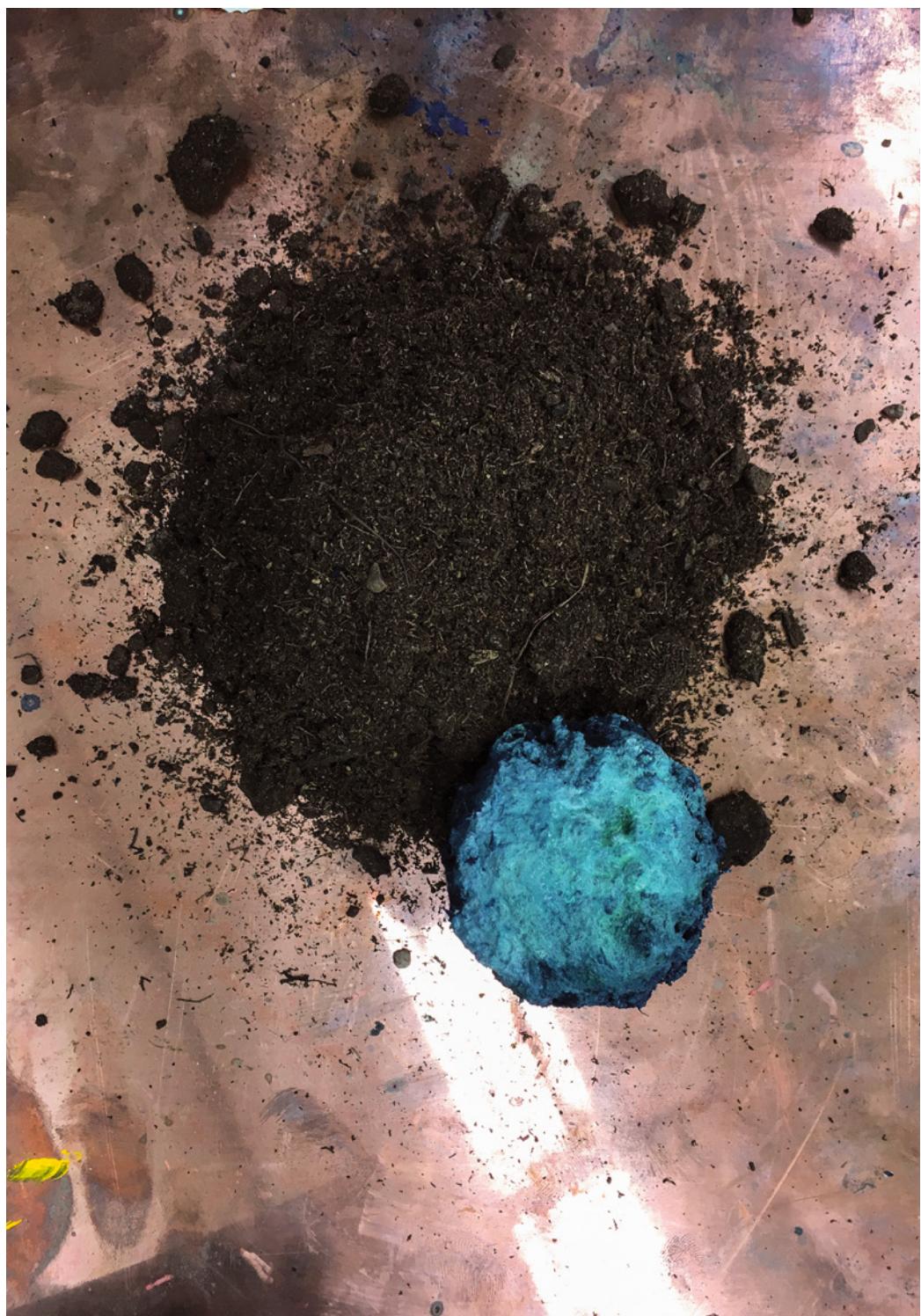


Image from the Handbrain workshop.

**Fig. F**



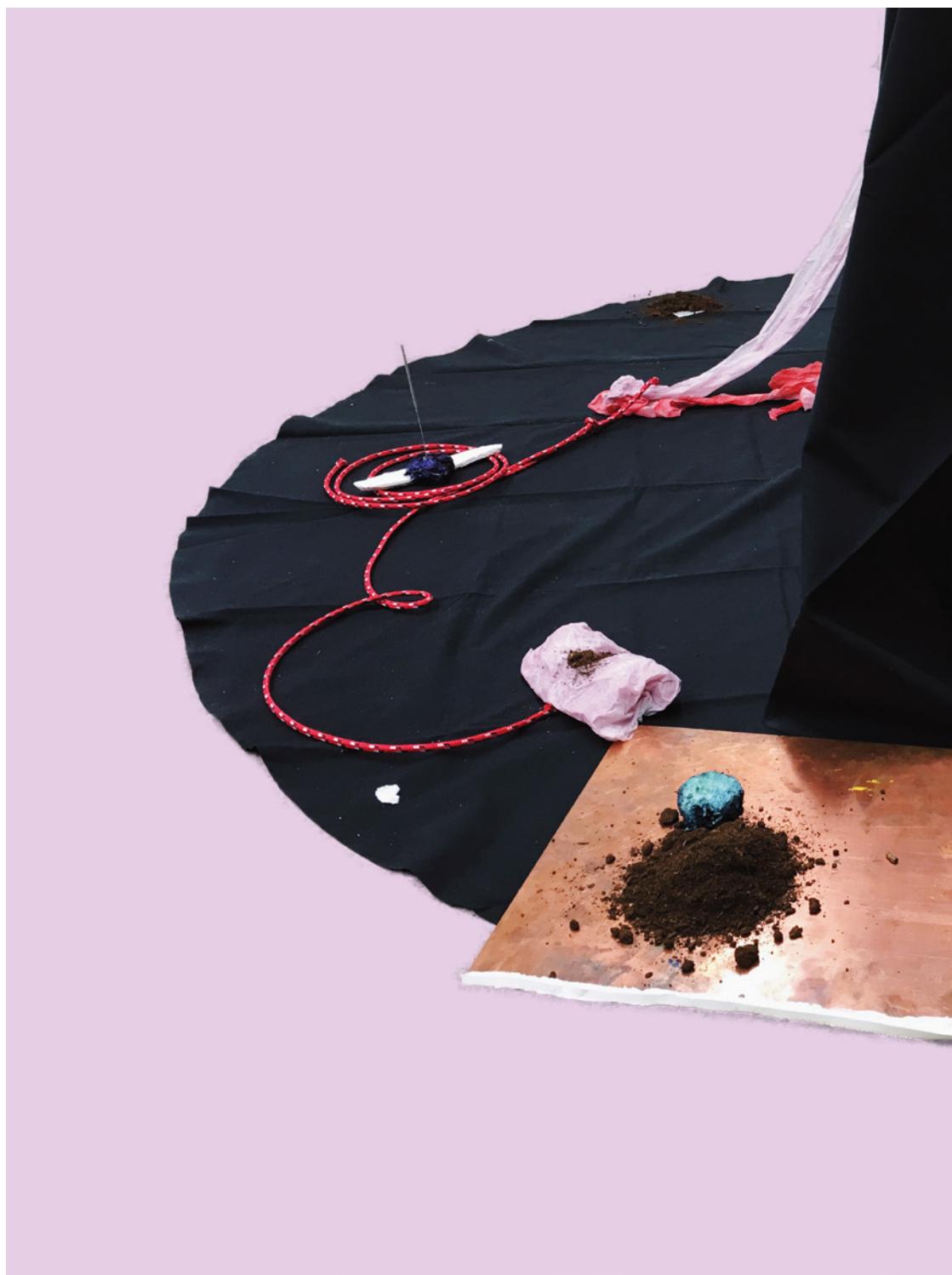
Image from the Handbrain workshop.



