

# The Other Wild

*Touching art as confrontation*

Liv Bugge

REFLECTION



This is part of the practical PhD in artistic research by Liv Bugge

The reflection includes:

- *A guided guide* - reflection text
- Conversations - An appendix of conversations
  - April 26, 2018
  - April 26, 2018, Fossil
  - December 19, 2016
  - May 19, 2016
  - March 1, 2016
  - October 30, 2015
  - September 28, 2015
- *To accept theirs, to make it mine, to wish it for myself* (Book)



Left: The Toten Princess,  
Photo: Museum for  
University and Sci-  
ence History, Oslo

Right: Bronze cast of  
detail, Cell A315, Depart-  
ment A, Oslo Fengsel.  
Photo: Istvan Virag

# A GUIDED GUIDE

As a first exercise, let's start with two images. They depict objects, each of which has an imprint. Let's not decide what they are, but what I would like you to try to do before you go on reading this text is for you to do a reading with them and ask what and who they are. You can do this in any way you like.

Turn your attention to the images, touch them if you like, close your eyes, and note down whatever comes through anywhere in your body. It might be an itch, an image, temperature, weight, words—just note down whatever you sense and experience. Spend some time with this if you feel like it. And then join me again.

The objects depicted in these two photographs are from the two external institutions in which I have been working during my PhD fellowship period at The Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO). One of them is from the collection of fossil trilobites in the former Geological Museum in Oslo, which is now the Natural History Museum. The other is a bronze cast taken of a tabletop in a cell in Oslo Prison. The imprint from the prison is most likely made by a human; the fossil one is most likely not, instead found, held, harvested, and placed in the museum collection by a human.

A crucial part of my research project has been entering into conversation with these two objects—or subjects—which have been left to us by the touch of someone or something, as well as how to begin this conversation. On one hand, the how touches on representation, ownership, and other forms of mechanisms and logistics active in artistic and exhibition practice. On the other, it touches on using the body as an image-producing, communicative apparatus.

Together with my supervisors, I started this artistic research fellowship thinking around the terms ‘wild’, ‘wildness’, and ‘wilderness’ in relation to normativity, the commons, the body, and subjectivity. The project asked questions relating to the normative, and how processes of normativisation are incorporated in our bodies, how they stretch out into the collective body, and how they are imposed onto the land and our notions of wilderness. The topics seemed huge, but there were certain threads I was interested in, such as the demonisation of bodies and practices as it was laid out by Silvia Federici in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Autonomedia, 2004) as a necessary precursor for capitalism.

I was interested in looking at this in a Scandinavian context: how religiously charged dichotomies such as “good” and “evil” still play a part in secular society, and how the normative polarisation between values such as these plays out in institutional structures and language. After a while, my interest turned towards the magical as something para- or inter-normal. In my reading of the fossil trilobite and the bronze cast of a burnt tabletop, I found things they have in common other than their visual resemblance. They are both taking part in what I have been calling an “act of structural disappearance”, or structural magic, which I will return to.

My overall wish for the fellowship period was to open up parts of my personal practice to the thoughts and insights of others, to invite other minds and bodies into it, and also, in the end, to let more people have some kind of ownership of the work. Making art is a collective effort anyway, but there are of course different types of working together with both people and what we call material—the living, the non-living and the no longer living. To be in dialogue or contact, and listen to or dream the other, is an important aspect that wanders through this work.

# Image production, community and confrontation (Method)

Since childhood, I have been aware and occupied with the images produced by dreams, meditations, and being in contact with others. My biological family was invested in dog racing, so I grew up partly in a dog yard, with sometimes as many as 60 huskies as my friends. I learned a lot about collaboration, joy and the difference in lifespans during my time living and racing with them. In many ways, it was quite wonderful to grow up in such a large community. “It takes a village to raise a child”, as the proverb says. This experience gave me an interest in nonverbal communication, and also partly led to my engagement with visual art.

