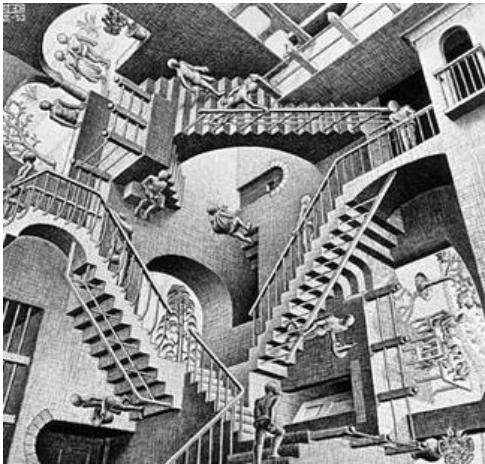


INTRODUCTION

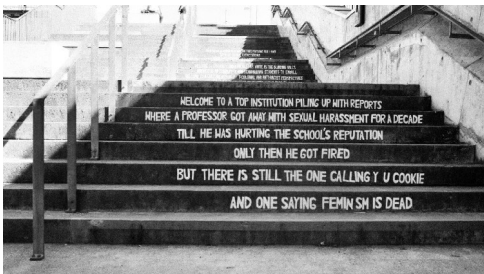


You probably have seen this drawing of Swiss artist [M.C. Escher](#) many times. I am showing it now, because it has something to do with writing. That is, the *activity of writing* when it is brought to *theorise*. *Monkey-mind* says: “I want to figure it out, to have it in my keep, do with it *what* I want, *when* I want.” But it will not succeed, in the attempt it will run frantically in all directions, and where it sought a solution it will find confusion instead. It will be caught in a downward spiral of pointless errands, and will eventually annihilate. Morale of the story: greed led to nothing.

Then there is the *theatrical mind*, that says: “I can perform the problem of this image as a musical score. I *cannot* comprehend it but it can be *held*. And the scenes on the terraces, outside the staircase, are scenes from different parts of my life. Private, public, professional. If I go in

depth, I can make these scenes as precise as needed. Because the staircases connect, I can use the image-score to determine my needs. By declaring ignorance before the puzzle, I can hold the complexity of my life. And before the audience I can *embody the maze*, and thus be *amazing*.”

This approach is inspired by [Douglas Hofstadter](#)’s book (1979) *Gödel, Escher, Bach—the eternal golden braid*. He’s a physicist, a cognitive scientist and a literature theorist. The book is not for the faint minded. The reason why I am presently bringing it on board is that it *somehow* aims at providing a theory of *all possible theories*, with a fan of scholarly repertoires that are relevant to design: physics, cognitive science, literature theory. Of course, this is very broad. But important because it points out two causes of error: **1)** to be trapped in the *stairwell*; **2)** to *leave it* behind.



So, I thought we could start the kickoff of *theory 3/ synthesis* with a two anecdotes about KHiO-students, -teachers and -passers by. Perhaps the first anecdote will prompt you memories of your early months at KHiO in MA programme when you were novices to book-presentations in your first theory course with me—theory 1. This Friday, when the MA1s were doing their book-presentations we were outdoors, owing to the C19 restrictions, to have the possibility to meet with the entire class of 24, at least *once* this term. The waterfall was roaring. We had to shout.

We did the Friday course in the upper staircase outside the school-entrance. In the light of recent political events—and the precedent of the stairs as a site for a political art-work 2 years back—I wanted us all to feel what it was like to do our class there, and take awareness of the relevance of the discussions we have been having in theory-class *for some years now*, to the institution (and take some pride in that). What I didn’t count on were the reactions of the passers by to our loud, and extremely articulate, activities. All of them had a big understanding smile on their faces.



Not only Ali, who passed us on his way to the school-entrance, but *strangers* as well. Literally passers by. So, the class slid into an open air performance, that appeared to be meaningful to the people walking up/down the stairs, as though the significance of what we were doing was evident to them. This is an example of what I would call *third party readability*. Another anecdote: at a preview in the dance and choreography MA, I met Marte Røyeng who studies composition with Henrik Hellstenius at NMH, and has entered a collaboration with Georgiana Dobre who we know.



