

# Objects of Attention

## OBJECTS OF ATTENTION

### Experiments with Knowledge in the Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design

Francisco Martínez

This essay starts by inviting the reader to think museums as places where things can happen and to engage with object-centred problem making. Ethnographically, it describes the preparation of the exhibition 'Objects of Attention', which set out to explore alternative ways of knowing (including unlearning) by experimenting with different things, material arrangements, professionals and audiences. This has been an anthropological project in which perception, materials and interactions were as important as texts, concepts and relations. Eventually, it shows that: 1. Objects can be assembled as devices for thinking critically; 2. Wisdom relies on our personal, practical and reciprocal experiences; 3. Scholarly disconnections and separations limit experimentation, curiosity and care. Hence, we can argue that the articulation of different forms of knowledge depend on our capacity to enter into states of wonder and not-knowing. In our project, the transformation of the museum into a site of social interactions and collaborations facilitated to apprehend things otherwise and allowed both participants and the audience to revisit the peripheries of what we know and the boundaries of different specialisations.



### Things that Make Things Happen

Objects are part of a cognitive ordering of the world and constitutive themselves of politics — they are part physical, part social, with the power to bridge different spaces, times and scales at once. Indeed, one of the etymological meanings of 'thing' is assembly, a gathering zone, a meeting space. We can also pay attention to the etymology object (*obiectus*), which denotes an act of placing something on the way. It is hard to prove that objects occupy a place and time inside us; but this fact does not mean that they don't. We perceive things at once, in a presentational way, rather than sequentially or verbally. Things have a particular ability to silently intrude into our lives (Miller 1987; 2005). In some cases, they come to be endowed with particular forms of meaning, value and power, playing an active role in the production and sustenance of relations and culture (Dominguez Rubio 2016). People surround themselves with stuff with practical, aesthetic, political or affective value, collecting, using, abandoning, symbolising, imagining, creating comfort, entertaining... Hence, it is relevant to investigate how things become loaded with particular significance. As with texts and images, things can be taken as evidence, helping us gain insight into the societies that produce them, as tangible remains that continually convey meanings. In this light, the following are the three basic assumptions of material culture studies: 1. Inanimate things give symbolic meaning to human activity, as they have the ability to signify something, mediate human experience and carry out social functions. 2. Things mirror and condense social phenomena, as a day-to-day metabolism acted upon by people. 3. Since things convey experience and express meaning, they can be taken as evidence that allows us to reconstruct lifeways, imaginaries or particular human (in)activities.

Objects have a longer duration than people, political regimes, and the original designs with which they were created. Indeed, approaching things as evidence for cultural and behavioural study is not new: objects were a key element in founding anthropological museums 150 years ago (Stocking 1985). In recent years, however, there has been a shift from the traditional view of 'objects as repositories' to an understanding of objects as participating in social dynamics, having their own kind of material agency irreducible to human actions (Gell 1998; Latour 1999). In this light, sociologist Fernando Dominguez Rubio (2016) proposes to change the question 'what do objects represent or symbolise?' to 'what do objects do?' There is much to be gained from paying closer attention to what things do; sometimes, objects may tell more about people than people can tell themselves. Think about rubbish, cooking tools, or underwear. Likewise, artefacts have a significance beyond their tangible quality, and beyond their designer and maker, often acquiring a constructed auratic or social meaning that relies on their materiality. We can recall Freud's divan, a statue of Lenin or the sickle and hammer, the hand of

Fatima, Gutenberg's press, guillotines, uniforms, and guns. As pointed out by Daniel Miller (2005), objects are able to perform social tasks precisely because we are often unaware of them; they set our scene without consciously being challenged by us. Also, Miller criticises those assumptions that relegate material culture to the passive role of supporting social structures, as if objects simply represent people or illustrate cultural life. Indeed, things might have an *infrastructuring* capacity for bringing together, relating, coordinating, organising and making public (Marres 2012; Niewöhner 2015); they generate particular modes of being, making people's behaviour and objects appear as one. For instance, Tomás Errázuriz (2019) has studied his grandmother's material culture to discover how a particular socio-material entity house-grandmother has been created, stabilising kinship networks, bridging different generations and reinforcing affective relations materially. His grandmother has been living for more than 50 years in the same building, carefully curating anything that comes in and out of the house, equalising the sacrifice of an object with a failure of relationships. In a self-reflexive form, Tomás juxtaposes his own way of living with that of his grandmother, acknowledging how he passes through different apartments, multiplies the objects that come into and out of the home, producing a sort of one-night-stand relationship to things.

As previously mentioned, material culture studies have expanded the discussions in recent years beyond the opposition of social and material worlds. This dichotomy has been transcended, for instance, by applying a dialectical approach to the study of the subject-object construction, evoking notions of co-creation and co-production, and extending the notions of care and curiosity to objects (Latour 2004; Bellacasa 2011). Therefore, materials should not be viewed as passive, but as actively shaping societies and playing an important role in any human formation (Brown 2001). Bruno Latour (1999) has tried to exemplify what a material-social being could be with a provocative question: who is the actor when someone gets killed, is it the gun or the individual holding it? In this example, the gun is not longer in a drawer, armoury, or pocket, but in a hand, pointing at someone and influencing how we behave. Arjun Appadurai (1986) has also addressed how both an object and its exchange create social relations, and the way value is not inherent to things, but an assessment made about them by subjects in a given context and circumstance. Janet Hoskins (1998) moved the debate about the subject-object node forward by arguing that objects simultaneously have their own biographies (in other words, things might go through different stages or after-lives) while mirroring, materially, the biographies of others and specific parts of the personalities of individuals.

### Objects, Subjects and Viceversa

Being attentive to the potentials and limits of things becoming objects of care and political concern, as well as the specific social dynamics that the display of things might generate, I initiated an art project called 'Objects of Attention' organised at the Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design. A key proposition behind this project is that through objects we can disseminate critical thought, turning things into devices to think-with (Hertz 2005). Objects participate in life "through action rather than just conceptualization" (Miller 1987: 129), indexing social relations (Gell 1998). Hence, I invited ten artists to transform an everyday object into a political question, raising public awareness and making visitors think about migration, gender relations, environmental sustainability, growing automation and new forms of exploitation. Seven of the ten works of the exhibition were commissioned, done expressly for the project. An interesting landmark while designing the project was the discussion with the staff of the museum about the possible translations of the title into Estonian. The three possible alternatives were *Laetud objektid* (loaded objects), *Tähelepanu objektid* (Cautioning objects) or *Laetud esemed* (loaded things). We opted for the first one as it referred more to content than to effect, it was less potentially intimidating to a wider audience, and more precise than the ambiguous concept of thing, which carries less theoretical baggage than objects or artefacts (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007).

Otherwise, everyone seems to know what attention is — focalisation, concentration, consciousness, a train of thought avoiding distractions and dealing effectively with things. Our project draws on the assumption that attention and objecthood are intimately related. Objects enable the allocation of attention, presenting an opportunity for action by combining sensory and cognitive modalities of apprehension and generating reference frames (Scholl 2002; Gomez et al. 2018). The project has been intended to transgress conventional ways of analysing things and organising exhibitions, establishing multiple affective relations for visitors as well as to the context in which the artefacts were originally extracted. It also contributes to debates about the relationship of an artefact to its society, matters of aura and intentionality, the intrinsic properties of objects, as well as to exploring the intersections from which the dialogue between contemporary art, anthropology, design and museum studies can be brought forward. Two key challenges of this project were to be aware of different political, ethical and methodological traditions as well as of the standards of the varied disciplines involved (namely, anthropology, contemporary art and museum studies); Also, to create an audience tangentially, across disciplinary boundaries and different fields of study and interests.

I am not sure however about having managed to do so, as one of the comments that I got after presenting my project was that "This is not an exhibition, but a conversation". Also, when I sent this text to a local curator for feedback, she found it very dense to read. She noticed though the amount of people taking part in the project (10 artists, 2 designers, an illustrator, a researcher, two performance artists, besides the staff of the museum), and told me that the result would be too eclectic and heterogeneous. I replied to her that I was not afraid of being eclectic, and explained that for me the goal was to reflect on how the process of organising an exhibition about objects as political questions unfolds, rather than producing an ultimate product to be consumed aesthetically or to fill the room institutionally. Accordingly, my struggles and priorities were different: 1. To make time for discussions with the multiple actors involved; 2. To understand the different resources, forms and standards to be mobilised to make the exhibition possible; 3. Curate my own research tools — transforming the museum into an operating space for interplays in the research process.