In addressing the fossil trilobite, I have used a method developed from animal communicators, such as horse whisperers. In the technique I learned, you often use a photograph as a starting point to connect to the animal you want to address. The first time I used this method in my work was in 2006, when I had an animal communicator based in Norway asking some questions to a concrete owl in northern California. Later, in 2009, I had an animal communicator talk to my father and his lead dog through a photograph in which they were posing together. I was wondering if they would both respond to the questions, which they did, although the dog was more eager to answer.

In 2014, I completed a course to formally learn the method. The practice involves looking not only with your eyes but with your whole body at the world, the trilobite, an animal, or an object. After a meditation that grounds you, you are able to enter into a conversation on a telepathic level. Visualisation in different ways is useful to get the conversation started. Then, during the conversation, deep listening, feeling, and seeing is the main goal. This means you should not filter out any information; everything is equally important, whether that’s a sensation, pain, a change in temperature, an image, a sequence or film, a sound, words, feeling of weight, restlessness, or calmness. Although you do not understand what and why, a sensation might be of importance to others.



Karsten Grønås and Nathan av Vargevass, 2006  
Photo: Liv Bugge

In 2015 I started following the process of emptying the exhibitions and collections that have occupied Brøgger's hus (the House of Brøgger) in Tøyen, Oslo, which served as the Geological and Paleontological Museum since 1917. Over the past three years, I have facilitated a series of group sessions where methods derived from animal communication are tested in telepathic conversations with a fossil trilobite. Trilobites were, in their time, one of the largest groups of animals on the planet, and they are among the most common fossils in Norway. They are especially common in the Oslo area. The session involved a group meditation followed by an individual telepathic conversation with a trilobite fossil. Notes from these conversations were then shared with the group. Often, the participants would say something like, "I am not sure if that was just me", when referring to a sensation they experienced during the telepathic conversation. As I experience it, it is not important whether it is you that feels something, or if that feeling is coming from something else. The important thing is that you are open to feeling



Preparations for workshop/ fossil conversation, UiS, 2018  
Ingvil Hellstrand  
Photo: Liv Bugge

something, that you are actually feeling something, and what that feeling opens up in terms of discourse. In line of flight with Karen Barad's work on diffraction, drawing on Donna Haraway, when she states, "Diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals. Unlike reflections, diffractions do not displace the same elsewhere, in more or less distorted form, thereby giving rise to industries of story-making about origins and truths. Rather, diffraction can be a metaphor for another kind of critical consciousness." (*Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers*. Open Humanities Press, 2012) So, rather than saying that the trilobite "mirrors" my body, meaning there is only one original feeling, I can ask what discourse can happen as I open my body to listen to the trilobite, and vice versa, while the communication happens. What happens to my body, the fossil rock and the trilobite body, and the language we use in the sharing of images, sensations and dreams?



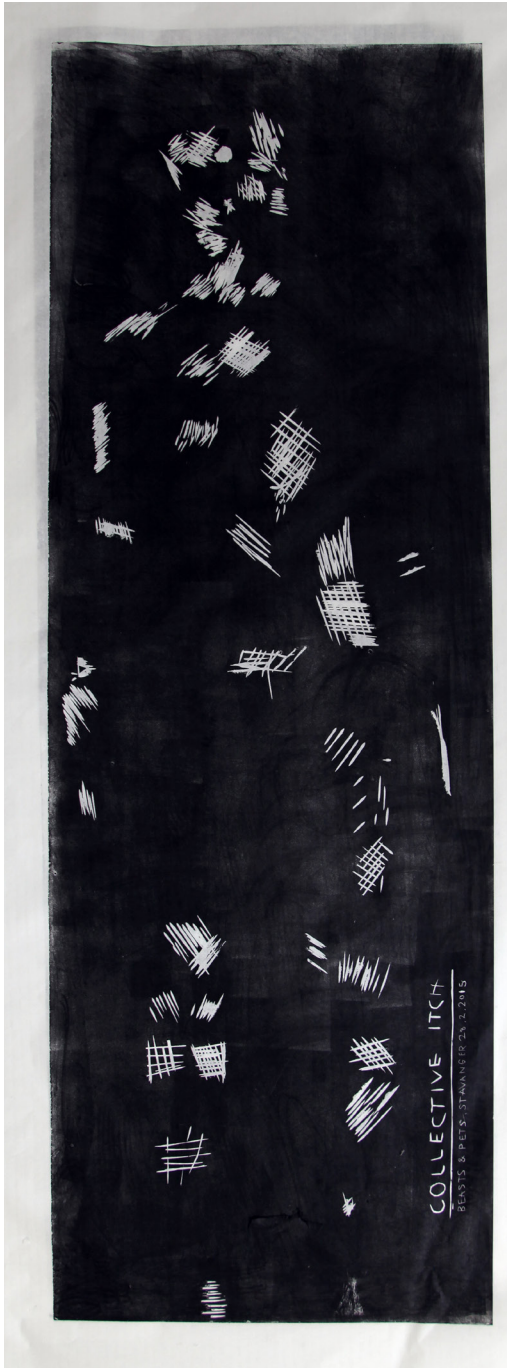
These sessions serve the purpose of being exercises in non-linear ways to relate to historical existences and concepts of time, as well as using the body as an image-producing apparatus. The exercise also allows for a collective circulation of images and experiences; a shared knowledge and information. By engaging in conversation with a fossil that is dated several hundred million years back in time, the exercise is letting the fossil stay in the now. The image of the fossil as governed resource is challenged by the image of the fossil subject that is felt and experienced by the participant's own body.



