Tactical work with an artistic core—w/3ʳᵈ party readability as an environmental vantage point

Report: This is a report on the St Phalle Games 2023 at Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO), 24th March 2023.

Participants: first year MA students in design, a team from the operations unit who also docu-minted the event, a team of researchers from the National Library of Norway.

Activity: 5 teams popping colour-filled balloons on a paper-sheet with an airgun.

Host: DE 545 Theory development, the master programme (MA) at the design department.

Equipment: left-over paper from the print-shop, 6L gouache/6 colours, 72 coloured balloons, safety pins, card-board floor cover, a carpet wall, air-gun and pellets.

Preparations: Theodor Barth (course leader/professor), Trond Mikkelsen (head of technical production at KHiO), Kjetil Smedal, Jane Panpakdeediskul & other MA-students who joined in.

Location: teaching room 1, the "form room" by the lower North side of the river by the water-fall.

Time: 13:00-16:00 hours

PRELIMINARIES

The function of the report is to iterate the MA-student's obligation to report on *planned absence* they submit when they seek extra-curricular activities—of relevance to the course & their specialisations—in a course of *theory development* (DE 545) in which they are engaged eight Fridays & two presentation-days awarding 5 credits/ects (total 125-150 hours) from the total of 30 credits/term.

The function is to feature 'a course that learns'[1] to a public of 3rd party readers, inside KHiO and beyond. The basis for establishing such readership and readability—which is part of the learning outcomes from DE545—was secured by inviting two professional groups from outside the course to attend the Saint Phalle Games, and participate. From KHiO & from the National Library (NLN).

The class and the two delegations/teams are listed below. The concept for what is attempted in the present report is laid down in the introductory paragraph of Universities & College Act (N. *Lov om universiteter og høyskoler*). The background for referring to this paragraph is a *design question*: a query on art in the context of its *application*, with a usership/query that does not have to be artistic.

> Quote (§ 1-1 The task of universities and colleges, section c): "The task of universities and colleges is to [...] c. spread knowledge of their activity and foster understanding of the principle of professional freedom and *application* of scientific and artistic methods and results, both in teaching the students, its own organisation, in public management, and the cultural/business sectors."

The concept of 'function' is here used in a design-sense: that is, the joint articulation of *purpose* and *experiment* in a conjoint process of pathfinding and goalseeking. This concept is tactical in the sense defined by Michel de Certeau (1984) in The practice of everyday life, in which a careful distinction is made *between* strategy *and* tactics. The present report articulates a *tactical* level.

Which is the reason for using the basic setup of Niki de Saint Phalle's work—*Fire at will* (Fr. Feu à volonté)—from June 30th-July 12th 1961. A part of a more extended work of moving *beyond* painting as surface and sculpture, *unto* large architectural outdoors projects, as the Tarot Garden in Italy. This example of action art explores destruction in the transition from art to design.

The report on the St Phalle Games 2023 is subdivided into 4 sections:

1) description of the activity

2) list of participants [MA-class, the operations units and the guests from the National Library]

3) relevance to strategic work [KHiO and collaboration with the National Library of Norway]

4) relevance to discussions we have developed in class [DE 545, theory development]

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[1] MA student Kjetil Smedal completed successfully a whole round of application for planned absence, approval, discussion, completion and delivery in the form of an exposé that was part of our learning theatre in our morning session March 24th. His work: an experimental for with shapes in extreme conditions with rock, wind, snow and ice.

1) description of the activity

The form-room by the Aker river—at the lower end of the water-fall—was converted into a shooting range for airgun, of a Czechoslovakian make from the 60s[2]. Safety precautions were taken by sealing the entrance at the end of the ranged, and by the implementation of strict safety rules during the session March 24th 13:00-16:00: barrel in shooting direction, clearing the range before picking up the gun, distributing one pellet at the time. Instruction in the basics of shooting before the session.