'Objects of Attention' draw on a series of questionable, open-ended assumptions, as for instance to use methods of contemporary art to free anthropology from disciplinary dynamics of restraint. Also, to assume that participants in the contemporary art field were willing to engage with multiple collaborations and epistemologies that operate around the edges and borders

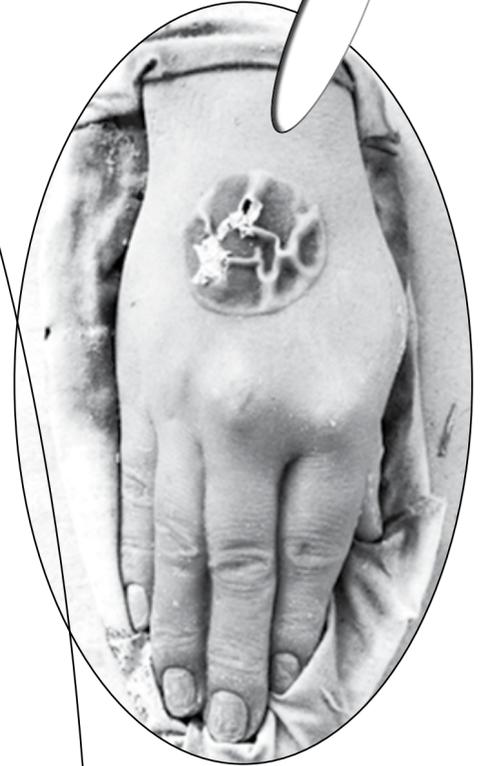
of their actual work. Indeed, not all the artists and institutions invited to take part in this project have accepted the challenge. From relying on physical things and from discussions about aesthetics and material agency, contemporary art seems to have evolved into a rather philosophical form of making things up, in the form of relational, situated and performative assemblages and installations. On the other side, anthropology — the study of things human — has traditionally been a destabilising knowledge for hegemonic canons and discourses. In explaining faraway cultures and other ways of adapting to the environment, the discipline questioned our naive conviction that ours was the best or the only culture possible. Otherwise, the incomplete, hybrid and open-ended character of anthropology was already noted by Claude Lévi-Strauss, who described anthropology as a practice that had grown out of various leftovers of other disciplines and moved forward through experimentation, traditionally trying to exceed its own condition of possibility.

### Objectual Thoughtscape

In her contribution, Emeli Theander chose an embalmed cat obtained for free in a secondhand shop of Berlin. 'Phantom Fleisch' raises the question of what is natural in nature, drawing attention to human-animal relations in Western societies and also to our current practices regarding disposal. The earliest known taxidermists were the ancient Egyptians, preserving animal skin together with its feathers or fur. The term itself derives from the Greek however: *taxi* meaning 'movement' and *derma* meaning 'skin'. As a form of redemption, Emeli has artfied the taxidermy by adding colours and feather to the cat. This artification is different thus from Cecilia Giménez' failed restoration attempt of the Ecce Homo fresco at Borja (Spain), which became viral, boasting the number of tourists visiting the town and turning the 'repaired' image of Jesus into a souvenir. Jussi Kivi presents rescued samplers (gloves and a poster) from a bunker at Sillamäe's nuclear factory. 'Samples from the former Sillamäe underground gallery collections' highlights ecological catastrophes and invites the audience to reconsider the use of renewable energy and natural resources. As Jussi describes, in 2008 he visited this town in the Eastern part of Estonia and entered into all its known bunkers (many of them nowadays demolished). There, he found "this apocalyptic material that opens up its breathtaking darkness", letting us see "the world of men in awe and the archaeological sensibility of totalitarianism with its own unspeakable romanticism".

Another artist, Kirill Tulin, has gathered roughly a hundred sealed-air packaging cushions from the parcels he has received over several years in order to highlight the size and weight of contemporary logistics and their socio-political impasses. His work, 'Sealed Breath', is presented through the over-inflation effect of a bubble-sphere, revealing capitalist antagonisms and the effects of over-accumulation. As Kirill notices, ironically, the machines that inflate cloud-like cushions on-site use the very same air that the workers breathe while assisting the machine's operation. For her contribution to the show, Eléonore de Montesquiou has presented a bible with leather cover, complemented with an audio track of singing a series of psalms. This object triggers questions about the reasons why people are confined these days and the way faith needs no visa. The artwork is called 'Psalms for Jessi'. Jessi is a refugee person who was detained at the Harku detention centre for a half a year because she did not have a multi-entry visa. She relates her own subjectivity with the Bible in this way: "I have had it since I was a child ... I believe it solves all my problems at any time. I read it and it makes me happy. I have read it all. I also have some favourite texts that I go through depending on the situations which I find myself in".

Laura Kuusk brings the focus to wallpapers in her work 'People like you', reflecting upon patterns of living and how both dreams and misunderstandings are spatialised in haunting representations. Wallpapers unfold feelings and aesthetics of home-making in a synthetic way. This functional material also makes visible the role of professional home-makers such as design studios and real state agencies, which help clients to build up their personal taste and to choose a home by choosing a building. Timo Toots has prepared a device to reproduce floppy disks, which are meant to substitute Spotify as a source of music. 'Flopper' challenges innovation as the dominant paradigm and confirms, in its media archaeology, that nothing is created from nothing, but from crafts, modifications and attention to detail. In a similar way, a series of broken tools gathered by Camille Laurelli make exemplify the limits and fragility of the worlds we inhabit. With 'Failure is practice', he contests the hegemonic, financial notion of failure, and demonstrate that broken things provide space for thinking and self-assessment (see Martínez 2019a). For the publication complementing the exhibition, Camille also provides



a text that presents him as the worst artist in the world. The paradox here is that he manages to turn his own failures into a way of promoting himself, a form of branding that works by turning the world upside down.

Three other artists contribute to the show with artworks made before this project. In 'Humans need not to count', Varvara & Mar present a robotic clicker posing questions about employment, robotics and our idolatry of quantification. It offers a performative representation of the obsessive need to count and measure everything and how routine jobs are being taken over. Varvara & Mar also organise a workshop within the cultural programme of the exhibition 'Data shop', in which participants are invited to map their own personal information in social media. As a material outcome, each participant will make a can with his/her own data from Facebook, Twitter, Google or Instagram. This can-making exercise intends to question the privacy of our personal data and its growing monetisation and surveillance.

Eva Mustonen in 'Xena & Samba!' combines a sequined bra and a mixer to spark thoughts about the contemporary aversion to physical proximity and sexual discomfort. In her work, Eva makes use of quotidian techniques of textile design and products of everyday doings to create unexpectedly beautiful mystical objects. Finally, Nino Kvrivishvili contributes with a set of objects preserved during the multiple wars that took place in Georgia. Her work 'Searching for traces' tells the stories of weavers and their families, making visible both the strength and perils of identity making. Specifically, the things displayed in the showcase were saved by Nino's grandmother Raisa Zatyukova, who moved to Georgia in the 1950s to work in the cotton industry in Gori. Many of Raisa's relatives, friends and colleagues chose to leave during the 1990s turmoil, so she collected everyday objects from them as a way to keep their relationship alive. This is a generation whose lives were devastated by war. Their belongings make evident the effort of building a life in a foreign city, getting married, having children, and then having to leave everything behind. As Nino observes, preserved things acquire an anthropological value and can easily be turned into memorabilia.

The objects displayed in this project have acquired in turn a new relationship to each other and to the public, proposing new configurations of intention, perception and meaning (Martínez and Lavolette 2016). We can argue that 'Objects of Attention' was not just "another fucking exhibition of ready-mades", as artist Maurizio Cattelan would put it, but a form of aesthetic cultivation related to the redistribution of social capacities and political sensibilities (Rancière 2006). There we could experience how objects can be considered themselves as compressed performances, serving as a condenser of multiple makings, and establishing an affective relation to the context in which the things were originally extracted. Furthermore, the exhibited objects manage to extend the imagination of what we consider as politics and to evoke an experiential response from the audience, establishing identification, affection and responsibility for them.

### The Power and Weakness of Things

Neil McGregor, author of best-selling *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, remarks that a history told through objects speaks "to whole societies and complex processes rather than individual events" (2010: vi). In the exhibition 'The Power of Things' curated by Kerttu Palgimömm at the St. Nicholas church in Tallinn, we can encounter several examples of this. Visitors to the exhibition could pay attention, for instance, to the token of the poor, which has the power to situate an ordinary beggar above all the rest, making him eligible for institutional care; or to the pilgrim shell of Compostela, providing an individual chance to redeem sins through a liminal experience; or the organ concert, or to the bareness of doctor Johannes Ballivi's tombstone, making him ready to pass into paradise.

