

We start with the brief: document your process in the MA visiting your projects following your interest to see if there are some “rocks” (ideas and materials) you haven’t turned... and work up their potential: not as a project you solve, but as an archive of collected items you can return to for *inspiration* in your practice, and a place to *garden* and stand as you develop theoretical reflections.

The logbook—called Black Book—is both a medium and materials for inquiry. What is meant by inquiry can be followed up by a line of query of this type. When you develop reflection in your BlackBooks, as they become thick with contents, you simply need to exercise that mix between open *curiosity* and intuitive *system*, in the following list of questions in this sequence:

- (1) What have we here?
- (2) Where is it going?
- (3) How far has it come in terms of what has already been achieved?

0— the adjoined panels provides the *user* with an example of a BlackBook: an entry into visually experimental logbook that aims at showing some possibilities for investigating a *sensorial* path and process of theory development; which combines a *goal-seeking* and *process-mining* practice, in which the hatching of aesthetic *patterns* features a core method to develop theory from practice.

1—This is Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO), by the Aker River. Start from where you are. *Seek always the resident principles*, as Norman Potter wrote in *Models and constructs—Margin notes for a design culture* (1990). What are you doing on this site, where you are right *now*? What was going on here *before*? Is there a *connection* (however slim, it could be a *trifle* connected)?

2—Then pick up on what is going on right in front of you. You ask: *what have we here?* And you allow yourself to be driven by simple *curiosity*. There is nothing more to it. Allow yourself some **serendipity**. Try this contract: *what is happens is not happening because it is important, it is important because it happens*. In the art-school you can take life seriously, as it happens, without asking.

3—I became tangled and tangoed with Bjørn Blikstad’s PhD project “Level up”, for instance, doing some research *alongside* his. Not supervising him, but mentoring him in all the steps by taking his work seriously. Not telling him what to do. His is a craftsmanship of risk in which the choices he makes is to test and stretch professional boundaries. At some point he wanted to paint his work *red*.

4—He applied his chosen *cadmium red* on his wood-carved Peacock Cabinet, which is a modern replacement of the *highly toxic* vermilion. In Norwegian vermilion is named *sinober*, which is also the name of a mineral from which the pigment is manufactured. At the time he painted his work, I was ignorant of this. And his choice to paint and choice of colour left me intermittently in shock.

But the pigment did allow some previously hidden possibilities of the work to come out. While unpainted (or, woodparent) the patterns from the chisel and in the wood held the audience captive. When it was painted, it became easier to see how the global sense of pattern of the Peacock’s tail, dissolved into organic tangles when looked at close up. Leaving us in the meanders of **pareidolia**.

5—At art school, pigments as *vermilion* bring us the hindsight of historical works: not only toxic, but also immensely expensive, owing to the rarity of the mineral *sinober*, or *cinnabar* in English. I

selected Titian's painting *The Assumption of St. Mary* (1516-18), because the interest this painter attracted among the moderns: Marcel Duchamp on the one hand, Walter Benjamin on the other.

6—But while I was ignorant of these connections (having only come across powdered sinober in Lofoten barn), I became fascinated by the fact that there were two places—in neighbouring valleys around Oslo—that both were named **Sinober**: or, **Zinober**, which is a variation in Norwegian. Though the explanations vary, I was struck by how *atypical* these was of Norwegian site-names.

7—But then, shortly after discovering the first duplicate of this kind, I found another on my walks in the forestry areas North of Oslo: **Nordmarka**. Indeed, there was a small place called **Kjelsås** along the Langli valley, replicated the much larger residential area (also **Kjelsås**) by **Lake Maridal**: to date the largest water-reserve feeding Oslo with power and drinking water. You can't bathe/fish there.

8—Eventually, when on my numerous bicycle rides around the Oslo country—for a visit to Midtre Spro on Nesodden—I became aware of an estate called **Skøyen**, which was not the one I was familiar with on the westside of the city. So, another example of duplicate: the repetition **Skøyen-Skøyen**, across the East-West axis of the city. Now I started to wonder if there might be more...

9—Indeed, when biking from Oslo to Blaker for a book-launch, I remembered a place called **Frogner**; as I passed it on the way: we had a student from that place. **Thomas Falla Eriken**, an MA student in design—specialising in comic—who claimed it was one of the oldest settlements around Oslo. Not the **Frogner** that I already knew from the “polished” residential area in Oslo West.

10—When I discovered that there were *two* places called **Skillebekk**, with a similar East-West distribution, I was barely surprised: a sense of *pattern* had already emerged. But by this time, I started to wonder which sense of ‘pattern’ might apply. If a pattern, a pattern of what? Was I about discover underlying forces? Or, was I going somewhere with these streetwise patterns of mine?

11—In other words, I got to the next item on our list. Asking: *where is this going?* Where is it taking me? Here, we move beyond simply marvelling on curious phenomena that we come across. Adding some context to see how the materials we have gathered so far, “react” to it. The protocol of this procedure also works generally with making: the process of making hatches contextual discoveries.

12—Here we return to our familiar surroundings and the initial question: what was here *before*? There were mills—factories—that were power by the river and coal conjointly. Notice, on both of the pictures, the direction of the smoke: from west to east, which is a general pattern in many European cities. Our school was a canvas factory (1856-1960) employing mainly female hands. Unhealthy.