The floor was covered with a thick layer of cardboard, to protect the flooring against paint-spillage. The paint used was gouache (so-called school-gouache commonly used in kindergarten), for easy removal in case of spillage. The gouache came in 6 hues, 1L of each: red, blue, green, yellow, purple and brown. A good amount of left-over paper was given to us by Brynhild Seim at KHiOs print-shop, it was cut and straightened by Kjetil Smedal. Jane Panpakdeediskul prepared the colours.

Working areas were prepared for the 5 teams to work on filling the balloons with a chosen mix of paint, water and air was separated from the shooting area with a line of *potatoes*. Potatoes were used because available, but also to prompt the connection to a cultivated area (like field, garden or park). This was done in order to invite the participating teams to conceive the aim, shot, and effect in emergent spatial terms of a *yet* unrealised *but* immanent potential of populating the form-room.

A certain number of variables were predicted: the amount of colour, the amount of water, the amount of air and *composition* on the paper-sheet on which the balloons were fastened with safety pins. Also that that order of shooting the mounted balloons might affect the *layering* of the piece. What was not predicted is that there is *no* automatic relation between the amount of air and the force of explosion: due to the small size and speed of the pellets many balloons kept/drizzled.

The number of hits with good explosion increased during the shooting, from learning. Hitting at the top end by the knot, appear to be a way to secure a good pop. However, the drizzling balloons traced the pieces with lines and also had a sculptural effect that—in some cases—invited [pareidolia](#). A team also decided that they would fasten the sheet in an L-shape to secure caption of the residue colour that otherwise would have gone to the floor. Generally the results were quite unpredictable. As MA-student Herman Enkerud commented: "you have no idea of what the result will be, yet when it occurs you know exactly what it is." This dialogue between *emergence* and *appropriation* is a potent communicator, if we include hit-and-impact into communication & sensorial cogency.

The sense in which the St Phalle Games featured a ritual. In Edmund Leach's (1964, p. civ) terms: «'Ritual' is a term which anthropology uses in diverse senses. My own view is that while we only run into paradox if we try to apply this term to some distinct class of behaviours, we can very usefully think of 'ritual' as an aspect of all behaviour, namely the communicative aspect.»

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[2] The *Slavia* airgun was a gift from former Professor of textile at KHiO, Hans Hamid Rasmussen (homage).

2) list of participants

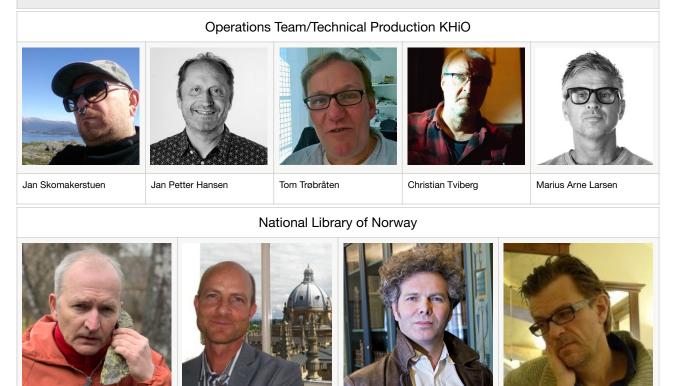| MA1 KHiO—design					
NiPe Bie (IM)	Mathias Malm (IM)	Eva Chen (KK)	Herman Enkerud (GI)	Em Mikalsen (KK)	Jane Panpakdeediskul (GI)
Kjetil Smedal (IM)	Nicolas Vittori (GI)	Zola Wang (KK)	Annikken Wilhelmsen (KK)	Lloyd Winter (IM)	Jav Wu (KK)

Acr. for specialisations: 1) IM = interior architecture & furniture design; 2) KK = clothing & costume designs; 3) GI = graphic design & illustration.

Operations Team/Technical Production KHiO				
Jan Skomakerstuen	Jan Petter Hansen	Tom Trøbråten	Christian Tviberg	Marius Arne Larsen

National Library of Norway			
Harald Østgaard Lund (photo)	Eivind Røssaak (film)	Marius Wulfsberg (handwriting)	Øivind Hanche (film)

Neither the groups *nor* group-members were selected/ordered: the students had a background of working in small groups, the guests—from the operations unit and the National Library—*volunteered* and, in this sense, defined *disordered systems* (F. Barth, 1992) at [different levels] of *game*: the entire attendance, the teams and the shooting (shooter-gun-pellet-balloon-colour-sheet): a process in which *deep learning* manifests *emergent properties* generated from *interaction* (not ordering).