This was not simply an exhibition of medieval art, but also had a theoretical ambition. For instance, by reflecting about how the immaterial beyond language is expressed in a tangible way. The exhibition studies the role of objects in the transition from life to death too, uniting materially the paradise to be earned, the political power not to be forgotten, and a biography to be told. An example of this is the representation of pastor Johann Hobing in his deathbed, with a blanket (a non-verbal epitaph) coming from his home region of North Rhine-Westphalia. In some of the other objects in this exhibition, we can recognise geopolitical clues and historical connections such as the commercial routes of the Hanseatic league; also, communicative artefacts such as the signing ring of a noble man, and the past notion of the Other through a brooch with the head of a Saracen. Also, we can learn about the materialisation of power back in the XV century by paying attention to objects carried by kings and bishops in the painting *Danse Macabre*. What would a contemporary Dance of



Death look like? Which people and objects of power would be depicted now?

Traditionally, objects have been used to tell a story about the people who *owned* them, for communication purposes, and for the metaphorical creation of meaning. But objects are more than cognitive representations, and contribute to re-imagine the boundaries of what constitutes the political. Indeed, tangible things have been described by Alfred Gell (1998) as cultural nodes mediating social agency, making things happen. Objects do not have to determine social issues to be important; they rather participate in life processes by influencing the ways in which social actions are carried out (Dant 2004). As noted by Miller (2005), people create things; these things affect people, who create other things. Furthermore, materials are important at a heuristic level, in terms of how we learn things, influencing the processes of durability, classification, display as well as the cultural forms and meanings associated with things. It is in this sense that Domínguez Rubio (2014) distinguishes between docile and unruly objects, the former generating stability and the latter acting as vector of change.

The Latin etymology of artefact comes from the conjunction of two Latin terms: *artis* (skill in joining) and *factum* (deed, done). Hence, an artefact refers to both: human workmanship, but also a product that survives this very action. Objects constitute a 'socially produced durability' (Buchli 2002), which appear to be stable and unstable at once. On the one hand, objects demonstrate obduracy and resistance to changes (Martínez 2019b); and on the other hand, they show a constant need of care and maintenance (Bellacasa 2011; Domínguez Rubio 2016). If visiting the Sillamäe museum in Estonia we can find there a very particular assemblage of things. The city itself emerged with a few grams of uranium in the 1940s, when the place was given the code name (R-6685), and thousands of people were relocated to build up the town and work in a nuclear factory. In the 1990s, however, Sillamäe became a broken city; its population decreased by almost the half, high levels of radiation were detected, it suffered institutional disinvestment, and according to local accounts it lost its identity and vision of the future (de Montesquiou 2006). In this context, Elena Gorneva et al. decided to recuperate themselves and to enhance the local sense of belonging by gathering Soviet household objects, mostly from the 1950s, namely things such as: furniture, toys, shoes, clothing, flags, portraits, banners, rusty tools and factory remnants.

The creation of identity is experienced through our engagement with everyday materiality and items of popular culture (Barthes 1957). We can find another example of this in Narva (Estonia), where Fjodor Šantsõn has been creating over twenty years a 1:100 scale model of the city's old town before WWII. The maquette shows a nonexistent ideal city, which serves nonetheless as a catalyst of affective place making in the present (Mikula 2017; Martínez 2018). Fjodor (born in Belarus) started to prepare the layout at this home in 1992, rebuilding the town through the available photographs, comparing locations in different seasons. In 2008, he was invited to bring the model to the town hall, and then, in 2015, he was given the highest Estonian award, the Order of the White Star, by the Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves. As Fjodor points out,

For some people, the maquette has meanings that I did not plan to generate. For instance, every year there are visitors from Sweden who come as if this were a site of pilgrimage... also, a woman who lives in Pärnu came to visit the maquette with her granddaughter and told her, 'look, that was the window of my room eighty years ago'... For me the visitors are important because of their archives; some of them emigrated even to Australia, and private collectors do not always facilitate access to old documents, they want money, so the people of the diaspora who visit the model are an important source of information.

## Critical Material Thinking

Material thinking is a concept coined by Paul Carter (2004) to explore new ways to convey the knowing involved when creating and how people think of making things. Recently, this approach has been renewed by Matt Ratto (2011) and his notion of 'critical making'. Ratto suggests leaving behind the matter-idea binary, and trying instead to connect two modes of engagement that are often held separate: theoretical thinking and physical making. As he argues, it is wrong to consider making as the opposite of thinking, as if making were simply a rule-following technical practice. Rather, we should incorporate both materials and making to our conceptual work, learning to understand creativity also in material terms. As noted by Ignacio Fariás and Alex Wilkie (2015), this approach calls into question the false distinction between creative and non-creative practices, and the over-valuation of the new instead of acknowledging the relevance of tinkering and the rearrangement of things.

Communication with the designers for the exhibition was fluid, so I could try to understand their way of reasoning. I met regularly with Ott Kagover, the graphic designer, in order to outline, discuss and eventually question the key ideas of the project. For instance, Ott showed interest in what kind of public I expected for the show, so I explained that I was willing to reach not only the local artistic and academic community, but also a wider public, such as families who might come on the weekend. Based on this, Ott proposed a newspaper-booklet that will make the texts complementing the show accessible to a wider public and with a sense of everydayness. For the visuals, however, Ott played with the visual identity of beauty parlours, including an object-mirror in the centre of the poster.

Hannes Praks, who is both a practitioner and a professor in the field, was in charge of the spatial design. His approach was different from Ott's. Being aware of the experimental and pedagogical character of my project, Hannes decided to involve three of his students in the process of the design (Merly Mändla, Elis Rumma and Henri Papsõn), who were part of our discussions, negotiations, and the installation too. When I started to explain to Hannes the key ideas of the project, he insisted on the need to say specific words, conceptual terms that he would try to translate later into space. Spontaneously, I said 'political affects', 'care', 'concern'. Then, we started to form random sentences together, such as: 'slow time room', 'awakening room', 'landing room', 'changing mood room', 'equalitarian room'... after this, he asked me about the effects I wanted to generate for the visitors, to which I replied: unlearning, discomfort, suspension of knowledge... Also, I wanted to reduce certain gaps: between us and politics, between people and objects... Finally, Hannes told me to suggest a film he should watch to better understand the interior design of the exhibition, so I replied, unexpectedly, 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari' (1920, Robert Wiene).

From my original proposal to build up a labyrinth, we moved on to a more pragmatic 'political corridor', as a labyrinth would be too costly and we did not have enough budget (and space) for it. I told Hannes that visitors had to be impelled to face the objects and spend time with them. I also encouraged him to look at the objects of the exhibition as political questions, and not simply as things. In the grammar of a designer, Hannes often talked of creating environments and atmospheres through material mediums, for instance urging Merly, Elis and Henri "to find the intrigue of each material". Then, we all walked together to the museum in order to feel the room. On the way upstairs, Hannes

started to touch the walls, then he walked the floor around, sit on the window sill, checked the lightening, and finally leaned against the wall for a while. An important point of our discussion was also how to produce a border-like sense of the entrance to the gallery, a way of landing in, as if we were about being public in a cave. The solution to this challenge was provided by the gallery space itself, which is 40 cm. higher than the rest of the floor and requires a step up to come in. Also, we thought of accelerating slow thinking by forcing people to watch their steps in the gallery and be only able to walk slowly there. Two possible options for this challenge were to put a carpet or to throw some material disturbances to the floor.

To see all this made me wonder about what is lost when translating material things into language. At some point, I also realised the impossibility to codify (translate into information) a great part of the knowledge involved in the project. Verbal accounts appeared then as insufficient in capturing some of the meanings, implications and wisdoms around me, hence I began to muse about other means of generating and representing knowledge, even calling into question the very meaning of knowledge. This questioning started however by acknowledging the multiplicity of wisdoms involved in the exhibition, and later by accepting the impossibility of knowing and mastering the different grammars and skills employed by the participants. In other words, during the making of 'Objects of Attention' I experienced my epistemological limits and the need to unlearn those anthropological tools that impel me to constantly codify knowledge, learning in turn how to get along well with not-knowing and epistemological multiplicity.