Fossil conversation,  
KHiO, 2016  
Bo Bugge  
Photo: Brynjar Bandlien

The objects depicted in the two images we started out with, the fossil and the cast, are the results of confrontations. How I worked with the mould of the prison mark is talked about in the book *To accept theirs, to make it mine, to wish it for myself* (KORO, 2018), a guide to the sculptural work in the prisons. I am trying to ask the bronze cast in the same way as I ask the fossil in the telepathic séance: what, who, how are you? To confront it, to enter into conversation with it, to touch it, rather than talk about it. In working with a video camera, it is sometimes a tricky line because representation, and the corruption of it, is largely linked to the camera itself. Moving images pass through the eye, which is different from the telepathic sessions where some images are produced by the body. However, the bodily experienced images are also produced through looking at and listening to images or objects, so my take is that looking at and listening to moving images will also produce bodily images. There is a conversation, and a dialogic side, to the film experience.

Am I breathing properly? My back aches from sitting too much, I have strange pains moving from my hip down to my left foot, caused by different kinds of stress. Sometimes while walking next to Lulu, the old dog I have shared my life with for the past 15 years, I see her left hip and leg, stiff and without strength. I think she is feeling me in her body, she has taken on some of my stress—or is it the other way around? I read my body as a reflection upon the research as I am handing it in. I would say there is a certain stress or uneasiness. If art was with one painful foot in the wild, is it still? It is contradictory that I have worked with listening through the body, while a counterforce of stress is trying to shut this listening down.



*Collective Itch*, 2015  
220 x 50 woodcut

The collective itch of a group of students from KHiO and passers by.

As a second exercise, we will walk together. You can imagine closing your eyes while I walk you safely around. I will be your guide, I will describe where we are, and you can note what images are travelling in between you, this text, and other things you sense and think and feel.

You are in Grønland, a part of Oslo's inner city, on the east side of the river. The river may be unaware of being a small-scale political and economic historical divide of east and west, as it forms a border of demographic difference. We are in a geological area called the Oslo Rift, a result of a geological drama playing out in a distant past—a valley is formed, caused by the displacement of a block of land which travelled several kilometres down into the ground. Geological time is bent here, folded, and at points it is reversed. The fossils of trilobites are sunbathing on the rocks by the beach, while, in other places such as the northern sea, we drill down from the ocean floor, remove tons of toxic slag, and finally get to the fossil oil between the sediments. Being in a geological fold, Oslo is a good place to enter into non-linear time.

If you use your foot as a listening apparatus, feeling and reading the ground, you can travel enormous distances of (linear) time while only moving millimetres on the ground. The feeling of connection is perhaps stronger as the ground draws on you slightly more here than some kilometres away, as a heavier gravity exists in the Oslo Rift.