In this sense, the St Phalle Games yielded an experimental generated hive-minds generated from the interaction within each team, their audience and the output in the visual pieces at the top of this document. The context: the students have been working in small groups called QUADs (after Samuel Beckett and [Bruno Latour](#)) for two terms. During which they have developed *experimental narratives* in logbooks submitted for feedback, and presented in class (so-called BlackBooks).

From this basic setup *formats* have been explored as interaction designs: of which the setup with the shooting-range for the St Phalle Games 2023, is a case in point. We have also explored *scenarios*—possible alternative presents to the current—which provides the opportunity to explore what is 'hidden in plain sight': this sort of scenario-thinking might qualify as the equivalent of deep learning in the art field. Here, the report itself features a scenario: reporting to KHiO and NLN[3].

3) relevance to strategic work

KHiO has recently launched a new [strategy](#)—i.e. a so-called "strategy-plan"—highlighting the school's *artistic core*, as a specialised university: this central column is flanked by two others— *strategic cooperation* and *sustainability*. During the pandemic it was agreed with the Dean Peter Løchstøer that the Design dpt. would enter a strategic collaboration with the Section of Media and Conservation at the National Library of Norway. Chiefly anchored to the §112-series at NLN.

As with the St Phalle Games 2023, this collaboration has been activities-based and *not* planned in detail: rather, the detail have emerged through the interaction itself. This is true of the several editions of the §112-series named *Snow- and ice-clad alps* (the seminar series devoted to 19th century geologist B.M. Keilhau), and later to the Norwegian petroleum adventure. The activity led to the course-leader's application for a research residency. He is now working there twice weekly.

According to the traditional divide between *strategy*, *tactics* and *operations* in strategy work, these activities—as experimental test beds—are situated at the *tactical* level[4]: which is often the level where research and related activities (such as theory development) are located in institutions as KHiO and NLN. That is, operating at the middle-out level of organisational development, from where collaborations *conjugating* student work and *articulating* management becomes *possible*.

In this report, the environmental dimension mainly features in the attempt at making an activity readable to a 3rd party in the form of a report[5]. As long are organisations operate as isolates—which can hatch a protectionist reflex in times of budgetary cuts in public spending—they cannot partake of dependencies in ecosystems that are generated through interaction. Which might indicate that the tactical activity level of strategic process is particularly needed in times with fewer resources[6].

The specific question that a collaborative venture between KHIO and NLN can serve to explore in depth is the possibility of using artistic methods in the expanded field of research; whether this research is archival or scientific—or, various combinations of artistic, archival and scientific. There

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[3] This scenario would have amounted to nothing if it was't for the GDPR that obligates the issuer to circulate the report to the people involved to retrieve the permission to feature names and faces.

[4] *Tactical drill*: when in such situation do this drill, to relocate sensorially and come up with ideas for the situation.

[5] We have used paper waste for the games, but the pellets are lead and the colours are synthetic. The *Caran d'Ache* gouache available at KEM contains mostly naturally degradable pigments, but are comparatively expensive and require a higher budget than what has been available this year.

[6] The model of collaboration with the operations unit on this project is a case in point: to document the Games, Jan Petter Hansen brought along 2 apprentices whose harvest will be the backbone of a collaborative narrative with the course.

are two aspects that can contribute to this: for one, what is learned by using *artistic methods* in the *expanded field*. Secondly, the basis of the archive in exemplars entering publication/exhibitions.

The professional profile of the the team from NLN that turned up with the St. Phalle Games 2023—photo, film and handwriting—are areas if direct relevance to the MA students, in the aspects relating to reflective practice, and in some cases production (e.g. in KK and GI). The aspects of the space rigged for deep learning—as the shooting range—yields materials for our MA students in IM. The Games also provided the occasion for disseminating NLN as a potential research for MA-research.