**Fig. G**

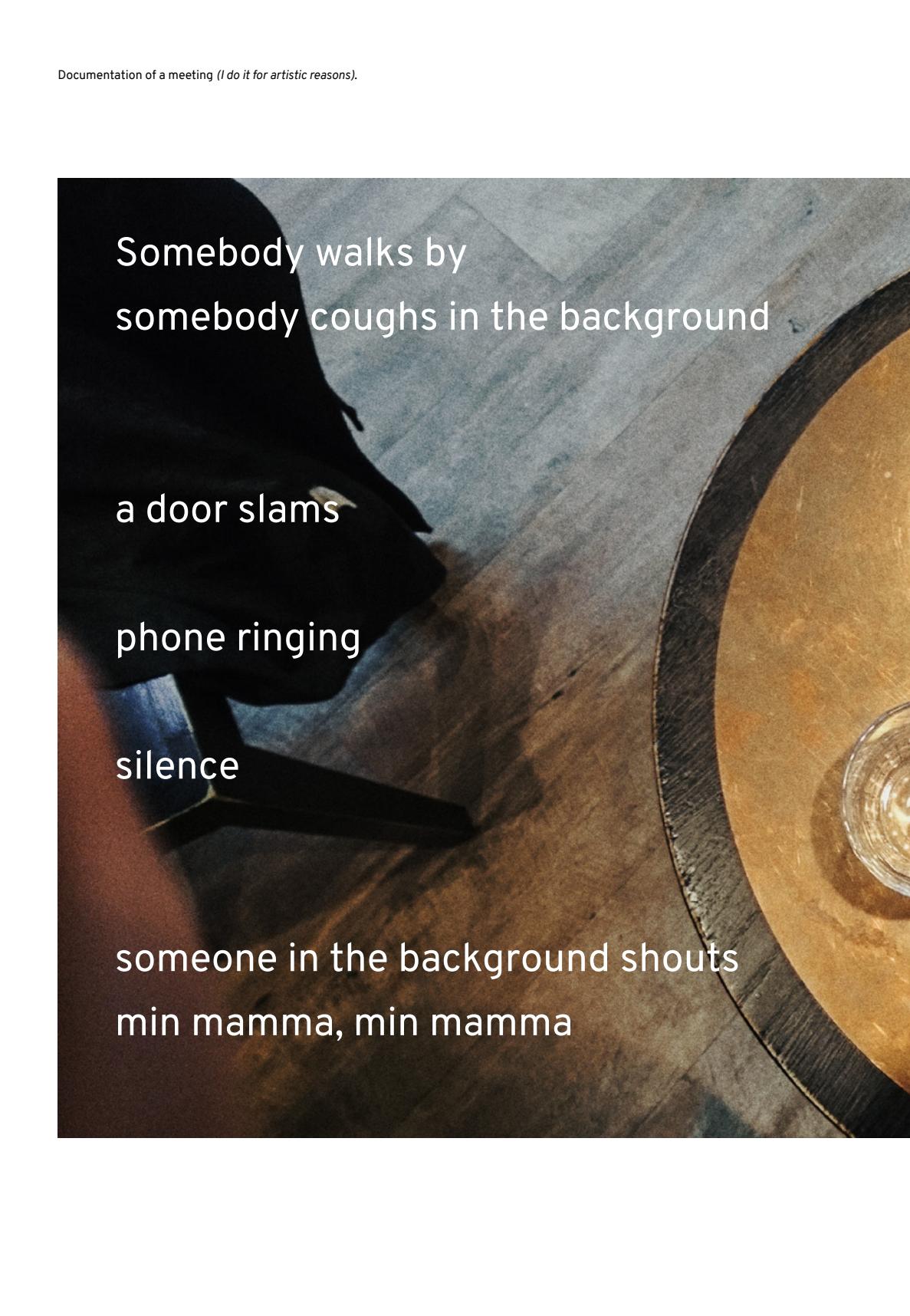


Image from the Handbrain workshop.



