

ARTISTIC RESEARCH WILL EAT ITSELF



The 9th SAR International Conference on Artistic Research
University of Plymouth, April 11th-13th, 2018

Geoff Cox, Hannah Drayson, Azadeh Fatehrad, Allister Gall, Laura Hopes,
Anya Lewin, Andrew Prior. EDITORS.





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**PART 3. REGURGITATION:
REFLEXIVITY AND REPETITION IN
ARTISTIC PRACTICE**



REGURGITATED PERSPECTIVES – PERFORMANCE

Annette Arlander, Hanna Järvinen, Tero Nauha and Pilvi Porkola

Abstract

This paper consists of the script for a performance created for the conference.¹ The proposal for the performance shall serve as the abstract for this publication:

The performance in four parts is based on different aspects dealing with the question of anthropophagy, necropolitics, sympoiesis, and utopian knowledge, where we create a space to think and play with critical approaches to artistic research: 1. Regurgitated voices, images (Video & Theremin); 2. The Wake: Speeches; 3. A body and Concepts; 4. A Hymn.

Antropophagy, perspectivism, and necropolitics: imagining possible alternatives to questioning colonialism and racism in performance practice. We ask what criticism of epistemological violence in colonialist discourses has to give to artistic practice in general? Can we consume heterogeneous influences without hierarchical positions, i.e. in the antropophagic sense, without resulting in cultural appropriation? The 'objective' spectator or the philosopher wondering about the art work both work post factum, like participants in a dissection or a wake — is this not an indication of necropower in art, to use Achille Mbembe's (2003) definition, of saving the people from themselves?

Sympoiesis and regurgitation: If honeybees produce honey by a process of regurgitation, could chewing one's cud as an artist produce something equally valuable? Reflexivity and repetition in artistic research are explored by revisiting *Day and Night of the Dog* and *Year of the Dog*, from the video series *Animal Years* (2003-2014), based on repeated visits to the same site. Here, excerpts are remixed to be part of the performance.

The utopian aspect of artistic research: There has always been an aspect of utopian in feminist theory of knowledge. It means, for example, that when you write history on unknown or ambivalent things based on incomplete archives, one needs to imagine and conceive relations between things (Hemmings, 2018). How about the utopian aspect of artistic research, is artistic research always 'utopian knowledge'? Here utopian thinking is demonstrated by using event scores. The history of event scores can also be seen as a form for utopian thinking, for example in Yoko Ono's (1970) scores there is clearly an utopian element when asking one to do something that is more or less impossible.

¹ The performance was created as part of the Academy of Finland funded research project How To Do Things With Performance? For more information about the project, see <http://www.uniarts.fi/en/howtodothingswithperformance>

An introductory note

The performance *Regurgitated Perspectives* was presented on the House Stage on Thursday 12 April 2018 at 2 pm. In the performance handout, it was structured in four parts: A Sermon, A Wake, A Communion, and A Hymn. In this script, the performers are called A CANTOR (Tero Nauha), A PREACHER (Annette Arlander), A WIDOW (Pilvi Porkola) and A SOPRANO (Hanna Järvinen).

The setup: center stage a table covered with white table cloth, an urn on the table and four chairs around it, a small action camera on the table, two microphones, some tableware covered by a cloth. Stage left a podium, some roses and toy birds on the floor, stage right a sound system with theremin and synthesizer, on the back wall of the stage a large projection screen.

Prologue

(THE WIDOW and THE SOPRANO distribute hand programs to audience upon arrival. THE CANTOR sprays 'holy scent' on the first rows.)

THE PREACHER:

Welcome to this wake of our beloved and respected one. We are very happy to see so many of you here, joining in our deep sorrow. We hope that with the help of artistic research we can share this moment of loss and say our final goodbyes with due ceremony. Unfortunately, we are in a slight disagreement concerning who the deceased actually is or was. You have all received the program; we will now start with a sermon and then continue with a wake, a communion, and end with a hymn to honour our dearly departed.

A Sermon

(The video *The Pine Revisited*, 16 min. 36 sec., is projected on the screen, accompanied by THE CANTOR on the theremin.)