## This Is Not a Method— A Laboratory of Objects

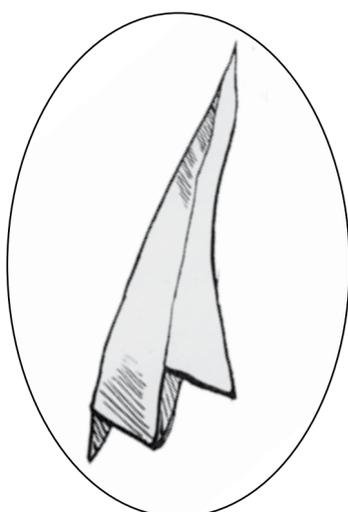
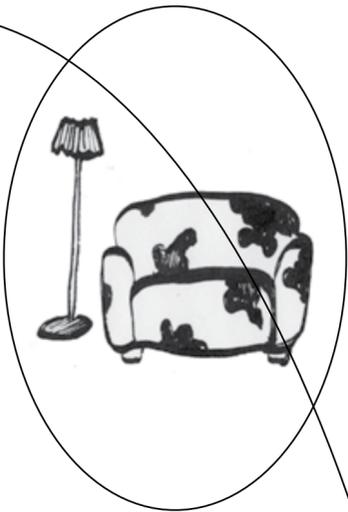
'Objects of Attention' engages with these constraints and sets the stage for new relationships between knowledge production and publics, moving back and forth between the theoretical and the empirical. Rather than to resemble and resolve, this exhibition seeks to disseminate and problematise what is already known, presenting political questions without mediation, representation, or concession. Through the display of ordinary things, it provides a sustained form of ethnographic experimentation, engendering events and meanings in unexpected ways, and shifting established ideas over what counts as anthropological data (Macdonald and Basu 2007; Holmes and Marcus 2012; Criado and Estalella 2018). This project, which combines anthropology, museology, design, and contemporary art, contributes to interdisciplinary efforts by crafting a platform for cross-fertilisation and thinking in action. In this sense, I was pushing for a renewed expansion of the notion of fieldwork, using an exhibition as a *sui generis* platform of theory building, where to test concepts experientially, and to reflect on the process of knowledge production during the process (Collier 2007; Murawski 2013).

As noted by Eva Berglund in the publication for the exhibition (2019), doing things differently is already a form of theory making—thinking through the relationship between the possible and the actual. As fieldwork, 'Objects of Attention' is not organised in order to know more, but to know differently and to access to alternative forms of knowledge that involve unlearning (Stengers 2005; Strohm 2012; Martínez 2018). Yet knowing differently requires unlearning mechanisms and unorthodox modalities of research too. The exhibition approaches tangible things as devices of ethical concern that call out various political responses (Dant 1999), but also it invites both participants and audience to reconsider ways of unlearning in the field research process. 'Objects of Attention' approaches unlearning as an intrinsic part of intellectual progress, contributing to reduce socio-political distances, promote experimental thinking and dismantle taken for granted assumptions and habits.

As we mature, personally and professionally, we distance ourselves more from the possibility of being wrong, failing, misunderstanding, misspelling, talking idioms or embodying accidents, as well as to avoid making time for what appears as unimportant and non-usable, or engaging with what is not yet translated into information or gradated as knowledge. This does not mean, however, that one has embrace ignorance, but rather to be open for epistemological multiplicity. As noted by Argentinian-Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz, to grow old is often the experience of distancing ourselves from the world. He also observed in his masterpiece *Ferdydurke* (1937) that to age practically means to unlearn what one discovers during childhood – to reproduce the adults' rituals, to follow traditions, to build up social masks, to inauthenticise yourself, to become alienated, to be patronised. For Gombrowicz, social experience does not necessarily bring maturity, quite the opposite, we only progress in inexperience and reduce the unanticipated to the minimum.

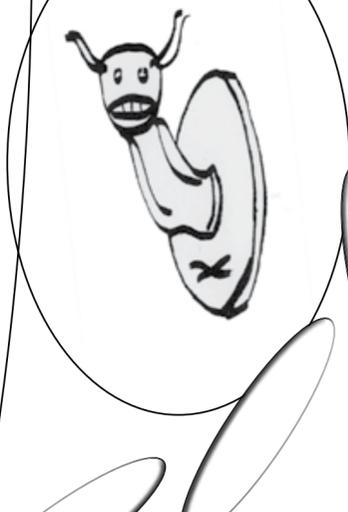
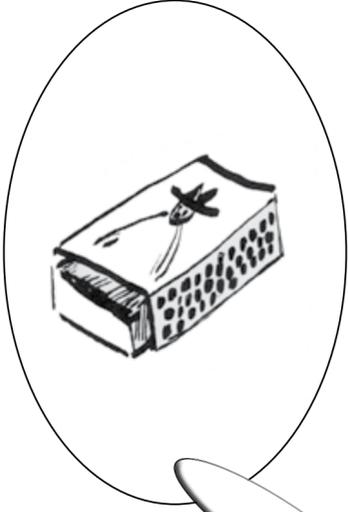
Exhibitions however contribute to increase the wonder of things (Sullivan 2005), preparing ourselves for the unexpected (Fisher and Fortnum 2014), and in some cases, making things less known rather than more known. The project took the format of an exhibition as an epistemological device that leaves the generation of answers open, and is not afraid of philosophical, artistic or poetic inclinations (Rees 2019). For 'Objects of Attention', the Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design has been re-functioned into a meeting place and point of exchange, whereby different participants had to find ways to share their expertise and connect their capacities together in a short time frame. The museum itself became an experimentation and production site that resembles more a studio – in which makers do not quite know what they are searching for (Fariás and Wilkie 2015) – than a state institution meant to establish artistic canons and standards. This re-purposing of the museum into a space of collaboration and not-knowing could also be understood as a form of conceptual fieldwork that turns the exhibiting space into a laboratory (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013; Sansi 2015), producing human relations that take the form of 'relational aesthetics' (Bourriaud 2002), and bringing new ways of seeing (Schneider and Wright 2010).

Traditionally, both anthropologists and artists have been more interested in looking at each other's practices simply as sources of inspiration, instead of creating 'reflexive fusions' (Schneider and Wright 2010). However, the synergies between art and anthropology are increasingly discussed and practiced, exploring the possibilities of cross-fertilisation (Kosuth 1991; Schneider and Wright 2013), and establishing "a bridge that can be crossed in both directions" (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013b: 168). As more and more scholars are willing to explore interdisciplinary methodologies and border-crossing explorations between art and anthropology, we can start discussing the step further – which is to explore cross-boundary ways to create different kinds of knowledge and mechanisms of unlearning with registers other than those of discourse and writing, expanding the notion of the field without sacrificing an ethnographic surplus of ideas. The production of venues for experimentation has been traditionally acknowledged in natural science as an authorised type of research yet much less in humanities and social sciences (Rheinberger 1997; Klein 2003). Hence, this essay ends with another invitation to the reader – to not give away opportunities for experimentation. Quite the opposite, we should better defend and recreate our own platforms for different material encounters and for interplaying with society.



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## PSALMS FOR JESSI

Jessi became a friend during my visits to the Harku detention centre, not far from Tallinn. She was the only woman there — lonely, very lonely. Jessi had arrived in Estonia in March with a student visa. She wanted to visit her sister in Belgium, but she was arrested at the airport and sent to jail. In autumn, Jessi was sent back to Cameroon, after months in detention for... for what? For not having exactly the right residency permit? Our fear that she would leave the country?

Jessi is an English-speaking Cameroonian woman. When I offered to bring books to her, she replied that she needed nothing more to read than a Bible. Her Bible and her faith had crossed borders without being arrested.

**Eléonore:**  
Good morning, Jessi, how are you today?

**Jessi:**  
Dear, good morning! I am very fine. Thank God for his grace. Now that I am talking to you, many people in English-speaking Cameroon can no longer stay in their houses. They are living in the bush. Killing is taking place everyday. We are living at the mercy of God. Life is not easy. The doctor here gave me sleeping pills. I told him I don't want sleeping pills. These days are fine, I am feeling depressed, but now I have a bit of relief, since the days are passing, I do feel a bit relieved.

**Eléonore:**  
I remember that you told me once about your Bible. If you agree with this idea, I would like to share your story with our public.

**Jessi:**  
My bible is one of the precious things that I hold so dearly in my life. I have had it since I was a child. I take it with me everywhere I go and also I downloaded onto my phone. I always have it. I believe it solves all my problems at any

time. I read it and it makes me happy. I have read it all. I also have some favourite texts that I go through depending on the situations which I find myself in. The Psalms are the most helpful texts. Whenever I read these texts, I feel uplifted and fulfilled in my spirit.