**Fig. H**





Somebody walks by  
somebody coughs in the background

a door slams

phone ringing

silence

someone in the background shouts  
min mamma, min mamma

**Fig. I**



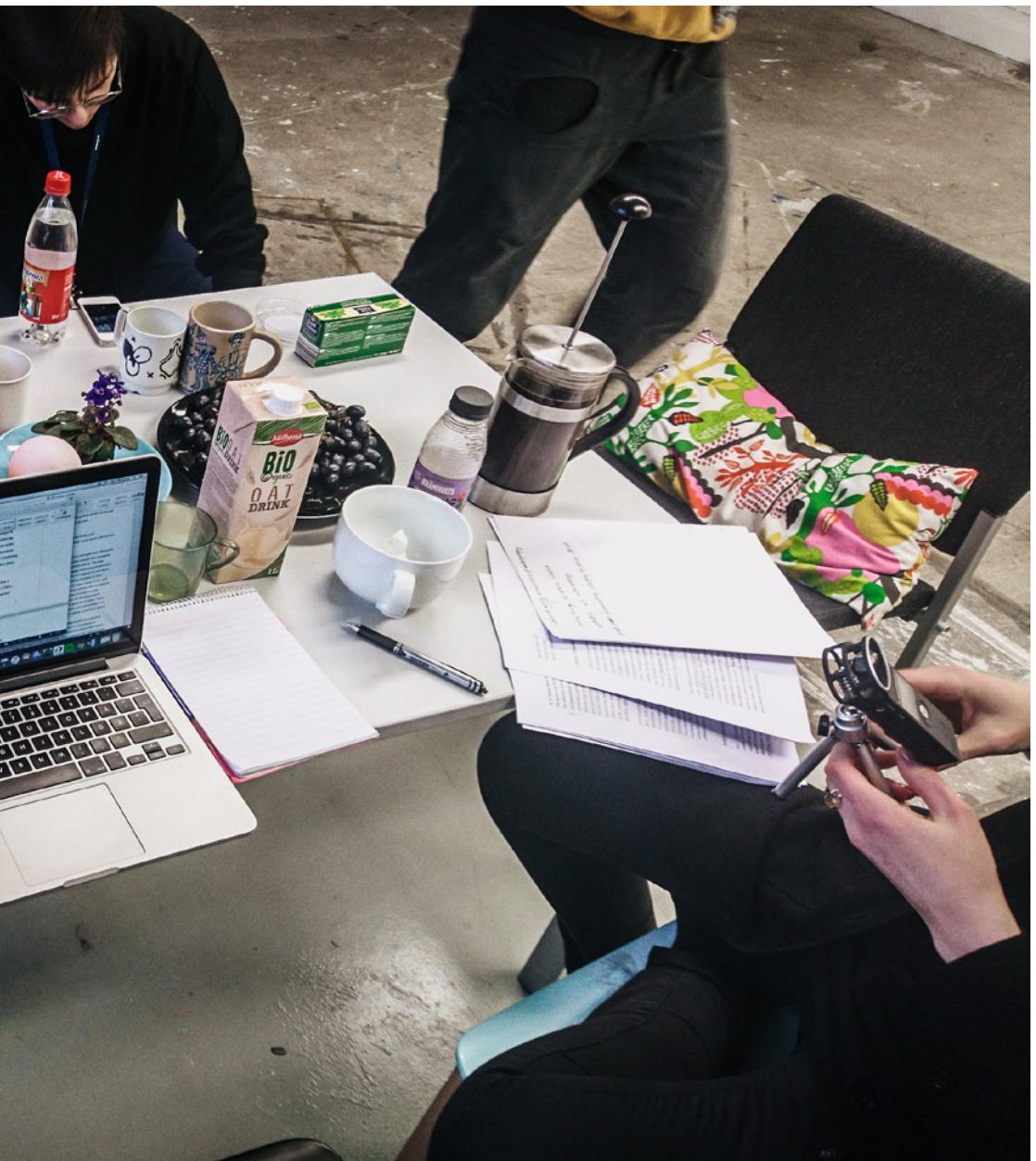
laughter

long silence

Documentation of a meeting (*I do it for artistic reasons*).



Fig. J



Documentation of a meeting (*I do it for artistic reasons*).



Fig. K



## Fig. L-M

Riikka Gröndahl. *Visualisation of artistic research in an animal research facility.*

It's okay for you to see the surgery unit, because there are animals in there now? You don't feel bad about that?

No, no. Can I take photos there?  
-No. I don't think so.

As we take one grip,  
we release another

Jamila Drott

*“All artists whether primitive or sophisticated have been involved in the handling of chaos.” Barnett Newman, 1943-45*<sup>1</sup>

*“The mind is a muscle.” Yvonne Rainer, 1968<sup>2</sup>*

## Matter sets things in motion

I’m talking to my sister, the archaeologist, about passive and active artefacts and about the “agency” of objects. In her field there is a debate around whether objects are to be viewed strictly as material, physical things; or as bearers of relational properties, with the power to initiate situations and courses of events. The question is if human intelligence and willpower can control the material world we live in, or if the material conditions we created, to some extent, control us. An *agent* can be defined as “any element which bends space around itself, makes other elements dependent upon itself and translates their will into a language of its own”<sup>3</sup>.

Artists involved in a material practice instinctively feel the power of the materials and the objects, that lie embedded in their complexity. We *know* that a touchable thing, made out of a physical material, can put the minds and bodies of people in motion. The belief in this is a prerequisite for our work.

## Some thoughts on material practices and objects

In her famous essay *Against Interpretation*, Susan Sontag wrote that we need “an erotics of art”.<sup>4</sup> She calls for perspectives that do not primarily look to find intellectual or conceptual meaning in a work of art, because such a narrow angle hinders us from experiencing the art work with all our senses. Her text tries to defend art against the type of analysis that seeks to control it, to break it down into small parts, to scrutinise each and every one; in order to disarm art’s power and make it submit to the rules of the intellect. She requests an art-view that does not separate form from content, that does not reduce the authority of art by overlooking its sensual power and energy.

<sup>1</sup> Newman. ‘The Plasmic Image’ in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art – A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*. 1996.

<sup>2</sup> “It is my overall concern to reveal people as they are engaged in various kinds of activities alone, with each other, with objects and to weight the quality of the human body towards that of objects and away from the super-stylization of the dancer”, Yvonne Rainer, 1968. Statement accompanying her choreographed, multi-part performance for seven dancers, interspersed with film and text: *The Mind is a Muscle*. Wood, Catherine. *Yvonne Rainer: The Mind is a Muscle*. Belgium: Afterall Books, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Callon and Latour. ‘Unscrewing the big Leviathan: how actors macro-structure reality and how sociologists help them to do so’ in *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology – Toward an integration of micro- and macro-sociologies*. 1981.

<sup>4</sup> Sontag. ‘Against Interpretation’ in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. 2009.

Artists involved in a material-based practice also know that the ability to release control — and take it back at the right moment — is key to unlocking a world of knowledge and discoveries, infinitely more multifaceted and wide-ranging than that which we can grasp with our intellects and describe with words. Rather than trying to outsmart the art-game by means of rational thinking, and figure out the next spectacular move, the person involved in a material-based practice often relies on the dynamics of the work-process to lead the way and continuously open up new opportunities. It is a process that at times can be exhausting. This engagement in sticky, noisy handling of often obscene and obtrusive materials, is committed in the faith that fortunate twists will occur, skewed and miraculous coincidences, that could not have been foreseen or calculated.