THE PREACHER (standing at the podium):

Let us now congregate around the scriptures.

Eating others or making honey? Cannibalism increases the risk of prion diseases, like the mad cow disease. Thus, we might find it safer to eat others. But this is not as easy as it sounds, because others are not separate from us.

Physicist and queer theorist Karen Barad suggests that 'bodies, including but not limited to human bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity, its performativity' and acquire 'boundaries, properties, and meanings ... through the intra-activity of mattering' (Barad 2012, 69). 'Intra-actions include the larger material arrangement', she writes, 'that effects an *agential cut* between "subject" and "object" (in contrast to the more familiar Cartesian cut which takes

this distinction for granted)...’ (Barad 2007, 139–140). Differentiating is not about radical exteriorities, she adds: ‘what is on the other side of the agential cut is never separate from us.’ (Barad 2012, 69).

This goes for artistic research as well, for cuts between artistic research and other forms of research, or other kinds of artistic practice, between the artist as subject and the artist as object, the one who eats and the one to be eaten and so on. Is this becoming too complicated? We could rather try to think in terms of sympoiesis, in the words of Donna Haraway:

Perhaps as sensual molecular curiosity and definitely as insatiable hunger, irresistible attraction toward enfolding each other is the vital motor of living and dying on earth. Critters interpenetrate each other, loop around and through one another, eat each other, get indigestion, and partially digest and partly assimilate one another, and thereby establish sympoietic arrangements that are otherwise known as cells, organisms, and ecological assemblages. (Haraway 2016, 58)

Cows and other ruminants regurgitate half-digested food in order to chew it a second time. This is what artistic researchers generally are asked to do, to chew their cud. The recommended mode of rumination is usually reflexivity, or critical self-reflection, to avoid narcissistic self-promotion. The Skylla to that Charybdis is drowning in a vortex of reflexivity. Indeed, following Haraway and Barad, we might choose diffraction rather than reflection as a safer tool.

Diffraction as a concept owes as much to the feminist theorizing about difference as to physics, (Barad 2014, 168) where in its classical form it is understood as the result of the superposition or interference of waves (Barad 2007, 78-79). In quantum physics diffraction experiments are ‘at the heart of the “wave versus particle” debates about the nature of light and matter’ (Barad 2007, 72-73) and have shown how ‘wave and particle are not inherent attributes of objects but’, interestingly, ‘the atoms perform wave or particle in their intra-action with the apparatus.’ (Barad 2014, 180). As a methodology diffraction was used by Donna Haraway as a counterpoint to reflection. For Karen Barad it is, among other things, ‘a tool for thinking about social/natural practices in a performative rather than representationalist mode’ (Barad 2007, 88). Thinking diffractively can thus imply a self-accountable, critical, and responsible engagement with the world, while reading diffractively can mean reading texts ‘through one another’ to produce unexpected outcomes, as suggested by Geerts and van der Tuin (2016). Rather than ‘a boundary-crossing, trans/disciplinary methodology’, which is ‘blurring the boundaries between different disciplines and theories to provoke new thoughts’ (Geerts and van der Tuin 2016), we could perhaps understand diffractive reading in the tradition of artistic cut-ups (Burroughs and Gysin 1978)

as various forms, combinations or collages of texts, images, video clips, memories and experiences.

If honeybees produce honey by a process of regurgitation, could we hope that chewing one's cud as an artist could produce something equally valuable? The video you see here explores reflexivity and repetition in artistic research by recording a visit to the site of *Year of the Dog*, on Harakka Island in Helsinki on 28 February 2018. *Year of the Dog* was performed and recorded approximately once a week from 7 January 2006 to 11 February 2007 and it is one of the works in the series *Animal Years* (2003-2014), based on repeated weekly visits to a site on that island each year. *Day and Night of the Dog* was performed in the same pine tree for a day and night with two-hour intervals from noon to noon on October 20-21 in 2006, that same year. These old video works are inserted, first the year, then the day and night, in the recently recorded real-time sequence.