In Grønland, or Tøyen, and in large parts of the Oslo Rift area, you walk on top of Alum Shale, a type of rock followed by the index fossils of trilobites. Alum Shale is seemingly silently sleeping as long as it is left alone, but if you expose it to air, dig or blow it up, it wakes up and starts to react. In contact with air it can double its size, melting the snow with its released energy. It bleeds cadmium, copper, nickel and zinc, as well as arsenic, uranium and mercury, and the heavy metals seep into waterways and rivers. Alum Shale carries uranium, which can give rise to the invisible and odourless, but radioactive, gas radon, which we breathe while sitting and moving around in and below ground level in Oslo's inner-city east. In the Geological Museum it is mentioned that Alum Shale was formed during the Cambrian era, but it continues to happen now.



Stone leaks oil, Svalbard, 2015. Photo: Hans Arne Nakrem, Natural History Museum, Oslo

Part of slide-show used together with *Instructions to make use of an already present itch*, 2017

When you enter The Intercultural Museum down a small side street by the name of Tøyenbekken (the Tøyen creek), just off the main street Grønlandsleiret, there is a gallery to your left inside the door. I am going to give you a tour of the exhibition *The Other Wild* in the gallery. In the first two rooms you see things, moulds borrowed from the Geological Museum, which is located some hundred metres away from The Intercultural Museum. Two sculptures, a cast of an oil drill bit in paraffin wax, and a bronze cast of part of a rabbit hole from the exercise yard in Oslo Prison, also located a few hundred metres away. A film is showing the Geological Museum's collections, in which the camera is focused on the stones and the hands that are packing, handling, feeling, or throwing them. In the third gallery room there is a projection of a film made together with the inmates of two prisons just outside Oslo. The inmates are moving, gesturing in a kind of choreography based on their prison routines.

The bronze cast in the first image you saw, is placed on a wooden surface, next to a fossil of a trilobite which looks a little like the one in the image.

Elizabeth Povinelli's thoughts on what she calls "geontologies" have been useful when it comes to thinking, relating, and doing with materials, objects, and humans. She defines "geontologies" as a situation unifying the contrasting components of non-life (geos) and being (ontology). In *Geontologies* (Duke University Press, 2016) she states, "The geontological comes to play a larger part in the governance of our thought, other forms of existence (other existents) cannot merely be included in the ways we have understood the qualities of being and

life but will need, on the one hand, to displace the division of Life and Non-life as such and, on the other hand, to separate themselves from late liberal forms of governance.”

This touches on our very existence and the governance of the otherwise, life, and non-life, as well as the rethinking that needs to be done in terms of how we think about resources. However, it also touches on how we, as artists, relate to material and objects, and how and with what intentions we choose to exhibit.

In thinking about exhibiting and relating to material, touch, and objects, I was also very inspired by a text by Denise Ferreira Da Silva, called *Reading Art as Confrontation* (e-flux journal #65, 2015). This text revolves around how we can overcome the problem of representation, or decolonise art, when making art in a postcolonial era.

## Magic

The realm of magic traditionally embraces the knowledge, philosophy of life, and existence that rejects religion as almighty, and which also moves beyond secular politics and science’s belief in reason, materialistic and methodological philosophy, and the belief in causality. By thinking with the magic, it may reveal certain categorisations and divisions as normative or fictional, such as the classic duality of politics and religion.

The interest in magic came to my work some years back, from what we understand from prefaces like *para*, “beyond” or “side by side” (from Greek) together with words like “normal” (in Norwegian, supernatural is written “utenomverdslig”, translated as “outside the world” or “overnaturlig”, which means “above, or beyond, nature”). Seemingly, a lot of what interests me as queer person, as a feminist, and as someone who grew up in a dog yard, can be said to be located in this “side-by-side” of normal, and “beyond nature and the world”, as magic appears to be. Silvia Federici points out that when capitalist economy took over for the feudal society in Europe in the middle ages, in order to make a productive working class, to accumulate and then capitalise the land, the mind/body split had to happen. Knowledge related to magic, animistic practices, or the spiritual had to be suppressed, and removed—this was followed by the witch hunts. She further shows how this continues as part of the colonial project, into the globalised, present world—we still see ridiculing and humiliation of the knowledge and practices of the otherwise.