A material-based practice can seldom guarantee a predictable outcome. We enter into a process where we take control over a material, and at the same time release control of our thoughts. As we take one grip, we release another, tricking ourselves out into the unknown. Yes, it is we ourselves who decide the founding premises. We set the stage. Introduce the materials. Invite ourselves. But, what happens next is, in part, improvisation. This means being prepared to put oneself in an uncannily disoriented situation and finding oneself lost. More often than not, we arrange this game so that we are forced to expose our vulnerability by putting our weakest cards on the table and let them be called, because it is in them we can usually find our greatest source of power, when we succeed in playing them right.

The material-based practice often generates *objects*, existing in a space. In their space they establish relations to the surrounding scales, to other objects and the bodies that move around them. In an art-context, these bodies are usually not united by a common agenda, but are simply there as an individualised mass, with the sole purpose of relating to *the object*.

The object can sometimes be a spatial situation, like Robert Morris's *Untitled (Mirror Cubes)*, or like Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Mirror Rooms* — a sculptural situation

to step into and become absorbed by. Some objects can be more “authoritarian” than others, demanding of us to adjust physically and spatially to their terms, like *Tilted Arc*, or any other of Richard Serra’s large steel structures. Other art-objects contain material stories, rich in symbolic meaning and associations. I am thinking about artists like Louise Bourgeois or Rosemarie Trockel, who continuously have expanded their *genres* by experimenting with and incorporating new modes of productions, and new types of objects into their respective practices.

### Sticky networks

When the Brazilian artist Lygia Clark used relational objects that the viewers themselves could manipulate, the goal was to create multi-sensory, therapeutic situations, where the boundary between human and object dissolved. Many of her works, that aimed at enhancing sensory perception, required an “agency of the objects”, a belief in the objects’ power to generate specific situations, where the interaction between human beings and objects were at the core of the art work. In Clark’s work, the objects were tools, aimed at fulfilling a specific purpose for the people that encountered them. The objects (for example her *Sensorial Masks* from 1967) were meaningless without the human activation, and yet, the human activation could not take place without the objects.

Objects and artefacts bear the stories of their own creation and history, and are engraved with the traces of human usage and activities that give them authority and emotional charge. The symbolic power of a relic develops through what we believe to be true about its past, and the continuous interpretation and re-establishing of the circumstances surrounding its previous whereabouts, ownerships and so forth.

Objects can assist us in drawing lines through time, to connect our present surrounding to spaces of the past or other imaginary/fictive/semi-fictive worlds. A recent memory from everyday life comes to mind. My four-year-old daughter is looking at a relief in stoneware, standing at

our kitchen table, and asks me what it is. I tell her that her great grandfather, who was a ceramicist, made it but that he is dead now. She strokes her little hand over its surface. I can see how she is deep in thought, and I wonder if she, just like me, is now travelling in time, aided by the relief; finding a piece of herself in a time before her, where she can anchor herself. Silently, she repeats what I just said. In me, the relief evokes scent-memories; the smell of the wind from the seashore, blowing into my grandfather's studio, carrying with it scents of wild roses and seaweed, and the visual memories of sun reflections on the brown ceramic-tile floor in the workshop, the fir branches swaying in the wind outside the windows. These memories cannot possibly be awakened in my daughter's mind; but for her, in that same moment, other images are activated, sprung from her own fantasy and experience, that are nevertheless associations to the small stoneware relief we are both looking at.

Our interaction with historically and socially charged objects and materials that were shaped by many others' intentions, long before ours, is involved in extensive networks of transactions and reconstructions of both materiality and meaning. As we process the objects, materials and spaces, we inscribe ourselves in their history, and take control of their future by leaving traces that give proof of our existence. At the same time, we are dependent on the physical world around us, and defined by the material conditions we live and work in "... as humans we are involved in a dance with things that cannot be stopped, since we are only human through things"<sup>5</sup>.

As extensions of the body, objects can help us gain increased control over our material subsistence. Objects can be obliging tools, facilitating efforts of will and intentionality to make their marks in the material world. They are the accomplices of human agency. This in turn contributes to a relationship of dependency, where our reliance on the objects makes us helpless, or with Hodder's words *entangled*, or *entrapped*, in a sticky network.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Hodder, *The Entanglements of Humans and Things: A Long-Term View*. 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## The mind-world connection

Is it when we engage in processes *with* the materials, when we act in response to the physical world that we become ourselves? Is it through the *making* that we, the material practitioners, develop our subjectivity? Or is it by imposing ourselves on the materials, shaping them after our will, that we manifest our human agency and formulate our existence? Archaeologist and anthropologist Lambros Malafouris gives an alternative perspective on agency, beyond what he calls “the internalist-representationalist view of human mind and intentionality”<sup>7</sup>. He means that agency emerges when human and material unite in a mutual process, extending over a certain amount of time, and takes the potter at the wheel as an example. “The shaping of the pot becomes an act of collaboration between the potter and the mass of wet clay rapidly spinning upon the wheel.”<sup>8</sup> He describes intentionality as an interactive phenomenon, and the material not as passive, but rather as significant for bringing about the intentional human state. The important question to ask ourselves when we talk about agency is therefore, according to Malafouris, not “who made it?”, but rather “what happened?”. The focus is shifted from *the author* to the process.

The material-based work offers opportunities for self-suggestion, methods to “disappear” into the work, and through a fairly controlled modus operandi lose control. An artistic production not simply focused on the intentions of the artist, but also taking into account contingencies of the process, must involve an acceptance of lost control, embracing the very plausible possibility of getting lost. It means being prepared to abandon solidified identities, truths and definitions in order to gain access to a realm where it’s possible to make the uncertain and chaotic materialise, where discoveries can be made. What I refer to is perhaps a utopian creative condition, the one where we might feel truly ourselves by losing ourselves, if you know what I mean? The final product however — the object that comes out of it, does not always reflect the glorious and emancipating experiences of its creator. Making art

<sup>7</sup> Malafouris. ‘At the Potter’s Wheel’ in *Material Agency: Toward a Non-Anthropocentric Approach*. 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 34.

and showing it means exposing our vulnerable selves as materialised avatars to fly freely through the skies and to sometimes watch them as they crash brutally to the ground. Even though we learned, and by now know, that art-making is a potentially violently painful procedure, we will do it again and again, because we are addicted to the thrill of losing and regaining control.