For Bibles, the editions are Good News, King James, New Revised Version. There are others, but these are the ones that are commonly used. As for me, I have Good News and I have downloaded the King James and New Revised Version onto my phone. They are all in English.

**Eléonore:**  
and what are the psalms that help you most?

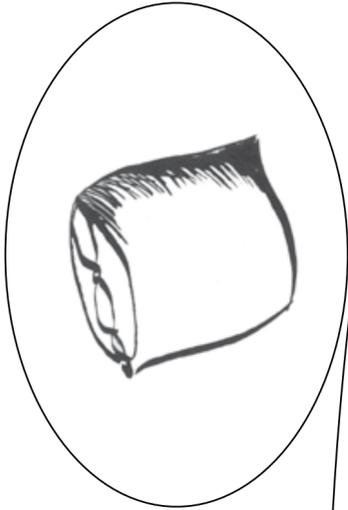
**Jessi:**  
Psalm 3, 4, 23, 51, 77, 91, 121, 142 and 150. The experience in Harku is something I don't like to talk about. But all the same, if you can remember very well the number of months that I was there, six months, I didn't sleep for more than 3 hours a day. Since I had my bible, that was so precious to me, I spent most of my time reflecting on it. That kept me from having nightmares.

# EXPERIMENTATION BACK AND FORTH

Eeva Berglund (Aalto University)  
with Tomás S. Criado (Humboldt)

## Experimental sites and encounters

There has been a tendency to assume that the relationship between the practices and practitioners of anthropology, design and contemporary art is merely one of service, in which anthropology is used as a proxy for more participatory and collaborative attempts at learning, and art or design are applied by anthropologists to represent their findings. Recently, however, other approaches have emerged. In line with constructivist, post-colonial, and feminist technoscience sensitivities seeking to re-politicise knowledge production, there have been many attempts at drawing other kinds of relations between art and anthropology (Calzadilla and Marcus 2006), but also, between design and anthropology, as in the emerging field of 'design anthropology' (Gunn, Otto and Smith 2013; Murphy 2016). Most of these feature a whole breadth of collaborative cross-pollination exercises and methodological exchanges seeking to re-create newer – should we say 'para-sitica' (Marcus 2010) – connections between these fields. Those are disciplinary contacts where not only designers and artists reflect on what it means to import the essential methodological feature of 'old-school' anthropology into their practices – 'ethnography' – but anthropologists are learning to expand and transform theirs through direct inspiration from art and design methods and materials (Murphy and Marcus 2013), re-enlivening perhaps a certain 'experimental' flair that has been always part of the discipline.



Hence, another mode of encounter between art/design and anthropology is also possible. One whereby ethnography is done 'otherwise' in conjunction or juxtaposition with artistic practices, generally drawing inspiration from them to foster open-ended, pedagogically valuable as well as epistemologically fertile moments and situations. But we also suggest that the collaborations have involved fold back, making ethnography/anthropology a different art. In those situations, the relationship is one of mutual learning, where art and design impact on anthropology and anthropology hopefully gives something back in return.

In short, artistic and design practices are catalysing a shift in anthropology itself, with young generations of scholars already often operating with different criteria of what is interesting, worthwhile and legitimate than earlier generations. Related to the shifting roles of experts and activists in society generally, these shifts are also about what the object of research practice might be, where it takes place and what is deemed to have happened or been gained through it. Anthropologists working in activist modes, for example, easily offer their intellectual work to be valued and treated as political action (e.g. Osterweil 2013) and can take considerable personal risk in doing so. Others seek out anthropology as a tool for making sense of prior professional lives using specialist expertise of their own in conjunction with anthropological modes of problematisation (Marcus 2016). Typical reactions to these shifts have highlighted the messiness of ethnographic fieldwork, but as these experiences multiply, they invite but also generate novel understandings of anthropology and its uses, in some cases in conversation with broader debates on legacies of scientism in social science (Latour 2004).

## Doing things differently is always theory and practice

Experimentation in its different styles (Klein 2003) has a long pedigree in the natural sciences as a particularly authorised type of research. Experimentation has been somewhat connected but also set in opposition to observation. This is despite its own

protocols to enhance trustworthiness, which have involved the production of a particular setting, equipment, and inscription devices (Rheinberger 1997) designed to articulate particulate knowledge on yet-to-be-known entities, as well as to produce circulating literature that establish the validity of particular claims (Latour 1987). Bruno Latour's thoughts on the imagined ideals of natural science in the social sciences are key in this matter: whereas natural sciences take the risk of their objects being recalcitrant or 'talking back', social science has mostly preferred to avoid such risk.

The idea of experimenting in the field has a taste of transgression, possibly because of the work initially invested in separating out laboratories – or in the case of art and design, studios and ateliers (Farias and Wilkie 2015). In ethnographic fieldwork, experimentation might indeed be a tale of the field and not only from it (Estalella and Criado 2018), being more honest about what ethnographers do: improvise and experiment in order to learn. Indeed, all forms of fieldwork have entailed *bricolage*, imports from the vocabulary of others, practices of arranging relations and interventive gestures.

All forms of experimentation also entail risk, or put at risk the solitary and disciplinary modes of research. The ethos of ethnographic experimentation may be that the risks are born across the field as the roles of scholar, activist, local expert or victim or whatever, are all put to work in collaborative knowledge production. However, maybe one of the most interesting moves is to consider the traditional 'Others' as 'epistemic partners' rather than objects or subjects of knowledge production, people we work with. For that, it is important to establish a space where practitioners can be confident enough to further engage with these acts, a sort of social laboratory, where the problem of change, and more specifically, the creation of new artefacts is central.

## Design anthropology

Design interests anthropologists because we live in the age of design. But we also live in the age of crisis where the futures on offer are scary and many people are looking out for ways to make them slightly less so. Discipline is a mutable and fraught concept these days, so it may be useful to note explicitly that I use the word to refer to a certain competence if not virtuosity, a capacity in a specialist area that comes with application. I also think discipline's prerequisite is time to learn.

It's important perhaps to note that the work of thinking has never been confined to academia. However, the fast-disappearing privileges once granted to academics now appear as important but endangered elements of our capacity to engage in the knowledge practices necessary for coping with a changing planet. If design anthropology is to emerge as a discipline understood in this way, this will take time and much effort. Design anthropology would however be well equipped to pursue proposals for better, less unsettled futures and a wider understanding of what is human. Design-anthropological collaborations have already developed a lexicon for and a habit of taking temporality seriously, and working with partial perspectives and multiple temporalities, ethics and politics.

As practitioners of their disciplines, anthropologists and designers engage with those they study as intellectual partners, seeking answers as well as solace in practical and sociable encounters that are simultaneously learning experiences. Design's conceptual apparatus is a particularly resonant one in these circumstances because it is a tool for thinking that attends necessarily and often rather precisely to acting and thus to shaping futures. Design doesn't just create future stuff, and certainly whatever it does it does not do it *ex nihilo* but by building on existing infrastructures, problem definitions and techniques. Also, design practice develops in relation to one of the key challenges for institutions these days: the overlap between concept and materialisation. In design not only is the relationship between the possible and the actual constantly posed, it is often thoroughly thought-through.

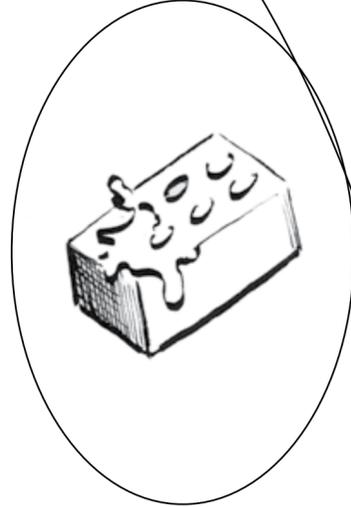
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# CAMILLE LAURELLI AN EPITOME OF FAILURE

Inès Sapin

Camille Laurelli's work has always scared me a little. Camille himself scares me as a person. When I have met him on different occasions around the buffet table at an opening, his nervous nonchalance and his inexhaustible flow of words has put me in absurd and embarrassing situations when he starts developing 'an idea'.

