**Matching Qualities in Artistic Research (MQAR)**

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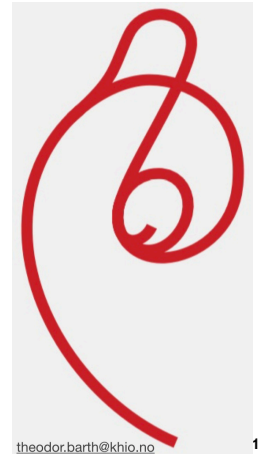
**1**  The present initiative comes from the challenges I see—also in my *own* practice—to match the quality of artistic work with the *discussions* that we have of it. That is, discussions and other forms of exchange/interaction relating to the work, that is *not* the work itself; which evolves alongside it, at gatherings and conferences devoted to this purpose, and part of a *whole* we call *artistic research*.

My training—as an anthropologist—makes me predisposed to take interest in cultural activities, describe these and develop understandings that will hatch new repertoires among a reading audience. At art school this audience is often made up by the same people whose activities interested me in the first place. Eventually, I realised that this is a rather limiting approach to engage with AR.

A muffled—or, muted—question is whether I can use artistic methods that *can level* with what I do as a trained anthropologist. And that, if they fit, the artistic methods could hatch insights, understandings and repertoires, which my anthropological training can *comprehend* but *not* produce. Do I have to be *skilled* as a practitioner to do that? Or, does it hinge on something else? As criticality.

Is it even possible to use artistic methods to embark on queries *not* interesting to all artists, but can serve to repurpose my work as an anthropologist in the art-field? Are there aspects of these queries that would take on, and catch interest, outside the confines of the art-school? This is the kind of question that I want to ask. Hopefully, to stage and empower *new voices* in our work-sphere.

**Exhibit #14(1)—an electric panel**

**2**  In this talk, I am developing a particular configuration of a lineup called Exhibit #14 which is placed deep into KHiO's library. I call it Exhibit #14(1) because there might be more coming. It is called a *lineup*: an English translation of the word *Aufstellung* in German, or *oppstilling* in Norwegian. It is conceived as a *non*-egocentric item, in the sense that it displays *not* itself, but a book-collection.

**3**  In one aspect, the lineup is inspired by Aby Warburg's atlas of memory, called *Mnemosyne*: it was made up of 63 panels and similarly developed to empower a book-arrangement, through *visual-tactile* metaphor. At this level, Exhibit #14(1) features a participatory attempt to be *with* Aby Warburg. In particular, through his years of *confinement* at the Bellevue Asylum, 1921-1924.

At another level, Exhibit #14(1) features a *cartographic* attempt: moving from the atlas as a simple collection of panels—displaying the architecture of memory in art history—to venture some initial

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[1] If you find this signature on a card-board box from Elementa—e.g., the planter system—it is all right, we are collaborating. If you find it in works of studio ^O^ related to the molecular ballet, it is the same thing. We are collaborating.

and hesitant steps in redrawing a map of the world: from the modern *global* to the post-pandemic *terrestrial*, ventured by Bruno Latour in two of his latest books: an environmental [attractor](#).

Finally, Exhibit #14(1) is about situating and positioning ourselves in the *electrosphere*. I hope to catch up with Henrik Hellstenius from here. When listening to Ellen Ugelwik playing real time on a Steinway, I pictured him operating a mixing-console to secure a *wealth of sound* from the grand piano in *digital recording*. This—the playing & recording *compound*—constitutes the *electrosphere*.

But then there is the *other* keyboard: what we are *now* hearing, results from an electric *amplification* from electronic processing. This too belongs to the electrosphere. I am talking about what Anthony Dunne (2005) determined as the Hertzian space: an "'electroclimate' defined by wave-length, frequency, and field strength arising from the interaction between the natural and artificial landscape."

So, the electrosphere is a *between-space*—the liminal, if your will, or interstitial space—connecting the natural and artificial landscape through interactions, that are also environmental transactions. Exhibit #14(1) also discusses what has been coined [the material turn](#). Something that we may want to discuss on the backdrop of the electrosphere. Electricity *powers* machines, *amplifies* electronics.