Sometimes we use the material based process to let abstractions take physical form in our hands. By interpreting and shaping, we take control and make the abstract graspable. When concepts are filtered through our hands, shaped by our bodies and visualised, they might become more real to us. We are obsessed by this: to establish abstract ideas in the world as things our bodies can relate themselves to, to taste them and chew them over until we feel sure we know their taste well enough to claim them as ours. As we drag the pure and unsoiled ideas into the dirty material world and make them dance to our rhythm, we may temporarily feel like mighty conquerors of wisdom and knowledge. Though Malafouris would probably call such a feeling “anthropocentric” and argue that it is fair to say that it is the materials that dragged *us* onto their dance floor.<sup>9</sup>

### Lost control

In *A Field Guide To Getting Lost*, Rebecka Solnit<sup>10</sup> writes about uncertainty as an artistic tool. The book is about getting lost, not only in a terrain, but also in one's own life; and about the necessity of letting oneself go, to surrender to the unknown. The art of getting lost is essential to the ability to experience adventure and mystery and deeply connected to the thrilling aesthetic experience traditionally described as “the sublime”. The idea of the eternal expanse, with its possibility for disappearance and dissolution, has a strong visual power that continues to seduce us: the void that refuses to yield information, this non-communicative black hole, that we both fear and long for, keeps haunting us and is therefore a distinguishable thread that runs through modern and postmodern art history.

Loss of control, when it's not voluntary, can lead to fear

**9** Making art might essentially be an anthropocentric activity altogether, and as such, philosophically quite hard to justify (but who cares? We're in it for the thrill). J.D.'s comment.

**10** Solnit. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. 2006

and panic; a sense of acuteness. A state that in turn gives rise to a reaction. When frightened, we often experience a strong sense of presence and sharpened senses. In critical situations we focus, and to avoid falling we might start fumbling, grasping for something concrete to hold on to. Such situations, when we manage to navigate through them, can sometimes prove to be productive.

Many years ago, I was locked up in a prison cell in Amsterdam. For hours on end I sat in a room so tiny that I could not lay stretched out at my full length on the narrow wooden bunk. I had no idea where the prison was situated geographically, since I was brought there in a closed prisoner transport, and there was no window to look out through. There was nothing to do and I did not even have my own clothes on, but was now dressed in anonymous prison wear, with the exception of my own panties which I was allowed to keep on. On these pink panties, the shape of a heart was drawn with a line of tiny plastic diamonds. I realised that the diamonds could quite easily be removed and used as tools to draw on the cell walls. The concrete walls were painted with a thick layer of greenish beige paint, ideal to scratch with my fake-diamond tools. For hours I drew with a focused intensity, to the sporadic background sounds of my co-prisoners' screams mixed with the heavy footsteps of guards pacing through the corridor. When one diamond became blunt, I plucked the next and continued my work. I now remember this experience with great satisfaction regarding the drawing; that in my totally helpless situation, it became a way to conquer the space and its materiality, and kept me calm. Later, in my work as an artist, I returned to these drawings, or the memory of them. The desperate movement of the minimal plastic DIY-tool on the dull prison wall, the energy and focus of this specific drawing-process, succeeded in breaking my inner powerlessness and alienation.

As artists, we also lose control when our work meets an audience. In the tension between the subjective experience of our material practice and the viewers' encounter with the finished work, the possibility for "misconceptions" arises. At the moment we show our work, we lose control

over it, and are deprived of the role as the sole rulers of our own universes. When the time-span of the material process has passed, the remnants of the process remain as physical objects. These objects will enter into new situations in relation to an audience. The objects free themselves of our control, and again become parts of the material world, where they operate according to their own *agency*. When we watch other people get involved in the dance with the material things that we have created we might experience the friction between these very different processes as painful, especially if the audience are tactless dancers.

In a situation like this Solnit would probably advise us to once again embrace the feeling of loss of control, and let ourselves be carried away by the objects' continuous dance out into the uncertain, and encourage us to keep looking for that which we don't yet know what it is. It is this balance between seeking and finding, grappling and releasing, that is the fruitful strategy in the messy, sticky dance with the materials. By keeping the door to the unknown open, unexpected miracles can keep coming in.

**Jamila Drott** is an artist based in Malmö. She holds an MFA in Fine Art from Oslo National Academy of the Arts and a BFA in Textile Art from HDK, Gothenburg.

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# A script

Cilla Berg / Kaisa Luukkonen  
Johan Melander / Hanna Romin



Handbrain is an inquiry group organised foremost as a reading group around topics that relate to materiality and making. We are four artists working in different media such as painting, drawing, sculpture, installation and performance. Our practices share making itself and interaction with materials as a key stage in the process of shaping the content and questioning the logics of the work. We test things practically, evaluate, and move on. This method exposes the core of the inquiry more constructively than trying to figure out things in our heads. We think with our hands. Hence the group's name Handbrain.<sup>1</sup>

We don't always agree, not even with ourselves. The script below reflects some of the discussions we have had within our group, in response to specific texts on the following themes: making, flow, time, materiality, care and power. These themes were chosen based on our common interests and things we wanted to think through together.

Handbrain inquiry group consists of four artists currently studying in the MFA: Fine Art Programme at Valand Academy: Cilla Berg, Kaisa Luukkonen, Johan Melander and Hanna Romin.

<sup>1</sup> The word Handbrain is stolen from the first text we read together, 'The Object Too' by Travis Jeppesen in *A Solid Injury to the Knees*, 2016.

# Cast of characters

2 Lee. *Om Eva Hesse.*  
13-14. 2013.

## **Eva Hesse**

A voice inspired by the artist Eva Hesse and her letters to Sol Lewitt.<sup>2</sup>

## **The Gainsayer**

The critical voice that is always in opposition.

## **The Caretaker**

A character mostly based on the discussion that followed the reading of Mierle Laderman-Ukeles' *Maintenance Manifesto*.

## **The Making Hands**

The hands of the artist.

## **Present**

The self-centered voice of the *period of time now occurring*.

## Act I

(Curtains open)

**Eva Hesse** I will tell you what I have in front of me. Work.

**The Gainsayer** Work, work, work. Everything is about work and production, making stuff. But what is the point of making stuff in a world already flooded with stuff? Useless things, and nothing is more useless than art objects. The handmade object can never be anything but a subjective, individualistic, narcissistic expression of the self.