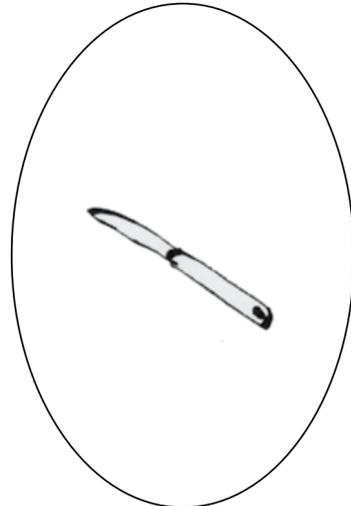


Actually, it is impossible to separate him from his work. Hair tousled, Camille moves around clumsily in a studio littered with disconcerting objects, like a mad scientist. He picks up whatever is lying around at his place (used q-tips, old bread, playing cards and broken tools) and converts them into something else. Following this vaguely poetic process of tinkering, in which the absurd seems to take over the real, the newly formed objects appear to be in a direct continuation of the artist's body, as if, not really knowing how to use them before, he twists them to his own use. A wine bottle topped by a shower head, a round chess board, a hung office chair... All these assembled things form a kind of map of the artist's life.

His bed is his desk – a simple mattress set on sawhorses that immediately determines his way of working. You know that he smokes, how much, what he drinks, and how much, what he uses and what he no longer uses, what he could no longer use and above all the time he spends doing nothing, as the bowls, cups and other containers filled with cigarette butts testify (he calls them 'hour glasses') – symbols of time passing with no recourse.

His productions seem to be dictated to him, by himself and for himself, with the idea of making the world according to his own image. He reacts to objects, images, signals, anything and everything, and corrects whatever doesn't suit him. I do say reacts and not acts, as he follows no clear strategy for life or work. If I had to use an image to describe his way of proceeding, I would use a recent work by him, indeed a self-portrait, made up of a vacuum cleaner running in a dark closet.

Camille is thus not marked by inspiration, but inhalation. What he has inhaled, he transforms into conglomerated, compact dust that becomes a 'piece' every time he has to empty the bag. And since this is about a vacuum cleaner who lives in a constant state of intellectual vigilance (as he himself says, 'thinking never stops', which means that you are always thinking of something, not reflecting on something), the piles of accumulated dust of varying dimensions accumulate in his apartment, his computer and sometimes exhibition spaces.



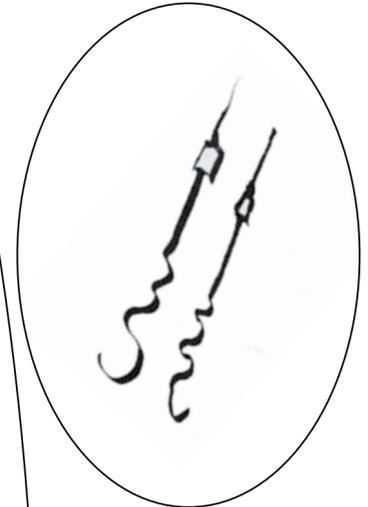
## Nano-resistance and laziness

Well, because we are in a dusty metaphor, let's imagine for a moment that Camille is one of those almost invisible artists who acts like those little grains of dust that make the machine go on the blink. He presents himself as specialised in nano-resistances and gives examples such as positioning a paper aeroplane between two fans so it flies, cementing a wall of lego or folding a piece of paper to make origami. However, strung together one

after the other, these little inventions remain an ensemble of little piles of demented dust, such is the extent to which the poverty of the means employed does not serve the poetry and the humour that were apparently meant to be deployed, and such is the extent to which the poverty of the discourse cannot excuse Camille's sorry aesthetic endeavours. His photographs or objects are in fact linked to a lazy practice of absorbing the real and rejecting it after digesting it.

Camille finds in this the ideal excuse never to follow through completely with what he undertakes, never to push an idea to the point that it becomes what is commonly called an artwork. In fact, this economy of means only serves to show us the extent of the possibilities the artists has to offer, that is to say, the closed doors you will run in to. Above all, don't do too much, stay at the limits of the idea – of its meaning, of its realisation. Above all, don't forget that behind this economy of means there is a real economy of the self, which is really the artist's form and subject.

Thanks to a badly-interpreted Paul Lafarge, laziness is a right, boredom is also a location for work, and idleness preserves us from an alienated existence. Except that this right to laziness was written to combat an economical, political and social system where the proletarian masses were subservient to the ever-increasing demands of productivity. Artists like Camille have no respect for work, and the idle time intended to facilitate the liberation of body and mind is here stupidly wasted. It is just a question of making yourself feel good when you waste your time on video games or watching some TV series.



## Parasite

Camille has not given up on the myth about the artist's identity: the authentic character who pours his guts out onto the table. Camille believes he is somehow like the last surrealist, having definitively left his reason out of the picture to give himself over to the raw expression of his thoughts. He has just unplugged his consciousness and is totally uninhibited. This could almost make his work engaging, but it makes him a parasite, to the point of attributing to himself the ideas and thoughts of others without even realising it.

Neither citation or re-appropriation, not even a nodding-to or referencing – Camille practices pillaging without restrictions, complexes of inferiority, or moral hangovers. Not accepting responsibility for any of the consequences of his actions, he prefers the term 'anachronistic plagiarism' – not because he is aware of having reaped the future (which would make him a sort of artistic prophet), but it is more that he realises afterward he has copied something already in existence (which had to be inhaled at one point with the rest of it).

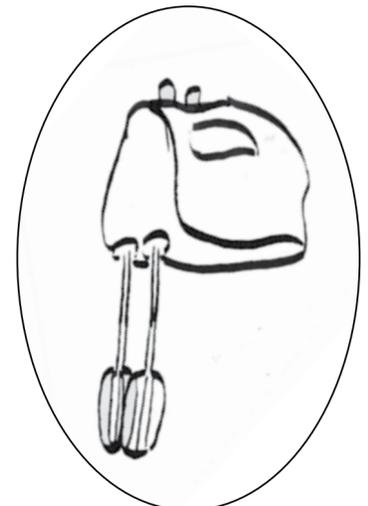
## The art world can wait for me

You can say that Camille is precise about nothing. When exhibiting photographs, no dimensions are given and they are all variable. Any titles that would kindly allow the visitor to identify an object as a work do not exist either, and though it would have been easy to add them, Laurelli has eliminated dates and details on purpose. Having thus gotten rid of all the necessary dressings that turn a simple object into an artwork, the artist's creation floats, like the things he suspends on a strip of scotch tape.

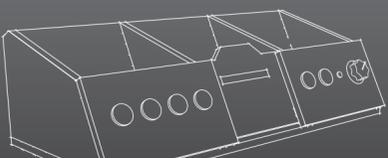
By getting rid of all that, or at least by not paying any attention to it, he eliminates the characteristics that make an object enter the field of art. Camille believes that by doing this, he refuses art institutions and challenges the established market codes; reconfiguring instead everyday objects or theoretical discourse. His aim is to bring back objects directly to the real and in doing so, to question his own position as an artist.

He obviously finds himself in a dilemma: how can you criticise a milieu and also be a part of it, even if just ranking 29,773 on artifacts.net. It's a bit like the invisible man's dilemma: he wants you to see he's invisible, so Camille wants to display his failure in order to make him feel like an artist.

With some of his acolytes he created a self-legitimising system taking the form of a network of fake residencies (i.e. The Free Zoo) made up mostly of their own apartments where they invite each other and reported on via a series of blogs and websites giving the impression the system really exists. This system of course reaches its limit very quickly. The perfect circle of a mutually-approving network of friends doesn't allow much to happen except perhaps being forgotten. They want to prove they are self-sufficient but someone has to comment on it. They want to get by without institutions, and that's very fine because institutions get by quite ok without them.



For all your new age floppies!



FLOPPER DRIVE

www.flopper.net

Timo Toots

**Flopper** is a floppy for a digital era. It is a proposal for an open standard to create a physical medium for digital content. Over past decades our multimedia (music, video, film) consumption has moved from the physical mediums (CDs, tapes, film, VHS etc) to digital (Youtube, Soundcloud, Bandcamp, Spotify). The way we discover music has changed from human contact to algorithms. This process has its positive sides, but it does have created a sort of void or distance with our physical world. To a great extent, the music industry has lost the physical medium, and through that also the musicians have lost part of their identity and income. This is part of a wider phenomenon, whereby our society started to value things differently in the physical and virtual spaces, including our ordinary ways of consuming and participating, as for instance by writing anonymous comments or through movie piracy. And yet, we still have our physical bodies. The flesh and blood of our ancestors from the hunter-gatherer era still affects our habits. Our processes of value-making is affected by this still. If I give you an apple and you give me a carrot, our bodies understand the exchange naturally. The virtual space does not have the same rules and there the physical element is kind of discarded.