I said to Henrik, in a fb message, that I always was impressed with the kind of *listening awareness* that the students from NMH seem to have—owing to their musical training—as a very positive presence, whenever they come to work with us here are KHiO. His reply was: “This is a keen observation, thank you for that. For my part I think that KHiO students often have higher level of reflection. Our students are also reflective, but the KHiO students have a stronger muscle in that area.” What a nice thing to say! And he certainly wasn’t speaking of the performing arts alone.

He knows design quite well since our MA programme did a project in which he was involved with his students—10 years back—when we did a collaborative venture at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. As now, he was teaching composition and got to know our MA students, at that time, over a full year with crowding, planning, rehearsals and discussions. This was taking place in the students’ house down by the river—in its heyday—a test-performance was hosted by the Munch Museum, while still at Tøyen, while the dress-rehearsal and performance took place in Paris.



But 10 years later we are here. We are living under the variable geometry of safety restrictions in the middle of a pandemic. I find that it is difficult to convey what has been going on in your classes this fall in images. The time-share of hybrid communication *on Zoom* and *on location*, is bending time and space in ways that *at once* more relational *and* -distanced. Paradoxically. At the close of Studio 3 KK hosted the kind of Zoom session that we have become accustomed to: *the intimacy of a workspace that is confined to an odd mix between warmth and isolation.*

The White Box exhibit hosted by IM was a crossroads between contributions from everyone, in a kind of collective experiment, where the point as much in the *rhythmic* expression of the exhibit as a whole as in the individual contributions. It is the first time that I have seen the *musical* potential of Sigurd’s Studio 3 on materiality, come out in this way at the students’ initiative. Then there was the GI Studio 3 exhibit of Blaker, where Guttormsgaard’s house was transformed into a *palace of memory*, where the students work were resident in the sense of bearing witness to the place.

Owing to the restrictions the audience was led through—at a safe distance and *room-by-room*—in a way that (to me) had the distinct flavour of *immersive theatre*. And together with the White Box exhibit and the Zoom session, it made me think of something that turned up in a short conversation with Kristiina in the White Box. What if exhibits are *not* about taking one step back, but *taking one further in*? That is, opening a space, within the work, *that makes the project leap to a new depth*. One that affords more *precision* about what has been *achieved*, and what is *needed*.



The KK students had already done some writing in Studio 3. Under the weirding impact Zoom proxemics, writing is not distanced, but invites the onlooker to *engage further in*. In the IM exhibit a collection of objects were brought to witness of each other. And in the GI exhibit the workspace of each student and the different rooms they had at their disposal on location at Blaker, were brought into a similar relation. Spaces, objects and writings become witnesses to other spaces, objects and writings. Things taking place alongside, in their own good time.

The essential role of the viewer—the passer by—in making this adjacency occur. It doesn’t happen in the regular interaction—in the first and second person—between students and teacher. It happens in the presence, eyes and movements of the *visitor*. The tutorials in this course (theory 3) should operate as a resource of this kind. The interactions in the *first* and *second* person you will have with me, as the course-leader, and each other in the studio-groups of 3. My perception of you, at this point, based on your work and interacting with you, is that you really are *ready* to determine your *needs*.

But you will also be visited by your *specialised* tutors that will bring out aspects of your work that will be invisible in your interaction with me. And you will also have the opportunity to sign up for tutorials with Maziar. The overall purpose is for you to *determine your needs*: **1)** your *need to theorise*, at this point; **2)** theorising as a way to *determine your needs as designers*. To do this, we will develop the *theatrical mind* (rather than the monkey-mind). Which means that you need to develop practices—during this course—to *hold the complexity* of your work and make it *precise*.

I will return to this. For now there is **1)** the part of the course dealing with *theory and writing* and **2)** the part of the course, harvesting from professional needs hatching in wake of the writing, relating to your *specialisation and methodology*. The harvest will be further enhanced by the presence of a visitor—that we will receive at the end, for the final presentations—who is Bojana Cvejic who teaches theory at the Dance dpt. She will watch your presentations, whether it will be on Zoom or on location, she will read your output and I will return to you with a written feedback.