**Eva Hesse** Labour is the only thing that lasts. Everything else will perish.

**The Caretaker** But, you are missing something important. Things can last if someone takes care of them. Somebody needs to keep track of the cracks, there are cracks in everything. Without care all would slowly crumble down to a pile of dust.

**Present** I think both of you are wrong. Work and maintenance just eat time and time is more important than labour. Time doesn't need any maintenance. It will keep on running anyway. What matters is that I am here. Now is what matters.

**Future** (Enters with a torch in their hand.) Have you possibly seen a deadline pass by? I'm pretty sure it's supposed to be somewhere in close proximity, but I can't find it.

(No one looks at Future)

**Present** Does anyone want some more coffee or tea? (Turns to The Making Hands.) Your creations must therefore always be in the present, even if our thoughts wander between what has passed and what will come.

**The Making Hands** Do you think it would be possible to say that artists, in that sense, are some kind of time travellers?

**Present** Do you mean flow as a kind of time travelling? When the hands are in a process of creating, the flow is

often something I long for. A so-called flow can distort the conscious tracking of time. When this happens, are we in the now, or beyond the now?

**The Caretaker** I think you are forgetting something now. Care, maintenance and future are more important than just being in the now. Everyone and everything deserves the same attention and care. The now needs to be looked after for tomorrow.

**The Gainsayer** Metaphors and riddles. Why can't you just get to the point. If you have something to say just say it. Be direct and honest.

**Present** Can the now repeat itself?

**The Gainsayer** You just did!

**The Caretaker** Why are you always in opposition? Are you angry, or afraid? Slow down. People and things need to be seen for them to feel real. You need to listen to be able to understand and I think none of you really do.

**The Making Hands** In a hierarchical production of knowledge it is hard to find your own way. In this context misunderstandings can be productive. The unexpected is only found in the choice of the unknown path. That's part of our practice.

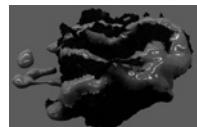
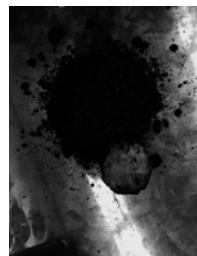
**The Deadline** Has anyone seen the past? I know she was around here somewhere looking for me.

**The Making Hands** No I'm afraid I haven't. But anyway people, I think there has been enough talking now and it is really time to get back to work.

The End

## Act 2

Figures E-H were created during a workshop conducted by the Handbrain inquiry group. Each member brought several materials to be used collectively. Paint, fabric, silicon, soil, wheat flour glue and different types of tape were some of the materials used. The workshop had three timed exercises of 15 minutes duration each. The first was a relay of actions; one group member after another working with one or more of the available materials towards an installation. In the second period the group worked simultaneously on a collaborative installation, but without any collective planning or coordination. In the final one, the group communicated and negotiated all the decisions before using the materials to create an installation. One of the conclusions was that the verbal communication slowed down the process but did not necessarily improve the outcome or make the collaborative aspects easier. The images are selected from all three exercises.



**Fig. E-H.** Images from the Handbrain workshop.

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# I do it for artistic reasons

Gabriel Nils Edvinsson / Theodora Ekholm  
Riikka Gröndahl / Johan Rikenberg / Lucy Wilson  
in conversation with Alyssa Grossman



An inquiry group consisting of five artists met with social and visual anthropologist Alyssa Grossman to discuss the relationship between art, anthropology and ethnography — specifically, the inherently anthropological methods and desires within art practice, and the artistic qualities of anthropology.

As a springboard for this discussion, the group read Grossman's text<sup>1</sup> on the artist Sophie Calle — an artist employing methods that could be viewed as anthropological. Over the past few months, the group has been meeting regularly, recording their ongoing conversations outside the studios. In listening back to these recordings, the group has decided to foreground the background (Noises) in the transcribed texts. Incorporating these noises into the written texts is a method of capturing the interruptions of the broader environment to our conversations. This situates our conversation, with the audio recording recognising more voices and sounds than our own — and acknowledging this in the transcription shows the recorder working independently from the human ear. Upon re-listening to the audio recording, references to the wider context became magnified.

**A** Alyssa Grossman

**G** Group (Gabriel Nils Edvinsson, Theodora Ekholm, Riikka Gröndahl, Johan Rikenberg, and Lucy Wilson)

1 Grossman. *Stealing Sophie Calle*, 2018.



Fig. I. Documentation of a meeting (*I do it for artistic reasons*).



Fig. J. Documentation of a meeting (*I do it for artistic reasons*).



Fig. K. Documentation of a meeting (*I do it for artistic reasons*).



Fig. L. Riikka Gröndahl. *Visualisation of artistic research in an animal research facility 1*.



Fig. M. Riikka Gröndahl. *Visualisation of artistic research in an animal research facility 2*.

(A door slams)

2 Sansi and Strathern.  
*Art and anthropology after  
relations*, 426. 2016.

G How is the process of collecting, recording and documenting things turned into art? Is it that you are considering the data that you collect through aesthetic means, and that makes it art?

A What makes it art and no longer data?

G Yes.

A That's a question I have too! Because you could say it's art just because an artist does it, you know.

G Exactly!

A But then does that mean that anthropologists can't do art?

G Yeah, is it just the intention or the education you have...?

A Yeah, and I don't agree with that. I don't think that an artist can't process data simply because they are an artist and not an anthropologist. But then I guess the question is, what are your priorities? Because when I read about this artist Rirkrit Tiravanija who cooked meals, (for people who visited the gallery with the aim of bringing people together)<sup>2</sup> I could say okay, could I do that with my background and credentials and be considered an artist? Because if I did the same exact thing that he did... I don't know. I have no idea.

G This is the thing. And I would say, of course you could, and if you then label yourself an artist, be my guest. But then again I don't think it works the other way around. I don't think I can call myself an anthropologist just because I wanted to. I need the education.

A I don't think anybody can be an artist just because they want to be an artist.

G I think so. You're an artist if you do art. I think it's that simple. But then if we come down to who gets money, grants, then you have to have a title, an education.

A But it's the same with anthropology. If you do anthropology but you are not supported by anybody or backed by any institution... You know, it's a good question. I don't have any answers. (Laughter) But it's interesting to think about

the definitions, where the lines are drawn and who's drawing them. Where do we come up with these definitions and boundaries, pigeonholing people?