### Exhibit #14(1)—material turns

There are four *material turns* in my work with Exhibit #14(1): materials became embodied whenever their *impact* on the work significantly *differed* from my anticipation. These materials are: **1)** the *Molton* fabric wrapping a frame; **2)** the *measurements* of the 90 x 180cm wooden frame featuring the panel's dimensions/proportions; **3)** the *wig pins* used to fasten the visual elements of the lineup.

The fourth *material turn* is **4)** the human *voice*, as something that can be lost and conquered: a determining, initial and final, instance of embodiment. I start with the Molton fabric because it shows, in a most obvious way, the importance of passive elements to *response-ability*. Given that *a body is* what—in a philosophical sense—*extends* existence *from* materiality. Including *non*-human bodies.

Among these material turns, only the fourth relates to *sound*, through the vehicle of *voice*. The voice being determined by *both* passive and active [attributes](#), the 3 first elements I lined up, will help to gain a more robust understanding of the *passive* element; cases of paradoxically *enabling inhibitors*. Something that *stops*, *pins* and *delimits* the scope that makes other active affordances *specific*.

The first material turn came with the choice of the Molton fabric to wrap the Exhibit #14(1) *frame*. It was selected because the voice-topic *associated* with a BlackBox, performing arts and opera. I had *no* previous experience with this fabric. As I was testing a mini-projector for another job, I happened to direct the light source on the textile. Revealing an impressive capability to *absorb* light.

This passive, non-reflective, property struck me because it so efficiently intervenes with the digital content. Though it belongs to the general purposes of *viewing*, it also stopped—or, interrupted—an online content; as efficiently as domestic life intervenes with the train of *daily* video-conferencing. I became excited by the possibility of what such *black* could do for the visual elements of my lineup.

That is, the *standby* passive property of making a space/surface *ready* for active visual elements. For a technician this is sure to be banal. But if certain materials—by their *inert* properties—stand to *witness* occurrences (with active properties), then this inert property of specific materials is sure to be important to what we understand by *embodiment*. Referring specifically to Merleau-Ponty.

The passage I have in mind is from the *Phenomenology of Perception* in which he states that when we say /*the river flows*/ we are surreptitiously placing *in it* a witness of its course. We speak from a

*perception* of the river, though we are *not* in presence of the river to witness it. So, we employ a *proxy witness* as a *placeholder*. Without such *currency* we couldn't speak of anything that is *not* here!

**12** Now I pass from the Molton fabric to the dimensions of the panel. The moment of epiphany I experienced with *these* measurements—90 x 180cm—is comparable to the understanding hatched by the Molton fabric. It happened on a journey to Kyoto, for a conference in 2016, when the organisers, to the extent I understood them, asked for posters in these specific measurements.

**13** I reasoned that the Japanese are famous for setting their own standards, so Brynhild Seim helped me print a poster on *vinyl*—which drops easily—which I had developed on my computer, dutifully respecting the measurements. Once in Kyoto, I lived in a Ryokan. I constantly bumped my head in the door frame. So, I began to wonder... *what if?* I found that the poster fitted the door-frame.

**14** Then I observed that the *tatami*-mats on the floor measured the same. I was soon to realise that these were the [preferred measurements](#) in both houses *and* city-planning. Fitting the poster into the door-frame, in a moment turned the whole situation in Kyoto into a giant jigsaw-puzzle. So, 90 x 180cm was the local metric *approximation* to the Japanese *ken*. The size also of the poster-panels.

**15** But why introduce these panel-dimensions into a project exploring Aby Warburg's panel work, in the memory-atlas project and not the dimensions that he used for his [panels](#) (140 x 170cm)? Reading Didi-Huberman's book on *Mnemosyne—the Anxious Gay Science* I found that building on the trail of material memories, of this kind, I would be closer to the method of the *original* than by mimicking it.

**16-18** That is, how a frame can stand to *witness* an architectural method largely *beyond* its scope. Which is why I include it into my portfolio of embodiment: *between* sensing *and* perceiving, a *bridge* featuring in our environment as a *passive* element. Another such bridge are the *pins* I selected for the lineup: big ones with a T-handle that could/would invite *less* nimble hands to make changes.

**19** Pins that would *also* include and invite male hands. Not by impulse but with due time spent knowing the project and developing understandings of it that would warrant changes. For instance, working on Exhibit #14(1) my daughter wanted to alter the sequence of the 3 text-elements in the vertical drop. I let it simmer and then I got her point. The images used to tag the texts also changed.