I have been wanting to look into structural, normative processes where one can say the refractions, or diffractions according to Barad, are in the effects and dynamics of the smell of the dead dog rotting upon us, as Franco “Bifo” Berardi describes capitalism. (*Futurability, The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*. Verso Books, 2017)

I also wanted to follow up on something Norwegian feminist and theologian Gyrid Gunnes noted in a conversation, where she suggests: when looking at the prison, I am at the same time looking at the museum as a fossil.

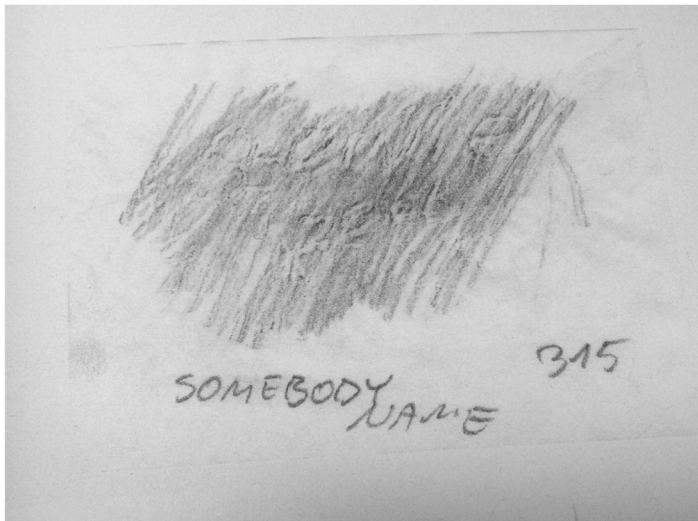
I have looked at structural magical practices in a secular social democracy where magical practices are otherwise ridiculed and shattered by capitalism and normativity. Some of what we recognise as magical practices in a European context are characterised by a rhetoric and by rituals with a transformative purpose—perhaps not entirely different from, for example, a court case. After hearing the stories and counterarguments, the judge with a touch of the table with their gavel, has transformative power. In his book, *Juridisk overtalelseskunst* (Fagbokforlaget, 2008), Hans Petter Graver describes the persuasive rhetoric and the painting of metaphors and pathos that are part of the rituals in the courtroom. The defendant may, after the trial, change legal status from ordinary citizen to state property for a given period of time. (Nils Christie also wrote that the trial itself does the same. It is its own transformative punishment, even if one is acquitted, and often a prosecution/punishment for the victim as well as the perpetrator). In the extension of the courtroom’s ritual, the prison acts as a paranormal phenomenon, where people disappear from the normal world.

In Angela Davis’ 1998 article on masked racism in the United States, *Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex*, she writes about how we attempt to remove social problems like poverty, mental disorders, drug abuse, and lack of education by putting people in a cage—the growing prison industrial complex. When the problems are removed from the public space, it is people that are removed; a disappearance and displacement act is happening. Although the prison system in Europe, and especially Scandinavia, looks quite different, the majority of inmates are not from the privileged part of the population.

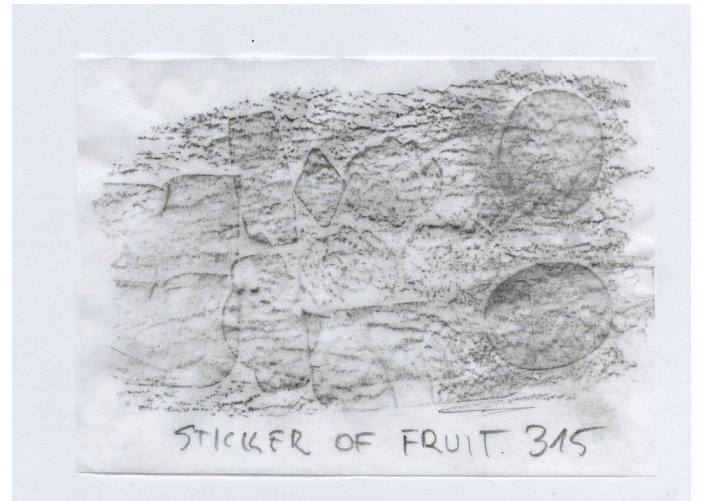


Benjamin Larsen Lipski reading his text *I am not the person I used to be* (KORO, 2018) out loud, Ullersmo prison in April 2018.

