

INSTRUCTIONS TO LOSE MY WAY: ABOUT ARTISTIC WORK AND RESEARCH FROM UP CLOSE

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Abstract

The main topics of my artistic research, *Home base – Bodily response and spatial experiences processed to works of art*, are examined in this text. The central concepts *hapticality, sensorial, in-between* and *bodily response* are scrutinised through the theoretical frameworks of embodied philosophy and responsive phenomenology. Spatial and sensorial experiences are approached through a few examples from my artworks and art teaching. As in the research, this paper stresses the liaisons between theoretical thinking and artistic process. They are seen as a merged process that includes gaps and differences. In addition, the text elaborates these two different approaches together as a method of producing information from a state of *not knowing*. A partly unconscious response to the processes is central in my research.

Keywords: bodily response, spatiality, embodied experience, hapticality, photo, video, artistic research, sensorial, gap, in-between, subjectivity

To start with

She walks on, writes Peter Morgan. How does one avoid a return? By getting lost. I do not know how to get lost. Yes, you will learn. I'd like to get an instruction to lose my way.

(Duras, 1965, p. 7)

These words create an atmosphere that corresponds to the nature of my artistic research. When writing and working with art, observations and experiences assume a linguistic form. In the process of making an artwork, as well as after completing one, I discover that my research leads to an unknown and unseen point. Similarly, the writing process draws from some unknown source to begin with, until the process of writing has created a connection between the artworks and the theoretical framework. (Orenius, 2014) The process reminds me of a continuous circle where one gets lost and found again.

The content of my research in brief

My artistic practice has been inspired by phenomenological philosophy. A phenomenon can be understood as an experience. Phenomenology – how things appear to us – has become the method of my artistic research. The phenomenological approach can be seen in the process of making artworks: the moment of filming is based on various sensorial phenomena. Simultaneously, writing proceeds alongside making artworks, not trying to analyse them but giving signification for the same process with words. In that process, something that was known by one's body becomes linguistic and it accrues meanings that can be discussed. As a result, the linguistic form leads to other definitions, explanations, senses, connotations, interpretations, nuances and meanings that are studied from the first-person point of view. As phenomenology examines the structures of consciousness, responsiveness is a method of my research.

Studying phenomenal and sensorial experiences is intertwined with researching environments and spatial structures in my artistic research. In my photos and video works, embodied experiences and their relations to the environment are widely reflected. Knowledge and theoretical thinking are combined with experiments in writing, filming and cutting a video work. When approaching an interesting idea, e.g. through a camera, the filming moment is based on sensing (and less affected by the knowledge of sensing). The research focuses on the consciousness of different activities and events on the micro levels of one's body and on the macro levels when approaching spatial structures.

When working with art, the body is often one of the parameters, as an intuitive process requires. My own presence becomes a part of my artwork, but I am also the one who carries out the realisation of the work. In my approach, themes are merged - visibility and invisibility as well as presence and absence - instead of being polarised. The mutual influence of the public and the private is exemplified by interiors and the familiar environment, schools and institutions. One's inner life and the regulations of the shared world are some of the main themes in my artworks.

There are three standpoints in my research interwoven with each other: the perspectives of the artist, art teacher and researcher. My research discusses spatial and bodily experiences in the context of the artistic process and development. How does making art produce information? What are the factors in a moment of finding new things and learning? Going through an artistic process becomes a space of learning. The moments of teaching and learning happen between the student and teacher. (Biesta, 2004) Learning, researching and making art are based on perceiving and sensorial experiences. As in my research, bodily response (including the automatic and unconscious activity of perceiving) is stressed as an essential part of forming artistic knowledge. The methodology of writing research is based on the phenomenological approach and ethnographic strategies.

Hapticality in the process of making art

Making an artwork consists of various series of events and the processing of ideas, which are partly shaped unconsciously. Thinking happens right in the body, and haptic seeing means that the body thinks. Similar bodily activities occur in processes of remembering and learning. A sensorial stimulus, e.g. touching or smelling, activates the whole system of perceiving, remembering and emotionally responding.

While lying on my stomach, my body presses thighs, knees, belly, ribs, breasts, sternum, cheek and ear against the floor. The carpet patterns are flattened against the skin. The eyes are not focused on anything. As a close up view, the pattern is out of focus; when looking at a detail, we do not see the beginning or the end of the pattern. It requires some distance. A small entity is always related to a larger pattern. When I try to perceive the whole pattern, it reminds me of doing artwork, or it feels like any art-making process; at some points, it is vague and shapeless, but the next moment, after a small movement, it becomes whole and clear. Changes in time and position affect the wholeness of the work.

