

On Interface

Questioning Memory, Matter and Meaning through the Haptic

This artistic research project explores the concept of 'interface'. It questions the interaction of memory, matter and meaning. I employ interface as an actual, metaphorical and reflective tool for my current art practice. In general, interface means a point where two systems, subjects etc. meet and interact, whereas in computer science interface defines a shared boundary of concepts of medium, material and technology. I propose an even deeper understanding of the interface as a connective tissue that operates between different aspects of reality, for instance as in between the immaterial and material¹, abstract and concrete, repetitive and differential, representative and original. By questioning the interaction of memory, matter and meaning I am pursuing a closer understanding of these aspects when creating new artworks. When bringing together sculptural bodies and installations, the aim is to grasp a better understanding of these notions, how they are activated through technology and the senses. It is also an exploration of possible ruptures, or even a collapse, in the layers and levels of reality, to reveal a world of intricate and infinite possibilities where the artwork is an obscureobscure and enigmatic body of knowledge.

Amulets as interface

Archival objects are a central point of departure for this artistic enquiry. Amulets from material text-cultures², deriving from 300-1200 A.D. situated in two European public archives³ will be explored through the technologies of the digital contemporary of the 21st century. Both in relation to the archives, and in the practice of creating form and structure in space, I am specifically intrigued by the positions of the first- and third person perspectives – the subjective and the objective and how this relates to phenomenology and the notion of intersubjectivity.⁴ I will search into these perspectives with micro-phenomenological methods in order to re-read the amulets in a current situation: to 'other histories'⁵. I have chosen the amulets as objects of research not only for their aesthetic and conceptual qualities, but for their agency as apotropaic⁶ mediators from paradigmatic shifts in time, when humans moved from being oral to writing individuals, and inscriptions of meaning in materials was practiced as a means to communicate with the metaphysical. I will explore the apotropaic practice of pre-modern amulets and the contemporary digital technologies that represent the complexity of the Anthropocene. In both temporalities the material, meaning-making technologies and their different realities have constituted our being. My visits to the archives have influenced and suggested the re-reading of amulets as interfaces. These re-readings question their placement within humanities (e.g. history, philology and archeology) and their representation in the Eurocentric postcolonial archives. As part of my investigative

¹ In this distinction I find support in the feminist materialist perspectives of N. Katherine Hayles where she simply states that "material" should not be seen in a narrow sense but as "matter, energy and information, not only matter in the narrow sense" p. 218, notes to p. 29-69,

² Material textculture describes cultures of the pre-modern, the nontypographic societies, where text where developed and articulated in metals, wood, clay and stone.

³ Vorderasiatisches Sammlung, Staatliche Museum zu Berlin, Germany and Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, Norway.

⁴ Intersubjectivity as identified by Edith Stein in her dissertation *On the Problem of Empathy* (1917): the relationship of the embodied subject to foreign consciousness is intersubjectivity.

⁵ p. 107, Donna Haraway: *Simians, Cyborgs and Women – The Reinvention of Nature*, Routledge, New York, (1985), Fabrizio Terranova : *Storytelling for Earthly Survival*, documentary on Donna Haraway (2019): "We need other kinds of stories. We must change the story".

⁶ Apotropaic (from Greek αποτρέπειν "to ward off" from από- "away" and τρέπειν "to turn") magic is a type of magic intended to turn away evil spirits or influences, to turn away harm or deflect misfortune. It has been practiced in most of the world's cultures, through rituals, names, symbols, practices and objects.

visits to the museum collections I will collect audiovisual material of the objects and the architecture that surrounds them.

I describe my work process and critical reflection as my subjective form of archeology: unearthing the circumstances around the archival objects. The project unfolds through making, reflecting and exhibiting multidimensional art (sculptures and installations), working across different media, where a new epistemological understanding of the 'interface' will be presented in the form of an exhibition and publication.