Of course, you will have to put in the work to pass the course. And I will now turn to what that work-load is. As usual, you will see that the work, people's places and events I have relating to thus far, will reveal themselves as tool as we proceed. *Please keep in mind that there are two methodologies to keep distinct*: the ones relating to theory development where I am the specialist, and the design methodology that can help you develop your projects in the Spring (e.g., leaning on the resources of artistic research). *Questions you need to sort out within your specialisations*.

The methodology below relates to *theory-development*, specifically; and to the step-by-step model that threads the theory curriculum from *theory 1*, through *theory 2* to *theory 3*. So, I will bring you to a *simplified* version of M.C. Escher's stairwell and use that as an outline—something to hold on to—in the difference phases of the weeks to come, that have already been handed to you in the course-calendar. The tutorials with Maziar he will manage on a separate list where you have to sign up individually. As a rule, the tutorials with me will take place in groups of 3 (studios).

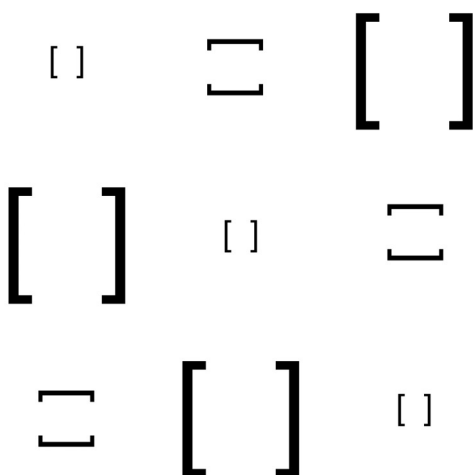
## SUPPORT STRUCTURE



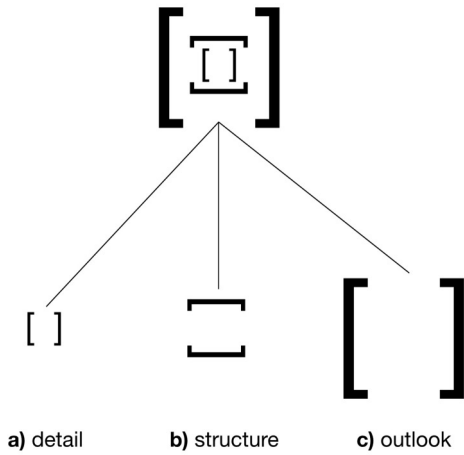
A support structure is a notion developed by artist and architect Celine Condorelli (2009) as a proposition on what theorising can do—and how it can articulate—in artistic practice. When I am applying this notion here, it applies to the course structure, what it does and how it articulates. *It is not there to tell you what to do, but to provide an outline of the elements that are required in the course and how they combine*: in the simplest possible model of how the elements relate to each other. This principle is applied throughout: the principle of *precision* through *repetition*.

*That is, the final step in one job/phase is the first step in the next job/phase*. In this way learning outcomes from each phase become tools in the next phase. Or, the conclusions from the previous phase become the premises of the next. This is the principle that will apply to the simplified version of M.C. Escher's stairwell. Please note that the rule used in the drawing is simply 'rotate 90°': in 3-space it yields 6 cardinal directions. In 2-space the same rule only yields 2 cardinal directions. If we needed 6 we would use 6, but in this course we do not need more than 2. It is complex enough.