Classically, seeing is divided into the sense of sight, optical vision and tactile-based *haptic visuality*. Laura U. Marks (2002) describes haptic visuality as an experience generated through a variety of sensorial experiences that take the body of the viewer to the event. According to Marks, haptic visuality is not only based on tactility, the sense of touch. In examining textiles or other textures of materials, compositions and structures also require touching. Only when vision is combined with touching does seeing the structure of a textile or other material become possible.

In constructing my photographs *Memory cavity*, *Present past* and *Daddy Cool* (2012), haptic visuality was a part of the working process. In the large photo prints, rays of sun, skin, leather, a sheepskin coat, a curtain, a window and parquet are there to be touched. My photo work *Memory cavity* was inspired by a memory from my childhood. When playing hide and seek, I remember well what it was like to be camouflaged and to be under cover. It was a moment of being hidden while the body experienced sweltering heat and excitement. The viewer can look at the flattering sunlight on the skin at the same time the person in the picture has suppressed her visual sense. *Present past* is like any day or a daily happening: looking out of a window. Times and places are mixed and the experience of looking out a window becomes a powerful experience. The image symbolises contemplation, but also points out two different spaces: the inner and the outer. The major part of the photo *Daddy Cool* shows a hardened leather armchair. The convex back of the chair is the only part visible to a viewer. The fuzziness of its outlines makes it uncertain as a recollection, and so it is not possible to get caught up in it. The shape of the chair is obscured by white space, leaving one corner clearly visible, which lets us identify the material of the chair as hardened leather. (Orenius, 2014)

Some of the experiences behind the three photos and even some of the interpretations of the material

that are used in the photos are described above. Why exactly are these materials or objects in the photos? What do skin, leather, parquet, a sheepskin coat, a curtain and a window have in common? Certainly they are tactile due to their quality, but they also present some reminiscences of my childhood. Therefore making these photos built a bridge between me and the experience of some memories. For me, a photo is never equivalent to memory but, in this case, it functions as an experiment to reach the hapticality of an idea. Building a bridge between an original memory and artwork makes it discussable. Moving along the bridge, the gap between becomes visible.

The dimensions of a gap

When writing and working with moving images, it is possible to find some similarities in these two different approaches and processes. One has to consider editing (or cutting) and linking two parts together as a creative tool for thinking. A cut can be seen as a collision and a merge, as well as a form of separation. I reflect on the term *cut* in a concrete way in my video editing. It also opens up theoretically and philosophically interesting thoughts about what *in-between* is or could be.

What makes a gap interesting? My interest centres on differences that create gaps. A gap can appear when the visual work stops and ideas come in the form of words. You find yourself in a gap when trying to formulate affections coming from your body in words. Gaps then happen in writing words, meanings or whole texts. Gaps occur in writing moments. Gaps occur in reading. Gaps are there when processing the meanings of given words. Gaps are the distinctions in explaining and understanding. Gaps are between each frame in videos and films. Gaps make the difference between past, present and future.

The gap is one of the main subjects of my two-channel video work *Domestic disorder*¹. The adult female protagonist's trauma is central in the video. I perform my role as mother. In the home scene, I am in front of my five-year-old son. My role figure's mental absence indicates some prohibited childhood memories. Different inserts in the video bring up the memory of her deceased mother's hands and voice. In the video, there is a moment when the mother's hand is touched by the child's fist. The storyline has a twist there: the mother reacts to the touch and opens her eyes. She has to see outside instead of inside, and what she sees is the child in front of her instead of her own grief. Her silent presence is like a reflective prism of the past and the future. The editing stresses the fact that the senses, including touch, are triggers for memories and emotions. It also suggests that different spaces are simultaneous despite gaps in time. Especially in this work, the past, present and future co-exist due to the editing of these scenes.

A *gap* or *in-between* is a vague state of possibility, but it also reveals vulnerability, incapability,

¹ Domestic disorder is a two-channel video installation presented at the Gallery Taidesalonki in Helsinki in 2012.

insufficiency or incapacity. The gap is a space of contemplation or a destructive element in one's artistic practice. The deconstruction of one's artistic methods is something that one has to face when working on artistic research. In earlier stages of the dissertation work, my goal was to explore the difference between art and science. Now, there is no clear difference in my approach when I make art and I write research. There are gaps and changes in my process of writing and making art that are explored in my research.

A space of changes

The criterion and identification of artistic research are to highlight the change and indicate the way to those changes (Kirkkopelto, 2014, p. 250).

Processes, such as writing and artistic working, are associated with change. Without change, it would instead be a cold execution of a plan. Changes either creep into the work or they are intentional choices. In the latter case, the author makes every effort to bring about the change. A change that proceeds slowly is only detected afterwards. Examination of the change in artistic research is challenging, because research changes one's perspective and thinking. Carrying out research is like inhabiting the eye of a storm. However, change should be examined from the eye of the storm.