If you grow up as a boy in Norway, it is quite normal to be charged with a criminal offence; every third male person is (Statistiscs Norway, Skardhamar, 2010). However, very few end up in prison, and the majority of inmates today are poorly educated felons convicted for drug abuse and violence, followed by an increasing prison population in custody; a group reflecting patterns of migration and a growing European underclass (Statistiscs Norway, 2016). The Norwegian prisons, including those currently being built, are examples of what is known as the reformatory prison, widely used in Scandinavia as part of the welfare model. While the correctional service (named “Kriminalomsorgen” in Norwegian, which translates as *Criminalcare*) is supposed to help inmates with their lives by means of education, job management, health services, and rehabilitation, help to return to society has largely been dependent on non-profit organisations financed through state aid. These organisations received a cut of 50% at the last state budget, which makes it impossible to keep activities at the same level as before. During the past few years, the Norwegian correctional service has gone through



Pencil rubbings, 2015  
Cell 215, Oslo Prison,  
Department B



the same efficiency reform as all other state organisations, the ABE reform, and after this, the institutions have fewer human and economic resources for reformative work, which causes prisons to function increasingly as retention facilities (Oslo Economics, 2018).

In *The Other Wild* I worked with three prisons and two museums (The Geological and the Intercultural). In thinking about structural magic and the act of disappearance, I have been concentrating on how geologists, or paleontologists, date fossils and how this process of dating and placing them on a linear timeline actually enables the disappearance of objects into a great void of history. In disappearing from the now, the thought of rock or fluid as a resource is enabled, in order for us to handle and govern them. This is part of the transformative magic of the Geological Museum, apart from the very physical disappearance of stones from nature into the building's cupboards and drawers.

Bringing the tactile into focus, I have studied the work of hands in the two institutions as they deal with both human and non-human resources. In the museum, people's hands are moving, packing and handling objects, stones and minerals. In the other institution, people are moving invisible things, concentrating on the movement itself and discussing the potential of resistance in the bodily movements of the prison routines. We are experiencing a time when more and more people live in prison-like settings—refugee camps and asylum centres—and are deprived of rights and the freedom to move.

Both the prison and the museums experience a crisis in their respective academic fields, relating to late liberalism and how we think about resources. Human and non-human, living and non-living. In geology, there is the rise of the Anthropocene era and climate change, in which the humanities and humanity also suffer a philosophical and political crisis. How can the humanities continue or discontinue an academic field which puts the human in the centre of life, when the geological discourse actually points at that very problem?