While sitting in the pine, the branches of which had grown so vigorously during twelve years, that sitting proved rather uncomfortable, I tried to remember my previous experiences, without much success. What I did remember, where some thoughts I recently read, by Anna Tsing, in her ground-breaking study *The Mushroom at The End of the World - On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins* (2015), where pine trees are key figures together with matsutake mushrooms. She describes how 'pines, matsutake and humans all cultivate each other unintentionally. They make each other's world-making projects possible.' (Tsing 2015, 152) For her 'landscapes more generally are products of unintentional design', they are 'overlapping world-making activities of many agents, human and not human.' Although the 'design is clear in the landscape's ecosystem... none of the agents have planned this effect.' (Tsing 2015, 152) According to Tsing 'humans join others in making landscapes of unintentional design.' (Tsing 2015, 152) She writes:

As sites for more-than-human dramas, landscapes are radical tools for decentering human hubris. Landscapes are not backdrops for historical action: they are themselves active. Watching landscapes in formation shows humans joining other living beings in shaping worlds. Matsutake and pine don't just grow in forests; they make forests. Matsutake forests are gatherings that build and transform landscapes. (Tsing 2015, 152)

The group of pine trees that has grown during these twelve years near the old pine on Harakka Island is perhaps not a forest, and there are no matsutake mushrooms anywhere near the area as far as I know. Tsing's idea of humans and others cultivating each other unintentionally, seems to make sense, however. She refers to human dependence of other life forms, 'we proudly independent humans

are unable to digest our food without helpful bacteria, first gained as we slide out of the birth canal.’ (Tsing 2015, 142) There are more bacteria than cells in the human body, and they are necessary for us. Tsing refers to biologist Scott Gilbert and his colleagues, who claim that, ‘almost all development may be codevelopment. By codevelopment we refer to the ability of the cells of one species to assist the normal construction of the body of another species.’ (Gilbert quoted in Tsing 2015, 142) ‘This insight changes the unit of evolution’, Tsing writes. ‘Some biologists have begun to speak of the “hologenome theory of evolution”, referring to the complex of organisms and their symbionts as an evolutionary unit: the “holobiont”’, she adds. Tsing describes how, in order to emphasize development, ‘Gilbert and his colleagues use the term “symbiopoiesis”, the codevelopment of the holobiont’, in contrast ‘with an earlier focus of life as internally self-organizing systems, self-formed through “autopoiesis”. ‘More and more’, they write, ‘symbiosis appears to be the “rule”, not the exception... Nature may be selecting “relationships” rather than individuals or genomes.’” (Tsing 2015, 142) Tsing summarizes her view on codevelopment and contingency: ‘Interspecies relations draw evolution back into history because they depend on the contingencies of encounter.’ Moreover, ‘interspecies encounters are always events, “things that happen”. The units of history.’ Events ‘cannot be counted on in the way self-replicating units can; they are always framed by contingency and time.’ (Tsing 2015, 142)

And now, let us listen to some examples of the myriad voices of the world:
(the sound of wind and a voice in Finnish, with English subtitles, from the video is accompanied by THE CANTOR with live sound of theremin)

A Wake

(From left to right THE WIDOW, THE SOPRANO, THE PREACHER and THE CANTOR , gather around the table with the urn, standing.)

THE WIDOW (places the roses on the table, tears some of them and spreads the petals over the urn):

It’s time to say goodbye, my love.

You always knew everything.

You were always sure about everything.

You had huge tradition with heroes and noble men behind you.

You had strict orders to follow and great thoughts to think.

You knew what a competition means. You wanted always to win.

You always said how things are, I mean, what the facts really are.

You were one of those who wanted to have power and make it great again.

Now you don’t have a body anymore.

Goodbye, darling.

After you there will be something else.

There will be more shadows.

There will be more uncertainty, ambivalence, more freedom.

There will be more subjectivity but also more relational thinking; there will be more “others” and many ways of knowing.

There will be fewer orders, less hierarchy, less men who always knew it all.

There will be more fragments, more poetry perhaps.

There will be more space.

We are still here, in flesh.

After you there will be a future.