At the moment, in my work in progress, I am not following the classic way of making videos. The filming is not coming right after the process of screen-writing and storyboarding. The decisions of filming are made coincidentally. Afterwards, the filmed material reveals something that I didn't recognise when going through spaces. Spaces are more likely to be sensed than analysed. The camera is attached to my body when I move in different spaces. The way the camera moves and the rhythm of walking are more important factors than properly or comprehensively filmed spaces. The editing of the video and writing about it create another "time and space". The filmed material is either included in or left out of the work. The moments of editing a video and writing are spaces of changes. My present method is to keep on changing and therefore the manuscript is prepared while editing (and finishing) the video.

A minor change in one cut might result in a chain reaction that changes the whole work into something entirely different. This process can result in a butterfly effect. Usually, there are chain reactions all around us, but we only recognise some of them. It is not crucial that something changes; a process is never stable or in a stand-by position. Sensing is an on-going process of changes that steer one's decision making in different situations, as in writing and making art.

Sensorial perspective

Consciousness of senses localises in one's body, as the past is located in the body. A surprising sound can be felt in the neck, stomach, knee or another unexpected part of the body. Senses are one part of an

experience. A sensorial stimulus, such as seeing a colour or hearing a voice, can return past to present and to an embodied experience. Sensorial experiences are physical; they are not like rational meanings that need to be verified or argued about, but they can be debated and analysed.

The sensorial experience is recognised, at the moment, through the senses. The connections between sensorial experiences and the awareness of the present moment are part of the teaching event, thinking, writing, drawing or other work. They are events based on senses. By being aware of the sensuous experience, it develops its meaning and becomes a component of thinking. Perception exists before all the decisions and it is more immediate than thinking. One cannot decide to perceive.

The coordination of various senses happens inside of an individual, but also in communication with others, in between. Senses not only come from inside; they happen because one is in connection with the environment. This involves multimodal happenings, with many events at the same time, in an environment. This idea is based on Francisco Varela's (1991) theory of the basic living organisation in three systems of selfness: biological, neurological and sociological. The human biological, neurological and sociological system makes one aware that one has senses. The multimodality of an event is natural among people living together and it can be seen as a model for an art school, too. People are in an art school for around five years and during those years they spend time in their studios working, thinking and resting. Outside of their working spaces (in the next zone), there is the school building, the bigger organism they are connected with. An art school creates an environment that is needed for the inner components to progress (even studio-based art studies include quite a lot of individualistic teaching).

As already noted, perceiving happens without knowing. The experience of perceiving is an interesting phenomenon when sharing ideas, when communicating. Art teaching is based on communication and, as an art teacher, I try to get inside of a student's artistic process, but still keep my objectivity. From that experience, I recognise that my emotions are effected by the situation. There are several automatic activities going on inside me, but also between us. At that moment, the space and silence in between, as well as our interaction, become significant for thinking and verbalising. Not knowing creates an opportunity for learning and finding, for both of us. Collective learning is an example of the sensorial perspective in shared "time and space". This form of learning is similar to collegial inquiry, which is based on creating knowledge together and learning that which is not yet known. (Dyer & Löytönen 2011; Löytönen, 2014, p. 269)

Response of a subject

To be able to research the process of making art, one has to go through a process. There are different stages of a process when working with a video work. First of all, one records with a camera, either as planned, or one just finds recorded material that can be used. The moment of filming includes one's

thinking and decision making at the present moment. In the next step, one watches the material and makes a decision to edit it or not. At this stage, one is responding to the filmed material and to the plans or ideas around the process. The response of a subject is included in all the stages of the artistic process.

How can we trace the process of a response? Sensorial experiences and emotions are connected with responding. Emotions become one's response through a process of becoming aware of observed senses. The chain of these events is hopelessly slow. When one, for example, realises that one's back itches and one should scratch it, then it has already happened. The sensation is gone and one has responded before becoming aware of it. The process of sensing happens in a shorter time than one realises: it is automatic activity. To solve the problem of how to trace these processes in my research, the structures of bodily events are studied from the first-person point of view.

In my artistic research, the subject is "I". "I" is approached in theory, but also in practical work in a concrete manner. The main medium for my artistic practice is a camera, together with bodily movements. Calling somebody a "subject" alienates one from personal history and experiences. The distance makes theorising possible, but it also distinguishes from the real. A subject's back might itch, but then it happens in theory only.