13—At its peak, in 1908, 902 workers were employed in this factory. This was in the early days of electric power in Oslo (**Hammeren** by Maridalsvannet produced a small amount of electric power mainly for city lights at that time, while hydroelectric power became a major power-source in 1927 [**Solbergfossen**]). I have tagged this page with a movie reference: **Tziga Vertov's movie** (1929).

14—In looking at cartographic renderings of Oslo—in regard of the East-West divide—the best one I came across, in terms of legibility and clarity, was **NVE's** (governmental agency for waterfalls and electricity). It neatly divides the city in two, with a clear blue line of the approx. 10km long river from Lake Maridal to the Oslo fjord. I found it to be the most objective one, featuring the natural site.

15—With this map in mind, I returned to the inventory of bike-trips—during and after the Covid 19 lockdown—to see if it might be possible to gather them in a single view. Since they were bit **uncanny** to start with, they were like islands of experience. But then I started to wonder if they could/would yield a new way of inhabiting the city of Oslo, after the pandemic, which I cannot answer here.

16—Yet, this is how it came out. Here the twists and turns of the roadmap are not interesting, but rather the grander gesture of *moving between places with identical names*. The sense of *pattern* that came out here, held two elements that often are separate: 1) the functional explanation to how the east-west axis became significant [smog]: 2) the unexplained duplication of names across.

A *pattern* may be held to be *aesthetic* if it is within the pattern's reach to hold understanding *and* puzzle *jointly*. If this claim is sustainable it means that we are talking about **investigative aesthetics**, rather than a *formal* aesthetics. That is, *not* an aesthetics of pleasing form but one of *investigation*. The functional aspect of the east-west divide is *clear*. The replication of names across it, a *puzzle*.

17—In a map on dialectal variations between the west- and east-side of Oslo, a **web-site** devoted to conversations on language, expanded the field of research to areas around Oslo—to understand the impact of labour migration. This map provides an expanded view, compared to NVE's, showing how the difference of economic wealth/social status, is also linked to seaside-access and altitude.

18—On this map, we leave the natural habitat and are offered a mapping of social-symbolic *status*, linked to physical beauty: if the residents of the wealthier West are more beautiful that's the poorer East, it is because beautiful women seek social status, is the content of the proposition explored by NRK in 2011. The national broadcasting corporation refers to some research to trigger debate.

19—To explore where this might be going, I have adapted a schema in Bruno Latour's book *We have never been modern* (1993), where purification between *binary opposites* (e.g. east-west, poorer-wealthier, beautiful-ugly) find a counter-point in lower part of the drawing, where more *stealthy* dynamics take place: such as, for instance, the duplication of names (and its *deep ecology*).

20—We have come to the last question on the list: how far has our query reached, in terms of where it is moving, with regard to what has already been achieved? It is an occasion for you to observe, as the body of your work grows, that what you thought were new discoveries, actually are reflected in other things that you have been working on for a while: contributing to better/deeper understanding.

Here I feature elements in an ongoing project involving archive research into diaries, documents and photographs: where the diaries are processed *digitally*, and the photos by *photogravure*. The materials is from a wife-and-husband team in the Norwegian Foreign Service, where the wife was from a wealthy family, while the husband's family was unfortunate in the Great Depression (1930s).

The materials—and the investigative aesthetics of processing these—feature a major divide between the wife's and husband's work-days, on the backdrop of the *stealthy* dynamics of receptions, dinner parties and cultural events that are the rule in diplomatic homes: the life of a social and cultural elite on government scale payrolls. It is used as a window into the history of Norwegian energy politics.

This is not the place to go deeper into this materials, but rather to demonstrate the virtues of exploring freely for the purposes of researched theorising. In aspects the project brings together

elements of fashion, interiors and graphic design. With the understanding that stories that seek to capture life as it is in fiction, also will be marked by its realities. It is not abstract theory.

21—To summarise: by *visually experimental* means we have *performed* the three questions—**1) what have we here? 2) where is it going? 3) how far has it come in terms of what has already been achieved?**—in the sense that we have not only asked them in our minds, and *thought* about them, but we have *extended* them working with them according to visually *productive* protocols.

Which means that we have determined a possible way of developing a logbook for reflective and theoretical purposes. This kind of logbook—defined on broad terms as one to collect dated inserts where you develop a foundation for goal-seeking—pairs up what we *think* with what we find out by *doing*. When combined these two yield a deeper understanding of *process*: what is its *substance*.

The specific example given here shows how a need for *repair*, that we can sense in the wake of the pandemic, can be assisted by pairing up with our environment in new and personal ways: *re-pair*. The strategy used has been to look at the urban and natural environment around Oslo, making it less familiar/known: rather than making it more familiar/known trying to go 'back to normal'.

This strategy was developed by Muji-designer Kenya Hara in an MA project called **exformation**: rather than bombarding the world and each other with more information on the same, removing some of that information to make the environment *less* familiar. Then, *re-pairing* it with a context that may already be known, but will prompt unexpected insights from the experimental material.

By proceeding in this way two outcomes may be achieved: **1)** developing a personal philosophy as designer/artist [with deep ecological connection to the natural and cultural environment]; **2)** including *simplicity* as a resource on your repertoire, as something likely to *enhance* rather than reduce the specificity of the site, where you are working or your knowledge applies.

So, resulting from this query is a thesis on *simplicity*: when developed along the lines ventured here, simplicity is *specific* not generic. It is an intuitive resort that may straddle the challenge of a complex world, with its calls and cries. This is a design proposition, in the sense of moving from a current state to a preferred one: not based on narrow preference, but *responsible* by being *able to respond*.