4) relevance to discussions that we have been developing in class

The assignment we are working from on the course is that *theorising* follows in the wake of the aspect of reflective practice that we can call the *work of reception*. The work of reception that extends unto theory-development, does not intend to hatch knowledge of the Encyclopedia- or Wiki type: but rather a style of knowing which is *actively* receptive *and* auto-corrective. The relevance of this form of knowledge—common in the arts—is acquiring a contemporary relevance with AI.

That is, a way of seeing AI is that it is developing *active models* of this form of knowing, in [active models](#) based on parallel processing machines, deep learning in neural networks, *compressing* data, and methods of programming *from* data. Compressing data—according to Ilayda Sutskever ([Open ai](#))—models the transition from the world as it is (and we can know it) and its *projection* in language. The role of *images*—as a vehicle of sensorial cogency—in compressing information, is based on realm of *experience* which has been familiar in the arts-field for a long time.

The pieces at the top of the report—for instance—contains a record of the *entire* process of shooting that can be replayed up to a degree through conversations that do *not* substitute the visual process, but contributes to *and* enhances the sensorial compression into *images* (based on cross-sensorial inputs packaged in *touch*, whether haptic or kinaesthetic[7]). The shooting teams and the output in the pieces, is one instance. Another is QUADs that the MA students have been practicing. is another: in this case, the team-work is a studio-meeting that precedes individual logbook-entries.

A difference that might make a difference in the future community of humans and machines—if the St Phalle Games 2023 are considered as a *learning theatre*—is the difference between *disordered interaction* (which we may not want) and *interactive disorder* (which may be crucial in creative work). Some of the fears linked to AI stem from what they would do given the context of our current models of learning. However, the outcomes of AI usership will likely differ if we develop critical learning cultures, which the St Phalle Games 2023, are used to indicate in the present report.

That is, what will happen/not, in the wake of AI, may hinge on the cultural level: that is, the *apprenticeship* at hatching sensorial cogency—of which the emergent and appropriating activity in the Games, could be an example—based on deep learning. That is, linked up with developing the cultural offer and demand that can keep up with the developments in AI: in aspects, these ideas have been developed in France by the [IRI at the Pompidou Centre](#) by Bernard Stiegler. But there are aspects of the AI development that constitutes a real challenge to the cultural offer and demand.

Which lies in its mega-scale deployment and speed. If the speed and *innovation* of AI exceeds the speed of *development* we can get into real trouble. In this setting, cultural production is about survival of the democratic and socio-economic fabric. And has been point out by knowledgeable people from different background: ranging from philosophers as Bernard Stiegler to practitioners like

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[7] Pallasmaa, Johani. (2005). [The eyes of the skin. Architecture and the senses](#). Wiley.

Jaron Lanier from the tech-field. What we may want to do is not only to ask the question "who owns the future?" but take concrete steps to increase cultural repertoires and disseminate ownership[8].

Concretely, develop protocols whereby we managed to *conjoin* different aspects of *deep learning*: knowledge from experience of the *deep* sensorial field—where the world extends beyond our reach —knowledge from experience of our in aspects unconscious *core*; learning to conjoin these in the work of our hands. Phrased like this, is sounds esoteric. However, the shooting range experiment of the St Phalle Games 2023 combine these three into one: clearly not with a single abstract answer, but in the panoply of material expression of paints, balloons and paper as a form of critical knowing.

If planning for the pursuit of the topics related in this report, to take into account the environmental footprint of digital technology, we will have to press matters further: including the technological footprint into society as part of the environmental account, and taking stock of the *rare earths audit* that is part and partial of the digital technological developments. Which is currently in overdrive. We would then need not only to delve into the forensics of computer hardware, but also into a broader repertoire of investigative aesthetics: the possible of *fiction* as a vehicle in investigations of the *real*.

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[8] It is assumed that if the *hive minds* of the future include both people and machines *conjointly*—and is not a term reserved for machine intelligence—it will be a platform to launch a new culture of learning and education based on co-evolution. Cf, Andreas Ervik (2022). His PhD thesis combines one for his defence, the other re-written with an AI algorithm.