If you start left and go right, the pattern in the first line is repeated as you follow the vertical from bottom-right and upwards. Going one line down and following the horizontal, this pattern is found in the vertical bottom-up at the centre of the diagram. Finally, the bottom horizontal line from left to right, is repeated bottom-up from the left at the bottom of the diagram. In other words, it is a variant of the magical square that we know e.g. from Albrecht





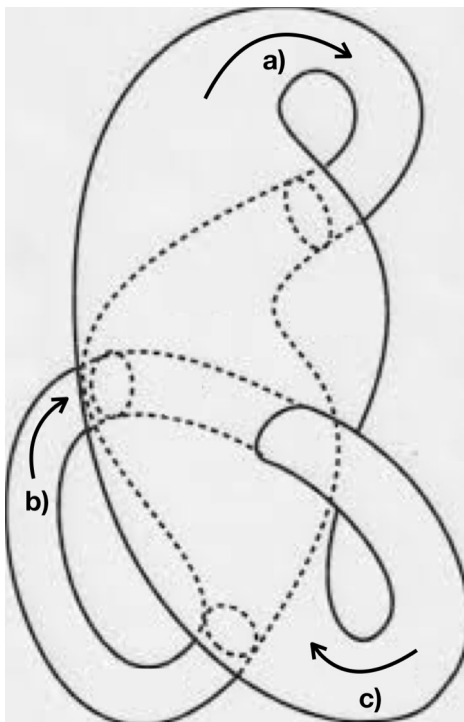


Dürer's print *Melencolia*. It is the same type of self-holding pattern we find in Escher's drawing (cf, appendix).

As previously stated, you will not solve this pattern as though it was a puzzle, but it can be used for categorising purposes that will act as a *support structure* as long as you are content to *develop your skill by proceeding step-by-step*. The brackets are used to take awareness of and separate between **a) detail**, **b) structure** and **c) outlook**. These are conceived such that they will *hold each other as they become joined by the practitioner*, in doing the 3 jobs. So, the joinery between them is performative. They are functionally/generatively rather than logically related.

The principle is similar or identical to how space, objects and writing can become functionally/generatively connected on location. For instance, in an exhibit (also on Zoom when it starts to operate as a local broadcast). It is

on the account of performance connecting the elements functionally that the course-track—in theory 3—beyond the Black Book and the Research Portfolio to define as a Learning Theatre. The learning theatre is also a *project log*, but the difference is that it is held by the body, in the performative aspects of working up an understanding. And developing a theoretical precision in your work.

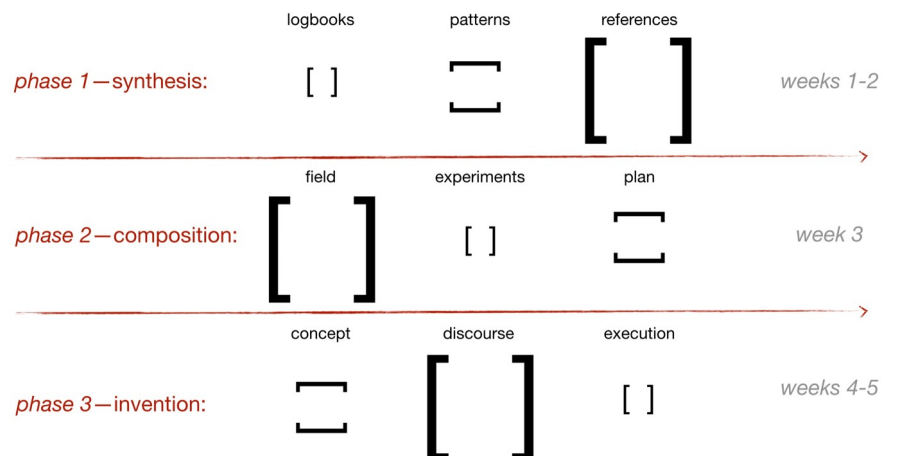


The *static* diagram is used to support a clear *distinction* between the elements, and the layers involved in their *joinery*. The relationship between the 3 can also be drawn to convey the same ideas in a *more fluid and dynamic* way. This I have done in the diagram to the left. I am inviting you to experiment with starting with the outer layer, moving to where it enters into itself to define a narrower pocket, proceeding to an even narrower pocket, only move unto the outer layer again. Moving from project to exhibit, from exhibit to write up provides a good example of how it works.

It means that we can use the logic of *engagement*—always entering—and yet ending up *outside*. Relating to the work as an *embodied* compound (rather than seeing it from distanced point view ["objectively"]). This is really an important point because I am inviting you, in this course where writing is a focal activity, to engage with your work by going further into it, and gaining precision and substance as you engage with the subject matters of your interest. This is not an assignment that I am giving you, but

a challenge that you can work with.