In my artistic practice I have employed historical sources to raise questions about power-structures in both history and society. For instance, in the project **Anatomical theatre (2013)** the establishment of the Cartesian split was questioned through interdisciplinary collaborations with scholars and artists, with an interest in a decentralized view of both history and the human body. The installation and subsequent anthology opened up for an embodied reading of a historical space and knowledge deriving from mystical traditions of the so-called East and development of Western medicine. The **Anatomical theatre** has led me to an interest of the position of the embodied mind, suggested as a solution to the mind-body problem, firstly introduced by the neuroscientist, biologist and philosopher Fransesco Varela⁷ (1946-2001). How the interface can be placed in relation to the embodied mind is something I explore, for instance through employing methods from micro-phenomenology, developed by Varela and his team of researchers⁸, in the re-reading of the amulets into the present.

The haptic as modus operandi

I intend to examine how meaning is expressed in both analogue and digital technologies. I will look closer at the operations of the nonconsciousness that exist in the making of art, as another form of creating, retrieving or dissolving memory. Recently the feminist materialist N. Katherine Hayles concept 'tripartite framework of human cognition' has gained importance to my reflective process, and in particular her thoughts on nonconscious cognition and technical assemblages. Guided by an interest in a broad range of media, I will emphasize the 'haptic' as a methodological modus operandi when realizing and exhibiting the artworks. When I think and practice methodologically through the haptic, I suggest to myself an openness and criticality to the sensorial hierarchy: focusing on the sense **of touch, to be touched and to touch**⁹ through all parts of the artistic process. Rather than being a specific method within one medium, I suggest that the haptic *leads* the way in making conceptual, perceptual and formal choices.

Artistic results

Current ideas and material for work and reflection consist of texts in written and oral form, composed as essays, performance lectures and voice-over in audio-visual material. These texts unfold in a work-complex of sculptural elements and immersive installations articulated by employing both digital and

⁷ Fransisco Varela (1946-2001) studied medicine at University of Santiago, biology at Harvard University and brain research at universities in New York and Frankfurt. His notion of organisms as a set of closed systems cooperating on the basis of common sense, introduced important changes in our vision of reality. He promoted the dialogue between science and Buddhism as co-founder of the Mind & Life Institute. Varela presented his thoughts in the seminar 'Art meets science and spirituality in a changing economy' on BBC in 1990s and later in the volume **The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience (Fransisco J. Varela, Eleanor Rosch, Evan Thompson, MIT Press, 1991/2017)**

⁸ Cognitive Science and Epistemology, CREA, at the Ecole Polytechnique, Paris. The French phenomenologist Claire Petitmengin, professor Emerita at the Institut Mines-Télécom and member of the Archives Husserl (Ecole Normale Supérieure) in Paris, is leading the development in the field. Petitmengin completed her doctoral studies on intuitive experience (L'Experience Intuitive, 2001).

⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy: *Rühren, Berühren, Aufrühr*, SubStance, volume 40, Number 3, 2011 (Issue 126), pp. 10-17, University of Winsconsin Press

analogue technologies. The installations attempt to stimulate a shifting cognitive and affective response in the participants.

I intend to present processual work at the mid-term seminar in January 2021. The final results of the project will be disseminated in an exhibition and publication during spring 2022.

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Petrine Vinje

Bio: *Petrine Vinje (born 1980) is an artist based in Oslo. She received her MA in Fine Art at the Institute of Colour, Oslo National Academy of the Arts in 2005. Her sculptural installations often combine audiovisual and textual elements in a large scope of materials, where she explores ideas about belief, temporality and spatiality in the systems of the material and immaterial. Vinje`s artistic practice is informed by mysticism, technology, phenomenology and feminist theory. Petrine Vinje has been conducting temporal, transdisciplinary projects in public space, commissions and artistic research projects. Her work have been exhibited in a number of national and international group exhibitions, and in solo exhibitions at Fotogalleriet, Oslo (2018), the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo (2014), Tegnerforbundet (2017) amongst others. She has conducted several public commissions including for the Research Council of Norway, and the Norwegian Defence Estates Agency. In 2018, Petrine Vinje published Anthology – Anatomical Theatre, a book based on a project where she invited scholars and artists to contribute in a vast associated programme that was set in a replica of an anatomical theatre from the 1500s produced for the Norwegian Sculpture Biennale in 2013. She is currently undertaking a doctoral fellowship at Oslo National Academy of the Arts.*