In order to get the best of the both worlds, we need a way to combine them into one. This project is a proposal to agree on one format that would become a physical representation of a digital content. NFC floppies are simple and cheap to produce, could be built from recycled or recyclable materials, built on existing technologies and providing creative freedom to artists and individuals.

The basic guidelines that make up a NFC floppy are following:

1. Physical object from any material (Size 9x9cm, maximum thickness 4mm).
2. Has three optional graphic elements (downward arrow, rectangular hole, lines on the left and right).
3. The physical object refers to one internet address (URL) that stores the content.
4. URL is stored in three ways.

- \* as NFC (Near Field Communication) for contactless reading by smartphones and Flopper players.
- \* QR-code for non-NFC smartphones
- \* printed as text for other computers.

The size of a 3.5" floppy is a perfect compromise of physical usability and creative content. It's big enough to fit an artwork and small enough to fit in the pocket. Also the universality of a floppy disk is similar to NFC floppy as it could be used for any kind of content.

Flopper Drive is a newly designed device that is able to play and create the floppies. Even if the floppies are playable by many smartphones or computers, the player makes playing experience nicer and also removes the need for a screen. The design, hardware and software of the player is released as open source and anybody can build, re-design or extend the device as needed.

The NFC Floppy project is inviting artists, musicians, film makers, producers and general public to create the new floppers and try using it in their distribution channels.

# SEALED BREATH

What has been removed? – is the question around which different elements of “*Sealed Breath*” – spatial and textual – are gathered. In the case of the subtitles, the answer seems to be the actual film. From its skeleton, from the microsecond of the thickness of its ribs, forensicists of cinematic history could restore the image removed – a six-and-half-minute-long fragment of “From clouds to resistance” by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet. However, only few lines do these subtitles follow the words uttered by the ancient greek heroes – cloud nymph Nephele and the Lapithian king Ixion – taken by the directors from Cesare Pavese’s “Dialogues with Leuco”.

1 00:00:18,680 → 00:00:22,389 It is a maze where we are, an incredibly sophisticated one.

2 00:00:39,480 → 00:00:43,712 Yet absolutely inconceivable, its law is as precise as intangible?

3 00:00:44,040 → 00:00:49,034 It is in the air. Or better – it is the air.

4 00:00:49,360 → 00:00:51,191 Here everything

5 00:00:51,400 → 00:00:54,198 is optimised: the shelves, the stations, the light

6 00:00:54,400 → 00:00:58,279 and the time which became a millisecond timecode of

7 00:00:58,480 → 00:01:00,755 our super-optimised exploitation.

8 00:01:00,960 → 00:01:02,837 There is a law, Ixion,

9 00:01:03,040 → 00:01:04,996 which there wasn't before. The clouds,

10 00:01:05,200 → 00:01:08,829 a stronger hand gathers them.

11 00:01:09,040 → 00:01:11,873 My hands pull, tear and push them in, breath, blink, repeat.

12 00:01:12,080 → 00:01:14,992 “Humans work hand in hand with robots in our innovative ware...”

13 00:01:15,200 → 00:01:18,033 Like the last un-optimised atavism. I am hand in hand with you, but

14 00:01:18,240 → 00:01:22,392 what matters the hand which scatters us like droplets?

15 00:01:22,600 → 00:01:26,912 It happened already in the times when there was no master.

16 00:01:27,120 → 00:01:29,111 Nothing has changed

17 00:01:29,320 → 00:01:32,630 on the mounts. We are used to all this.

18 00:01:33,400 → 00:01:37,029 Blower from the West. I would call you Zephyr.

19 00:01:37,240 → 00:01:41,836 We spend the days inflating these plastic bubbles and stuffing them

20 00:01:47,400 → 00:01:51,951 into these standard cardboard boxes.

21 00:01:52,160 → 00:01:54,958 Void fill solutions. The inflated void around deflated objects.

22 00:01:55,400 → 00:01:58,597 Fragile boxes suspended in thin air inside other fragile boxes inside...

23 00:01:58,960 → 00:02:01,793 The water, the wind, the rock and the cloud

24 00:02:02,000 → 00:02:07,279 are no longer your thing, you can no longer press them close to you, engendering and living.

25 00:02:07,680 → 00:02:12,276 Other hands henceforth hold the world.

26 00:02:12,520 → 00:02:15,114 There is a law, Ixion.

27 00:02:20,480 → 00:02:22,675 My fate, I have it in my fist Nephele.

28 00:02:22,880 → 00:02:26,236 In your gloved fist you have only air.

29 00:02:26,520 → 00:02:28,636 Sealed Air.

30 00:02:28,840 → 00:02:33,436 Which is your sealed breath.

31 00:02:33,640 → 00:02:35,392 The air you exhale I blow into this endless flow of cushions

32 00:02:35,680 → 00:02:37,910 into the endless flow of boxes

33 00:02:38,120 → 00:02:39,633 blown around the world

34 00:02:39,840 → 00:02:42,274 by all the gods of wind that the logistic pantheon recruited.

35 00:02:42,480 → 00:02:45,438 The undoing of this work –

36 00:02:45,640 → 00:02:49,110 the obsession with “unboxing”

37 00:02:49,320 → 00:02:52,869 does it breathe into those winds?

38 00:02:53,080 → 00:02:55,674 If not, where do the 3.4 billion that watched “unboxing of toys”

39 00:02:55,960 → 00:02:58,520 breath themselves into? Or the 120K youtubers that watched the

40 00:02:58,720 → 00:02:59,550 unpacking of a brand-new Venus

41 00:02:59,760 → 00:03:02,718 with 2 razor blade refills, that we packed the other day?

42 00:03:02,920 → 00:03:06,151 You sometimes wonder what those people do with all your air?

43 00:03:06,360 → 00:03:07,998 Maybe another obsession – that of blowing them up?

44 00:03:09,640 → 00:03:13,553 By jumping on them like this?

45 00:03:14,520 → 00:03:18,229 [loud popping sound] Oh how damn pleasant

46 00:03:18,880 → 00:03:22,395 to hear this exhaling pop.

47 00:03:22,600 → 00:03:27,151 The end of work. The return of air.

48 00:03:27,360 → 00:03:30,477 What if the air sealed was not fully sealed?

49 00:03:33,240 → 00:03:34,798 Or by some ca'canny it was sealed too tight, stone-stiff

50 00:03:35,160 → 00:03:39,836 and an object would have a seizure inside a box or maybe suffocate?

51 00:03:40,120 → 00:03:43,749 What if the gas I breath was made thinner than the business as usual

52 00:03:43,960 → 00:03:48,238 and it slowly leaked through the trademarked plastic film?

53 00:03:48,800 → 00:03:51,314 The cushions would become clouds indeed, called upon by their nymph

54 00:03:51,600 → 00:03:56,754 and the objects will be thrown into the hazardous world unprotected?

55 00:03:57,120 → 00:04:00,032 Naked gods. Naked goods.

56 00:04:00,760 → 00:04:02,671 They will arrive all broken!

57 00:04:02,880 → 00:04:06,668 Maybe, but so is our day broken up into units of time, measurable and

58 00:04:06,880 → 00:04:09,519 exchangeable in terms of the very abstract value it produces

59 00:04:09,720 → 00:04:11,073 I see you've fit the Capital into those standard boxes as well?

60 00:04:11,280 → 00:04:12,156 Yes, in many senses, and very little void was left to fill...

61 00:04:12,360 → 00:04:16,069 Don't defy the hand, Ixion.

62 00:04:16,480 → 00:04:20,109 It is fate. I have seen some more audacious than them and you.

63 00:04:20,320 → 00:04:23,232 You cutta da pay, we cutta da shob I'll clog you with my Chinese Ni...

64 00:04:26,680 → 00:04:29,638 Death, which was your courage,

65 00:04:29,840 → 00:04:32,798 can be taken from you, like some kind of good.

66 00:04:34,240 → 00:04:37,915 If they make bonus out of thin air we make bogus out of thinner air!

67 00:04:38,120 → 00:04:41,032 Australian companies started selling bottled fresh air

68 00:04:41,240 → 00:04:44,118 for the polluted rich apparently.

69 00:04:45,760 → 00:04:48,433 But we can send with each shipment and free of charge

70 00:04:49,000 → 00:04:50,513 the bubbled air fresh

71 00:04:50,720 → 00:04:55,475 from the exhausts of a hundred lorries puffing

72 00:04:55,760 → 00:04:58,797 their mornings, days and nights at the loading stations here.

73 00:04:59,000 → 00:05:02,436 Labyrinth doesn't monitor you 24/7. No need for it as the whole scripted

74 00:05:02,760 → 00:05:04,318 reality is created anew like in The Invention of Morel, day after day.