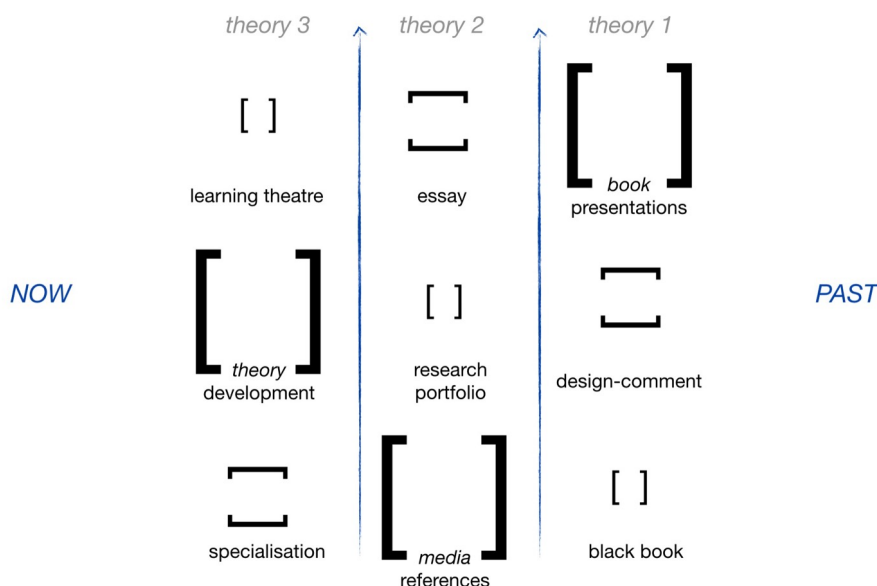
You will receive assistance in developing this possibility. But you will also receive assistance if you don't. That being said, the calendar structure that you have received from me on Canvas, has three gross phases. *Phase 1* is for *synthesis*: to gather your logbooks—the documentation from your work from your MA,



to pick up on your own trail, look up patterns going to your current field of interest, to give yourself a chance to pick up on earlier ideas that may be fresh as you review them at this point. Your job is also to survey how your references have moved, because it may serve to *catch your own drift* and see where you are moving. You will also have new references that hook you up with specialised theory: such as wardrobe-studies, fieldwork, activity diagrams, ergonomics, case-studies, typography, signage, literature theory, semiotics, art-history and philosophy.

Try to think of you references as an *ecological system*, in the sense of *non-same elements* that combined functionally as *performance* starts to define *connections* between them. I have seen this happening already, and we should use the 1-to-1 tutorials on Tuesday and Wednesday—this week—to explore these as we determine where you are with your work, at this point, and where you want to go. The *references* reveal their importance as you move to phase 2, where you to sharpen your ideas of what your *field* is, to create a sample of experimental combinations of text and image, developing compositions with them, and from hatching a plan for your written piece.

One week is a bit short, so if you want to develop smaller text-and-image formats to have more of them—and more time to work on them—you can start with this from *day 1*. That is, to work with it as a method of developing your synthesis. Or you can let the *two phases at least overlap a bit*. Because, in the third phase you are likely to need the full two weeks to work on your written piece. To develop a concept for it, to propose discourse in your field of interest, and jointly execute the design of the piece along with the lists and references that need to be done properly. After all the road with did with APA6<sup>th</sup> last year, I am sure that you have a fair notion of this job.



Here I am rotating the diagram 90° to make the *other face* of the course appear. To the left you will see how the elements of the 3 theory-courses are connected. How they evolve, yet hold each other, according to a pattern identical to the one above, but read in a vertical direction. Read it from the bottom right upwards. And then move leftwards to the next column. Then you will get a gross notion of a synthesis at the course-level. *This is what a synthesis does*: it compresses information that has been disseminated

over time, across different platforms and course-deliveries. In compressing the information—from *phase 1* to *phase 2*—you will make surprising discoveries that more often or not are fertile in theoretical insights. But clearly this diagram is also quite skeletal.