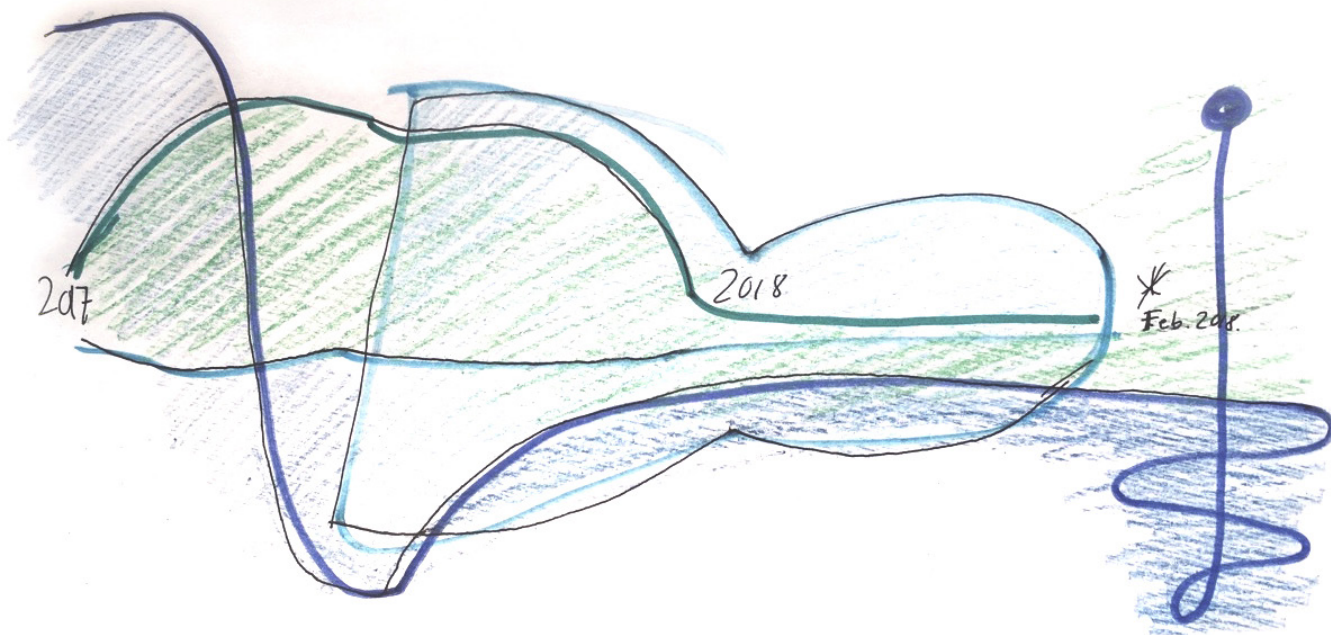
In the final exhibition, presented to the evaluation committee, I have chosen two venues that are quite polarised in terms of openness to the public, as well as in assignment or mission: the Intercultural Museum, a public museum, and the Ullersmo and Eidsberg Prisons. Though diametrically opposed in terms of public engagement, class representation, and civic pride, prisons and museums are architecturally complementary structures, employing related spatial and visual tactics to secure and display problematic citizens or priceless treasures (Joe Day, *Corrections and Collections: Architectures for Art and Crime*. Routledge Press, 2013). They are also institutions which are growing when it comes to visiting and imprisoned population. The Intercultural Museum is, in fact, situated in a building that was once a police station, with a wing of prison cells and top floors with living quarters for the police and prison staff.

The Intercultural Museum's mission reflects the educational values of the welfare state, in the long term an aim of cultural assimilation. The prison is closed to the public, so the art is shown only to inmates and employees. The artworks have also undergone a disappearance act, where they now are embedded on "the inside" or outside of society, in the paranormal.

The last visualisation we will do together is to walk out of the prison you were just inside. Through the courtyards, checkpoints and walls, leaving the paranormal behind. There are methods freely inspired by the Karrabing Collective, described by Elizabeth Povinelli, we can try out to see if there are things in the prison that point to things outside or in the museum that bring the two together.

"Visualisation is a practice of the body in movement which, in turn, materially constructed the mental life of moving bodies. Embodied obligation was not one complete event, rather giving ongoing attention to often nuanced interactions between human actions and other modes of action. What changed for what? Why did a geological formation shift?" (Elizabeth Povinelli, *Geontologies*. Duke University Press, 2016)

In your mind, put yourself in the place you just were but are now not. Look around. Where are you facing? In what direction are you moving? Recreate the entire path you walked around the area. See the figure you have made as if you were working on a massive sketch and your feet are drawing your lines. What does it look like? Does this pattern look like anything that might be relevant to where you are now, or what you have recently seen somewhere around here, or elsewhere? Say, a shape of a place or a particular story or dream? Or, for example, the shape of a rock or a fossil?



Green: Prison project  
Light blue: Museum project./ Third element.(touch)  
Dark blue: Reflection

Emotional timeline/workload 2017



Thank you supervisors

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People involved in conversations /Appendix:

Hans Petter Graver, Jon Lønnve, Ingvil Hellstrand, Gyrid Gunnes, Solveig Styve Holte, Brynjar Bandlien, Sara Orning, Roza Moshtaghi, Bo Bugge, Henrik Treimo, Lisa Rosendal, Jesper Alvær, Ingri Fiksdal, Annelise Bothner-By, Kajsa Dahlberg, Vanessa Ohlraun, Saskia Holmkvist, Mathias Danbolt, Kai Johnsen, students at UiS