**20** They continue changing. Which is why I wanted pins of a *manageable* size and with a handle. I determined with Nina Størk that they are used as dress-maker pins for toiles. But eventually I found that they were specialised pins for *wig-makers*. Which completed the circle, since my point of departure was the stage, and that in the maker-culture at our school wigs would rather belong there.

**21** Wig-pins are inert in the sense that they are simply *available* on the market, and enable wig-making. They stand to witness activities devised to frame a human face and shape it into a head. And if the audience will point out that my procedure in routing the materials—*fabric*, *frame dimensions* and *pins*—in a triangle is *rhetoric*, I couldn't agree more. The question is by *which* trope?

**22-23** The trope is that of the *synecdoche*, which from a *fragment* will conjure a *whole*: we move from a piece of *fabric*, a *frame* and a *pin* to a whole (a *stage*, a *city*, a *persona*). It is critically related to the metonym in which the *whole*—proceeding in the opposite direction—is tucked into the *part*: like when the *monarchy* is contained by *the crown*. Synecdoche features the opposite from this.

**24** And, this is my argument, it hinges on *embodiment*: like when a captain says 'all hands on deck'. If there was noone to testify what *hands do on deck*, the expression would be void. Not even absurd. So, there is a *proxy witness* to 'what hands do on deck'. A placeholder while the crew is still down below, and the deck is yet empty. The embodiment really is not a philosophical equivalent of a *spa*.

I enables immediate action. But posits the effective assumptions of a body—inert and standby—without which we remain powerless in connecting a part to a whole. I am assuming that a share of our audience are teachers, and that they have had the experience of speaking on a topic, but there is no—standby enabling—connection: the feeling of words falling like *sawdust* to the ground.

**25**

Kafka owned an MC called Odradek: a *make* that became Skoda. I am thinking of the story *Cares of a family man*: the story of the half-live/undead Odradek… a star-shaped spool with a handle and loose threads. The kind of item for which there is no fixed place. You never get rid of it. If it laughs—knowing that it will survive you—it is a laughter without lungs, with the sound of rustling leaves.

Another aspect of the loss of voice is when the words are *stuck* in our throat, and our decision to talk anyhow will pile up as *nonsense*, bring up *misunderstandings* and build *animosity*. To my knowledge there is nothing that can fix the problem by engineering it. It needs to be gardened and also needs the work of time. It is *not* a product to which design can be *added*. It moves to the core.

### Exhibit #14(1)—doing & making

**26**

Which brings us back to my errand with the *electrosphere*. The assumption that work can be contained by a screen takes *no* stock of what happens *alongside* it. It disturbingly—and symptomatically—*discards* the discoveries and occurrences in the electrosphere, which are here discussed as *material turns*. This is why I am making an attempt to bring them *out* of the shadow.

The point being that there is a class of items—conceived and hatched as the *bodies* of our perception— be harmful/unwieldy if kept in the dark, while they prompt an *attitude* if we are aware of them. And here lies the challenge, because they are *passive*. And at the core of this challenge lies the challenge of separating between embodiment and agency. A [mediaeval distinction](#).

The bodies discussed here are not *doing* anything for us. Which is why they *fall off* our radar all the time. Because we are so *busy*, think we are *busy*, need to be *busy* to earn our keep. So, it is the aspect of books, computers, money etc. which is passive—strictly not *doing* anything—that interests us here. It is the fact that they are *there*, standby, that puts them on the watch. Like waking up at 4.

**27**

Money is on the *watch*. Books are on the *watch*. Computers are on the *watch*. They have a sensorial *readiness* without which we could *not* extend our senses and compound perceptions. Molton is *ready*. Measurements are *ready*. Pins are *ready*. They are part of a *larger self* which is *not* the ego. If we conceive them as *actors*, their embodiment is kept in the *dark*. We become their cultural fools.

But can we conceive a *vectorial* sum between bodies and actors? Can they come together as *discrete* components of a vectorial sum? Like two orthogonal dimensions that *either* sing, or do *not* sing, together? Is the vectorial sum *inherent* to what we call human voice? It could explain how and why Aby Warburg—who *lost* his voice during a psychosis—regained it *twice*: at two junctures.

First by giving a lecture: his voice still shrieking/whispering. He managed to articulate a coherent mind in discourse. Then, after his discharge, and having worked for some time with the *Mnemosyne* project, the "full voice of his manhood" returned in full vigour. There is some discussion about this, but this is how the story goes. Which is why it belongs to a *cultural study* of voice.