75 00:05:04,520 → 00:05:07,830 And my breath who owns...

76 00:05:08,160 → 00:05:12,790 You are one of us, Ixion. You are all in the gesture you make.

77 00:05:13,240 → 00:05:15,993 But for them, the immortals,

78 00:05:16,200 → 00:05:19,033 your gestures have a sense that lingers.

79 00:05:19,240 → 00:05:22,391 They feel everything from afar

80 00:05:22,600 → 00:05:25,353 with their eyes, their nostrils, their lips.

81 00:05:25,560 → 00:05:28,393 [loud popping sound]

82 00:05:28,600 → 00:05:30,477 What you achieve or do not achieve,

83 00:05:30,680 → 00:05:32,875 what you say, what you seek,

84 00:05:33,080 → 00:05:35,548 everything gladdens or displeases them.

85 00:05:35,760 → 00:05:39,753 And if you disgust them – if by mistake you disturb them in their Olympus –

86 00:05:39,960 → 00:05:41,678 they pounce on you

87 00:05:41,880 → 00:05:45,190 and give you death – that death which they know,

88 00:05:45,400 → 00:05:48,472 which is a bitter savour which lasts and is felt.

89 00:05:48,680 → 00:05:51,478 Then one can still die.

90 00:05:51,680 → 00:05:55,195 No, Ixion. They will make of you like a shadow,

91 00:05:55,400 → 00:05:58,312 but a shadow that wants to live again and does not ever die.

92 00:05:58,520 → 00:06:00,351 It leaves this breathless plastic remnant.

93 00:06:05,960 → 00:06:10,078 Miserable squashed film from which all air has escaped.

94 00:06:10,280 → 00:06:12,714 A negation of life that has become visible...

95 00:06:12,920 → 00:06:14,114 Then to stuff these zombies in boxes would only mean to follow

96 00:06:16,160 → 00:06:20,790 the logistic logic of the capital with obstinate persistence.

97 00:06:21,000 → 00:06:26,597 That which was destroyed but did not decay

98 00:06:26,960 → 00:06:28,916 will be kept to circulate as if living

99 00:06:29,120 → 00:06:33,477 and curse the living as if undead...

What has been removed from their dialogue about the Olympian powers and its separation from men is coded in the replacement lines that bend the timeline of the “new” removed-film into the present day. It takes place somewhere on the endless planes of logistic warehouses amidst the mounts of cardboard boxes where little cloud-like air cushions are inflated to fill the void around goods too small for standard boxes. Tied to the endlessly spinning wheel of packaging and shipping, the “new” Ixion stares into that void and asks again “What has been removed?”

## Kirill Tulin

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# OBJECTS OF ATTENTION

In this exhibition, ordinary things are revised into objects of attention. Ten artists have been invited to reflect on the capacity of artefacts to spark political concern and raise awareness of actual social challenges. Through the engagement of these artists with and through the expressive (material, design, functional, indexical) potential of things, everyday items have been transformed into devices for thinking about the contemporary – through topics such as migration, gender, environmental sustainability, digital rubbish, obsession with changes, and the role of humans in an automated world. The project is intended to transgress conventional ways of making, analysing, and representing things, exploring alternatives ways of producing knowledge. Also, it contributes to debates about the relationship of an artwork to its society, matters of aura and intentionality, the intrinsic properties of artefacts, as well as exploring the intersections from which the dialogue between contemporary art, anthropology, design, and museum studies can be brought forward.

For instance, a bible used in the Haku detention centre triggers questions about the reasons why people are confined these days and demonstrates that faith needs no visa. A stuffed cat obtained free from a second-hand shop brings attention to human-animal relations in Western societies and also to our culture of possession and disposal. A focus on wallpapers unfolds current feelings and aesthetics of the home, inviting us to reflect on property dynamics in Tallinn. Then, a collection of sealed-air packaging material, put together in the form of a bubble-sphere, materialises the size and weight of contemporary logistics. A set of floppy disks, substituting Spotify as a source of music, challenging innovation as the dominant paradigm. In a similar way, a series of broken tools may exemplify the limits and fragility of the worlds we inhabit and demonstrate that failure is practice. Another example is how rescued samplers from a bunker in Sillamäe's nuclear factory raises ecological catastrophes, the use of renewable energy, and natural resources. A robotic clicker embodies our idolisation of quantification. The combination of a sequined bra and a mixer spark thoughts about contemporary sexuality and gender issues. And, a set of objects abandoned during the multiple wars that took place in Georgia during recent decades makes visible both the strength and perils of identity making.

January 12 – March 17, 2019  
Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design

### Curator

Francisco Martínez

### Artists

Jussi Kivi, Laura Kuusk, Nino Kvrivishvili, Camille Laurelli, Eléonore de Montesquiou, Eva Mustonen, Emeli Theander, Timo Toots, Kirill Tulin, and Varvara & Mar

### Graphic Designer

Ott Kagovere

### Spatial Designer

Hannes Praks

### Illustrations

Lilli-Krõõt Reppau

## BIO NOTES ON THE ARTISTS AND CURATOR

**Jussi Kivi** is an artist based in Helsinki. His works reflect on emotional landscapes and fringe areas, using archaeological excavation and classification to make art.

**Laura Kuusk** is a photographer based in Tallinn; her art is investigative and involves diverse mediums.

**Nino Kvrivishvili** studied textile design at the Academy of Arts in Tbilisi. In her works she uses traditional weaving techniques and combines them with a new formal language.

**Camille Laurelli** is a French artist working in different media including video, sculpture, performance and photography.

**Francisco Martínez** is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki. His work reflects on material failures, urban ethnography, and the synergies between art and anthropology.

**Eléonore de Montesquiou** is a Franco-Estonian artist. Her work revolves around the articulation between private and official histories, personal and national identities.

**Emeli Theander** is a Swedish born artist mainly working with painting and based in Berlin where she graduated from UDK.

**Eva Mustonen** has studied semiotics, textile and installation art in Tartu, Gothenburg and Tallinn respectively.

**Timo Toots** is an Estonian artist mainly working with interactive and media art. He runs a artist residency Maajaam in South of Estonia.

**Kirill Tulin** is an artist living between Estonia and Italy, who develops multiformat works focused on forms of collectivity, labour and social critique.

**Varvara and Mar** are an artist duo based in Tallinn. Their work features art, design and technological experiments.

## PUBLIC PROGRAMME: EXPERIMENTS WITH KNOWLEDGE

‘Experiments with Knowledge’ will consist of a series of artists talks, a public lecture, two workshops, guided tours, and a performance at the Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design. A key proposition behind this public programme is that museums can be thought as places where things can happen and different participants can share experimental ways to connect their capacities together. In this light, the diverse events scheduled are not organised to know more, but to know differently and access to alternative forms of knowledge.

### Coordinator

Francisco Martínez

### Participants

Eeva Berglund, Derek Holzer, Roomet Jakapi, Ott Kagovere, Jussi Kivi, Mihkel Kleis, Nino Kvrivishvili, Laura Kuusk, Camille Laurelli, Patrick Lavolette, Eléonore de Montesquiou, Eva Mustonen, Hannes Praks, Kirill Tulin, Timo Toots, Varvara & Mar

### Friday, January 11

in the Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design  
18:00 opening of the exhibition in the staircase gallery  
18:30 performance by **Roomet Jakapi** and **Mihkel Kleis**

### Saturday, January 12

in the Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design  
SEMINAR

11:00 Welcoming words by **Kai Lobjakas**, director of the museum. Introduction of the seminar, **Francisco Martínez**

Artists talks:  
11:45 **Patrick Lavolette** (UCL)  
12:10 **Derek Holzer** (Aalto University)  
12:35 **Varvara & Mar**  
12:55 **Timo Toots**

15:10 **Kirill Tulin**  
15:30 **Eva Mustonen**

15:50 Coffee break

11:10 Keynote lecture: ‘Experimentation Back and Forth’, **Eeva Berglund** (Aalto University)

13:10 Lunch break

16:00 **Laura Kuusk**  
16:20 **Camille Laurelli**  
16:40 **Hannes Praks**  
17:00 **Ott Kagovere**

14:10 **Jussi Kivi**  
14:30 **Nino Kvrivishvili**  
14:50 **Eléonore de Montesquiou**

### Practical workshop

January 19: **Timo Toots**, working with NFC floppies  
February 16: **Varvara & Mar**, working with data cans

### Tours of the exhibition

In English: January 19, March 9  
In Estonian: February 16