- G** Often when I start a new project I meet people, I'm collecting information from different sources. And then I'm like okay, well this is interesting, what to do with all of this? What makes documentation into art? It is the aesthetic considerations, I am framing the world in a specific way.
- A** That's why I'm always super curious when I talk to you guys. You are starting with ideas, you do research, you gather knowledge, you go to different places. I can't even imagine, I can't even picture what that would turn into as art projects. But somehow it turns into these concrete things. In my field that wouldn't happen. You would write about it basically, and it's pretty straightforward. Or if you do visual anthropology you would do a film or a photo-essay. There are different ways of shaping the text, but for me the really interesting thing is how do you go from all this stuff you're thinking about to the thing that comes out of it. It's fascinating to me. And, that happens to each of you in very different ways. You all have your own process of how that works. But, I'm always really curious about what makes you take a certain step into that direction or work with certain materials as opposed to others. Because in a way we are all dealing with the same original substances: life and people, connections and interactions and relationships. All of these are shared concerns.

- G** But, they are framed differently and for different purposes.

- A** Yeah.

(Somebody coughs in the background)

- A** Anthropologists ask questions, they listen to stories, they watch what people do, they join in what people are doing. That's the idea of participant observation. You're participating in activities and also writing down notes, recording, documenting. You could do anthropology in familiar contexts, like at home, or you could do something that is unfamiliar to you, in a different cultural context.

Just today I was reading a text by Arnd Schneider and Chris Wright<sup>3</sup> who've written several books together about art and anthropology, and a quote from them is, 'Both art and anthropology have practitioners who appropriate from and represent others.' There's this fundamental idea of working with others, around others, in relation to others.

**3** Schneider and Wright.  
*Anthropology and Art Practice*, 26. 2013.

**G** Then what is ethnography?

**A** Ethnography is often used in relation to any kind of qualitative research project. A lot of other disciplines have borrowed the term whenever it involves describing everyday life or people or traditions. Something that's not quantitative, not just measurements and statistics, but about people's interactions, engaging with them... This anthropological encounter is about trying to witness events while simultaneously being part of them, usually a long term engagement, not just a reportage — going in and going out — but an in-depth interaction. There can be surveys and interviews, but also everyday conversations, questions, discussions. Sometimes they emerge spontaneously; sometimes they are planned. And then as an anthropologist you're expected to process this material, think about it in relation to wider theories, or conceptual frameworks in the discipline of anthropology, and then write up your findings as an ethnographic text. Technically the ethnography is the written outcome of the research process; 'graphy' is writing, 'ethno' means people and is referring to culture, so 'writing about culture'.

(Somebody walks by)

**G** In your article you talk about a workshop you organised with the artist Selena Kimball. The aim of the workshop was to find different ways of looking at artefacts in museum archives. Could you talk more about that project?

**A** Yeah, Selena — who's an artist based in New York — and I had been planning a workshop called *Seeing Through Objects* at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg<sup>4</sup>, to experiment with looking at artefacts of ethnographic archives in new ways. She suggested the artist Sophie Calle's installation, *Take Care of Yourself* (2007), as a model. *Take*

**4** *Seeing Through Objects*, organised by Alyssa Grossman, Selena Kimball and Adriana Muñoz at the Museum of World Culture's archives, Gothenburg. 2017.

*Care of Yourself* was developed in the wake of a break-up, when Calle received an email from her partner telling her that their relationship was over. Calle then asked 107 women, chosen for their profession or skills, to interpret this letter, and then made a project compiling all the different forms of interpretation and response.

Selena and I worked with an archivist from the Museum of World Culture to select several artefacts from the collection, and in a similar way to Calle, we invited different researchers from the fields of psychology, archaeology, earth and space sciences, microbiology, poetry, conservation and photography to our workshop. At the workshop, everyone was asked to conduct a literal observation of these artefacts according to their own disciplinary traditions, reflecting upon the materials, tools, and bodily practices involved, and the various apparatuses of categorisation at work.

The idea was originally to look at how we see. How different frameworks of vision shape how we observe and how we look at things. What was hard about this workshop was that people took for granted what they do in their own field. One day for the workshop wasn't enough... People thought it was so obvious how you would look at an object, you know? But then when you get everybody in the same room together and everybody's approaching and reading objects in very different ways, then it's like oh, okay, yeah. Some people would want to understand an object's history and research archival facts about it, other people would want to touch it and feel it and try and engage with it.

I was going around talking to people, interviewing people about what they thought about the objects, because that was how I immediately thought about how I as an anthropologist would find out about the objects: what people say and think about them. And my friend Selena who was co-organising the workshop, she came up to me after about ten minutes and was like — Alyssa, you're supposed to be working with the object! And I was like I am! And even she didn't realise, and she was like oh yeah... of course, you're an anthropologist! And she's an artist, so of course, she was busy making this tissue-paper relief sculpture modelled

on one of the artefacts... It was funny, because until that moment of seeing what other people are doing, you just kind of assume that observing means what it means in the way that *you* do it.

5 Shaw. *A Conversation with Sophie Calle*, 2014.

(Phone ringing)

- G** Would you say that the idea of truth is something that separates art and anthropology? Going into this idea of aesthetics, and how they are used, because the artist doesn't always need to verify things or prove them or back them up?
- A** Yeah, I mean you can't narrow it down to one difference between them; I think there are many nuanced differences between them. Artists might have a tendency to complicate or obscure things, instead of wanting to clarify and explain everything, whereas an anthropologist would be more likely to be criticised for making something more complicated or ambiguous. On the other hand, I don't know, I think that raises important questions about what could be gained through making something more ambiguous and complicated. Maybe that's not actually the opposite of anthropological knowledge and maybe we need to open up what anthropology means and could be seen to do, and maybe it could incorporate those kinds of practices. That's where I'm coming from. I guess it's my own personal take on anthropology, because I know that there are so many different kinds of anthropologists and anthropological work. But, I feel like if I'm going to stand my ground or identify as an anthropologist, I also want to somehow claim that I can incorporate an artistic perspective into my work that's not outside of my own discipline — it's part of how I do anthropology. It's not that I am just going to 'oh, borrow a method here', or you know, take somebody else's example who does something — no. It's part of my anthropological practice to do it in an artistic way, whatever that means. And, I'm trying to make a claim for how anthropology inherently has that potential in it, so you don't have to go outside of anthropology to do something in an artistic way.
- G** There is a quote from Calle: 'I don't do any of my work for sociological reasons, I do it for artistic reasons.'<sup>5</sup> It sounds

so abstract. Artistic reasons? What does that mean?