This is the one point where I have been thinking that Henrik Hellstenius and I could achieve something together. Discussing in *this* forum, or through a collaborative artistic research project. Would it make sense to transform Warburg's sick-journal into a *libretto*. Could we work with a singer to find out more about the twists and turns of voice with the *associated technologies* internal to it?

ANNEX

Assuming that we as persons expect *ourselves*—as bodies and agents—*to be aligned*. But our bodies and agency often do *not* come together. Or, in Gilbert Simondon's terms, they do not *individuate*. The *vectorial sum between a body and an agent is an individual*. But this is *not* a given. It may/not happen. Which is why we have schools, education, research and conferences.

To Simondon individuation certainly does *not* extend from human beings *only*: on the contrary, his project starts with *physics* and a simple example of brick-manufacture, referred to by Tim Ingold in his book on [Making](). I will not take this example here, because it will bring us off the track from the present course. Instead, I will venture an attempt based on the earlier ideas on the *electrosphere*.

In many European languages—English, Norwegian, French and German to pick a few—electricity is associated with *water*, or at least with flow: electrical current. Current matters and matters of current, we are talking about a flow, waves, sinus-curves. Simondon is interested in *associated technologies*: such as **1)** electric power with **2)** hydro-turbines in Norway, and other places.

**28**

This kind of association between technologies is essential to what Simondon determines as *individuation*: his prime example being the *wheel*. A wheel individuates *from* rollers and came by through a *particular* association: the *rim* with a *hub*, where the *same* principle is applied twice. There is *rotation* at the rim and *rotation* at the hub, around the *axle*. It affects politics & economics,

In our present political economy we are relating to electricity in a *one-dimensional* way: electricity is the *same* whether it comes from nuclear, thermal, solar or hydroelectric plants. In economic terms it is *not* an associated technology. In Simondon's terms, by virtue of being an associated technology hydro-electric power is an *individual*. Solar electricity is another. They are *differently* wheeled.

**29**

Relating to electricity *no matter* where it comes from is, in other words, is *not* making us more advanced. On the contrary. It moves the electrosphere toward the *fictional* by removing it from its sources. It becomes *arbitrary* and *random*, instead of *contingent* as an associated technology: i.e. alongside and touching, as *power* and *amplification* in the electrosphere. A vectorial sum.

The lateral drift of the embodied electrosphere towards the fictional—or, entertainment—is accordingly *ideological*. It serves the tendency of making computers more abstract, of conceiving the digital as a reality to *itself*. With the analog as a *supplement*, or an appendix, that we are not sure what we will do with. It is promised to the garbage heap form the beginning.

What I am suggesting—as a matter for discussion—is how the environmental crisis is ideologically overdetermined. That is, the way we perceive environmental damage is *already* ideological, and is accordingly bound to produce more of the problem through the ways of our perception. The problem is *real*. But our perception is *part* of the problem. So, how do we address this in AR?

**30**

For one, we are arguably working with *associated technologies* all the time. Ane Thon Knutsen's work with type-setting and authoring in her *Virginia Woolf*-study, comes to mind. But if we start from here we will soon trigger an avalanche. Ellen Ugelvik's performance in *Hands | The Double*, is a case in point of associated technologies. Including the relationship to the composer (Hellstenius).

What will happen if we multiply our understandings of the individual, *beyond* humans—singular human contributions—to focus on the *hatching* of individuals in a broader sense: in the sense of the work. Art work. When and how does individuation *hatch* in an art production? Would it affect the nature of the *association* between art and research, and the *qualities* we are looking for there?

And at KHiO, what would happen if we took *voice* out a corner of the school devoted to *opera*—in the same sense as *design* is another corner, I would say—and started with the ability to sing, *before* the ability to name? What if we could study the ability to sing *and* name conjointly? What would be the resulting *individual* in which singing and naming are *wheeled*? Would it *communicate*?

That is would it *crystallise* and spread as a crystal growth *unto* other fields? This is Simondon's model of communication. Information *hatches* through individuation. Communication moves through *crystallisation*. You will notice how his notions are both passive *and* active (a vectorial sum). Could a school like KHiO provide other schools/research institutions with *proofs of this pudding*?

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