In both *theory 1* and *theory 2* the references to the *specialisations* are—as it were—“theoretical”. We have discussed them in class, and you have brought elements from them in your logbooks. However, in *theory 3* the specialisations are part of the course, in the sense that there are 3 Fridays with tutorials that are ear-marked to KK, IM and GI. The way I have been thinking about the specialisations, is that they will have a structuring impact on *theory output*. They will not teach you, or determine the contents of your work, but help you establish a *professional framework*.

Which means that they are hatching grounds for the professional contents that you will bring to the table in your oral presentations. I will not describe this process in detail, because it is that part of your journey with theory which is your journey: the Grand Tour that you owe yourselves before turning to work on your MA-projects in the spring. *Design methodology*—in the this sense—is to establish a cohesiveness between catching the drift of where writing is bringing you, in the framework of the specialisation, and enable you to share *where theory has brought you as a designer*.





as possible, avoiding prescriptions yet providing you with a workable structure, that will allow me to support you. Yet, what I will do, is to work on a theoretical piece together with a PhD fellow.

This is not to say that we are in the “same boat” because we are not. But I am will be attempting, in this way, to keep myself warm to be of as much practical use to you—when we have tutorials—as possible. Please find below the elements that I have been sharing with you in my last correspondence. And let us hope that working conditions are sufficient, despite the pandemic, to pull off this course in a professionally satisfying way, and to your professional benefit in the spring when conditions hopefully have substantially improved.

theodor.bart@khio.no

## APPENDIX

MA2 MDE 511   Theory 3 — Synthesis								
Weeks →	46	47	48	49	50	51		
Theodor Barth	Monday	Monday	Monday	Monday	Monday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	Thursday	Thursday	Thursday	Thursday	Thursday			
Specialisations	Friday		Friday		Friday	Wednesday?	Thursday?	Friday?
Bojana Cvejic						Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Studios (~3 stud)	monday-friday	monday-friday	monday-friday	monday-friday	monday-friday	monday-tuesday		
Tasks & Occasions	Synthesis		Elements	Precision		Rigging & Submission		
	(From logbooks/documentation)		(Experimental focus)	(Finishing & taking stock)		(Discuss room for Zoom broadcast)		

Chris Thompson’s ideas of theory as journey and the theoros (the one who makes the journey), in the following passage from (2011) *Felt—Fluxus, Joseph Beuys and the Dalai Lama*:

“The theoretic voyage was thus one that was an enactment of solidarity, though at the same time it demanded physical and psychological discipline and endurance from the theoros and entailed periods of solitude: The early Greek theoria was not a private matter, an individual intellectual or professional path leading away from home and tradition. It was, instead, a circular journey, beginning and ending in a rootedness and commitment to one’s native place, family and community, and supported by them every step of the way. Theory, the journey to new and more comprehensive insight, and practice, the living of daily life, were not divorced. Theorizing did not lead only outward and forward, in the linear style of modern thought, but back to the hearth and the polls.”

Theoros = the traveller, Hearth = fireplace; Polis = city; Native place = your specialisation

As Charles Baudelaire wrote in *Invitation to the Voyage* (1857):

“Child, Sister, think how sweet to go out there and live together! To love at leisure, love and die in that land that resembles you! For me, damp suns in disturbed skies share mysterious charms with your treacherous eyes as they shine through tears.

There, there’s only order, beauty: abundant, calm, voluptuous.

Gleaming furniture, polished by years passing, would ornament our bedroom; rarest flowers, their odors vaguely mixed with amber; rich ceilings; deep mirrors; an Oriental splendor—everything there would address our souls, privately, in their sweet native tongue.

There, there’s only order, beauty: abundant, calm, voluptuous.

See on these canals those sleeping boats whose mood is vagabond; it’s to satisfy your least desire that they come from the world’s end. —Setting suns reclothe fields, the canals, the whole town, in hyacinth and gold; the world falling asleep in a warm light.

There, there’s only order, beauty: abundant, calm, voluptuous.”