- A Yeah, I guess that's the big question. For me she's kind of disavowing any attempts to put her into an academic category, sociological category. Because that's not her intention. But then the question is what does that mean, what *is* an artistic reason?
- G When I was reading your text about Calle, it made me google the term 'art'. What does Wikipedia say about art? And it says it's a diverse range of human activities, bla bla bla, visual, auditory, performing... Intended to be appreciated for their beauty or emotional power. So, maybe that's the artistic reason.

(Someone on the street outside shouts 'Min mamma, min mamma!')

- A Yeah. Not for scientific analysis but for some bodily perception. But this quote from Calle made me think about this in terms of my experience doing research. Doing my textual work and then doing film work. And maybe this is going to sound really reductive and kind of simplistic but when I'm working on a film, my main goal is to get people to feel something. It's not about information, or processing data or explaining things. I'm happy if my film makes people feel something. And to some extent when I'm writing, I want people to feel but that's not the overarching priority for me. Writing can definitely be about conveying sensory and visceral impressions. It is also about information, explaining, contextualising and framing. But, I'm not an artist with a capital A so my perception of what I think I want to convey artistically would be very different from all of you. I don't want to say that art is about feeling and anthropology is about knowledge. That's bullshit. To me a successful anthropological film has a visceral impact on you rather than being solely concerned with what kind of facts you come away with.
- G Should we turn off the recorder?
- A But all the interesting stuff comes when you stop recording, right?

(Long silence)

(Laughter)

**Alyssa Grossman** is a social and visual anthropologist, with a PhD from the University of Manchester (2010).

**The Group** consists of five artists (Gabriel Nils Edvinsson, Theodora Ekholm, Riikka Gröndahl, Johan Rikenberg, and Lucy Wilson) studying on the MFA: Fine Art programme at Valand Academy who have been researching the relationship between art, anthropology, ethnography, the limitations of language, and corporeal responses.

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# Biographies

Artists and contributors



# Artists

**Cilla Berg** works with sculpture, performance and costume. She holds a BA hons. degree in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, 2013.

**Laura Darbutaitė** holds a BA in Printmaking from Vilnius Academy of Arts. She employs observational and ethnographic methods in her research processes and employs printmaking strategies in site-specific installations.

**Gabriel Nils Edvinsson** holds a BFA in Fine Art at Bergen Academy of Art and Design, and MFA in Sound Art at Nordic Sound Art (The Royal Danish Academy Of Fine Arts). Works with sound and sculptural elements that originates from ideas about politics and language.

**Theodora Ekholm** is a conceptual artist who explores discursive frameworks that define love ideologies, and influence the organisation of relationships. Her artistic research employs methods such as participant observation and discourse analysis. Her art is often installed in dialogue with the hierarchy of existing architecture, and is mostly text-based.

**Riikka Gröndahl** is a visual artist whose moving image based practice concentrates on the tensions and possibilities of the act of documenting. Her latest works address the relations between human and nonhuman animal.

**Danielle Heath** holds a BA in contemporary photography practice from Northumbria University. She is an artist living and working in Gothenburg, employing video, photography, performance and installation. She is deeply uneasy with the unacknowledged social systems that influence our behaviour.

**Kaisa Luukonen** is an artist that works with the media's of performance and installation. She has BA degree from Polytechnic School of Satakunta Kankaapää Unit of Fine Art (formerly known as Kankaapää Art School). At the moment she is trying to work out how to talk about futures and emotions.

**Katxerê Medina** is an artist and filmmaker whose work resides in the intersection of video, installation and performance, offering novel viewpoints from where to reinvent a poetic critique of contemporary society. Her research-based practice uses methods of auto-ethnography and phenomenology to explore social and cultural issues such as immigration, gender and capitalism.

**Johan Melander** holds a BFA in Fine Art from Bergen Academy of Art and Design. His work most often starts with and contains elements of painting.

**Johan Rikenberg** is a visual artist. He works with stop motion film. He uses humour as a powerful tool to pinpoint the absurdity in a situation or structure, to see things in another perspective. His current work addresses lonely men.

**Hanna Romin** holds a BFA in Fine Art from Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design. In her practice she is approaching how drawing as a media can be challenged, questioned and conducted through drawing installations.

**Lucy Wilson** holds a BA in Art Practice from Goldsmiths, University of London. Within a sculptural practice, she has recently been exploring how the visibility of structures of feeling contribute to our understanding of soft architectural spaces.

# Contributors

**André Alves** is an artist, educator and a doctoral candidate in Artistic Practice at Valand Academy. His practice explores how choreographic possibilities of reading and communities of listening offer affective and political possibilities to being together by developing strategies of care in the mixes of art and therapy.

**Jamila Drott** is an artist based in Malmö. She holds an MFA in Fine Art from Oslo National Academy of the Arts and a BFA in Textile Art from HDK, Gothenburg. Drott's work explores the creative process in relation to materiality, knowledge, art history and public space. Recent shows include Galleri Ping Pong and Galleri Thomas Wallner.

**Alyssa Grossman** is a social and visual anthropologist, with a PhD from the University of Manchester (2010). Her research explores the intersections between artistic and anthropological approaches and forms, using visual and sensory methods to investigate sites and practices of memorialisation in everyday life. She is currently an Associated Researcher at Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg.

**Daniel Jewesbury** is an artist, writer, lecturer and curator. Born in London in 1972, Daniel lived for 25 years in Ireland, where he studied for a BA in Fine Art and a PhD. He is currently completing a film, *Necropolis*, which examines the death of the contemporary city.

**Oscar Svanelid** is a doctoral candidate in art history at Södertörn university. He elaborates a thesis about Brazilian post war constructive art with a focus upon artistic strategies and techniques for the shaping of life forms at factory-based, pedagogic and therapeutic practices. Svanelid has presented his research at international conferences and via publications and art essays.

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Göteborgs  
Konsthall



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
VALAND ACADEMY





This book explores themes of temporality, materiality, entropy, artists' relationships with institutions, the construction of audiences, situations and actions, and the limitations of language.

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It is divided into sections which correlate with three inquiry groups established by MFA Fine Art students at Valand Academy during their two years together. They collaborated with external scholars, writers, and peers to interweave with their individual practices.

Across a series of overlapping nodes the artists are figuring out how to be together through their cross narratives, differences and commonalities.



**Before the I**  
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