Responsiveness, sensitivity and how we receive it form our understanding. "Responsivity goes beyond every intentionality because responding to that which happens to us cannot be exhausted in the meaning, understanding, or truth of our response." Bernhard Waldenfels (2007, p. 45) calls the sensitivity of the response and tactile sensitivity *pathos* in his "The Question of the Other". *Pathos* includes everything that happens to us between birth and death. How can we explain "pathos" more exactly: is it simply "life"? It can be seen as a term that is not entirely explained. It is lacking. Intentions to interpret do not succeed, but still pathos includes an intention to interpret. This lack I recognise in my artistic research, in general, and in philosophers', artists' and scientists' work, which does not exhaust the meaning.

As explained above, there are gaps in the events of responding and experiencing. My experiments through a camera in an environment are aspirations to illuminate these gaps, the moments of sensing. When the "recorded" moment is watched, it is also remembered and re-seen as a memory of the moment. The decoding of these moments has become my method and a way of expressing myself. Expression, here, means the way I write, use the camera and its movements, as well as the way I cut the filmed material. The processing concerns my response to the material at a different moment, and therefore another "time and space" adds a new level to the artwork.

To wrap up

One is alienated from the origin of an experience (the moment of sensing). The alienation produces a lack and a need to process. The methods or strategies which I use in my artistic and research processes are

experiences. These events happen through *me*, my flesh and my body. These events are also (and mostly) unintentional, accidental and unconscious. Therefore, I focus on tracing the momentariness of senses, memory and experiences.

How can we examine something that is in constant movement? My doctoral research balances between theoretical thinking and processing artistic work.² In one scale, artistic exploration as a close look at the embodied experience is weighed. Phenomenological questions surround a two-way functioning body³, and I am involved in a process of making, teaching and researching art. I ponder different meanings of phenomenological observations through artworks. Therefore artistic research is not an examination of works of art: the artworks are the research. Bernhard Waldenfels (2007, 2011) writings, which approach experience and alienation from philosophical and biological viewpoints, challenge and open up these questions.

In the other scale are the temporal transitions influenced by Walter Benjamin's and Roland Barthes' (1980) conceptualisations of the temporal. "For Benjamin, the process of actualisation (*Aktualität*) refers to a concept of history that cannot be seen as a closed entity, but rather as a discontinuous series of events" (Lindroos, 2006, p. 125). In my research, there are two concepts of time presented: *now* and *what-has-been*, which corresponds to Barthes's "an awareness of its *having-been-there*" (Barthes, 1977, p. 44). "Now" is connected with the moment of filming and "what-has-been" refers to the moment of editing the material. The perception of time is examined with a camera that constantly moves.⁴ The kinaesthetic experience is concretised in a blink of an eye: walking, driving, wandering, travelling and migration in the video works.⁵

My research is still in the process of examining the main concepts. So far I have realised that losing and finding are equal parts of researching, teaching and making art. One has to lose to be able to find. When we are *here* or *there*, we are not ever without the body. According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945), the body anchors the human in this world. For a moment. The body does not stop: the body is a changing process. On the other hand, the body is a way of leaving: it is on the way to the next place.

² A process is something that changes all the time and is never still. It is ongoing progress in constant action.

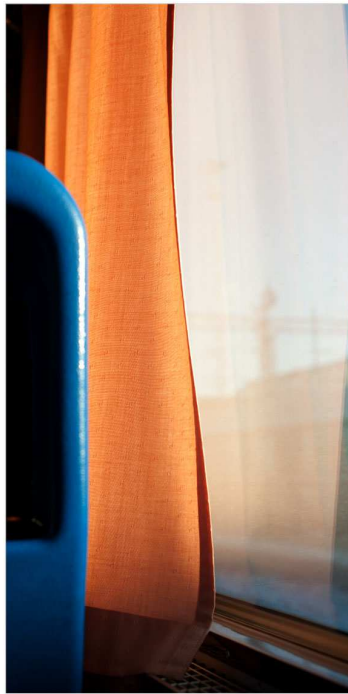
³ The two-way functioning body: the skin can be touched and we touch with the skin; see Merleau-Ponty, M.: *Le Visible et l'invisible, suivi de notes de travail*, 1964.

⁴ Two versions of the same subject: *Therefore it is here* was presented at the Poriginal Gallery 2012 and *Therefore it is (has been) here* was presented for the first time at Mediaboxi / Forum Box 2013, and was also showed at international film festivals in Rotterdam and Oberhausen in 2014, as well as at the AAVE festival in Helsinki in 2014.

⁵ This refers to a video work of mine that is in progress. The working title is *Parousia*. For more, see <http://www.marikaorenienius.com/sidor/2015.html>



Memory cavity



Present past



Daddy cool

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