THE SOPRANO (hits the urn with a rose):

Dearly departed,

I admit that I owe a lot to you. My career, in academia, has been due to your insidious presence, your choice of always standing up for the white guy at the expense of everyone else. It pissed me off just enough.

I am not convinced that you are, in fact, dead, although I have been told of your death by the dead white men of Roland Barthes’s and Michel Foucault’s ilk, time and again assured that we live in a different world now, as Jacques Derrida did when conspicuously turning all of us who are not dead white men as at best exceptions to the rule.

Yet, it seems you are resurrected, time and again, not so much Christ-like as a paradoxical zombie called forth by the voice of the master narrative in art, the one that claims we cannot do without you; the one that insists you are a neutral party, not a function of power with which to keep discourse focused on your limited number.

So trust me that I will be here, waiting with my mambo and my houngan, who are the subaltern, the queer, the feminist voices not allowed as much as a proper name in your vision of art. I am holding a stake, ready to put you down, analyse you to death again. Because even nameless, we shall overcome you.

THE PREACHER (places a rose to lean against the urn):

Dear Friend, if I dare call you that, since we were never really close. I should perhaps rather say dear mentor, teacher, guide and guard.

I feel very sad in saying goodbye, because your presence, the idea of your presence, has been so important to me and to many, many people that I love and respect, both now living and long departed. Because of You they could defend their critical and sometimes even openly outrageous work or legitimate their extraordinary flights of fancy. You provided the support and theoretical

legitimation, both for their extremely socially conscious and also their totally antisocial artistic projects and plans. Although we never really met and like many others, I suspected that you had passed away long ago, only that was never officially admitted, I feel this moment when your departure is an acknowledged fact is nevertheless something of a shock. Even though I have to admit that I often accepted that you were a mere fantasy, an illusion, a smoke screen to hide harsh reality, to openly admit that you are no longer with us will mean a huge change in our understanding of what could be done, what should be done and how to do it. Without you artistic research will never be the same again. Our beloved mentor, teacher, guide and guard - Artistic Freedom - Rest in Peace.

THE CANTOR:

Dear someone, without a name.

You have contaminated us by the heretical knowledge, a different pedagogy, which resembles the slithering snakes, murmuring of night-mares and swarming of bees, these mischeivous and nefarious discourses of yours.

St. Bernard has requested us to ask in *The Song of Songs*

Where, then, is the fox? We held him fast just now. How has he escaped from our hands? [...] we shall recognize him by his fruits. Assuredly the spoiling of the vines is a proof that the fox has been there. (Peters 1980, 99)

You were the cunning fox. We need to look at the fruits of your teachings, because we cannot tell if you were a heretic from the outlook or conduct yours. Since, to know a heretic, requires an authority to recognize the heretic. It requires an inquest in order to fortify the authority. It asks for an authority to recognize how the heretics, atheists, witches or scholastics only try to imitate the words of men like apes.

The emergence of such counterfeitters like you, is always a sign and asks for the re-organization of the accumulated capital or the production of knowledge. It is not that your heretical teachings did not exist before, since they were already defined in the 'medicine chest' of *Panarion* by Epiphanius in the 370s, when radical changes took place in the society.

You were a deviant and an exception, that the expropriation needed. The orthodoxy of knowledge and research has always been contested by the antagonising positions, and only heterodoxies prevail.

You said, that each sect may once become a hegemony, and each orthodoxy once was heretical. Each philosophical standardisation of argument, choice and decision between a concept and the reality, Being and beings. That you never existed is a fruit of your teaching, when you were dragged over hot coals by us.

(From left to right THE WIDOW, THE CANTOR, THE SOPRANO, and THE PREACHER sit down at the table. THE WIDOW distributes papers and pens for all the performers to write scores and fold them into airplanes. In the background, a video projection is shown, including the following sentences:

In feminist theory there has always been an aspect of utopian knowledge.
The imagination can be a tool or a method for research.
The imagination consists for example:
An aim to hear, feel and see things we haven't heard felt or seen before.
An act to adduce relations (between humans, non-humans and things) we haven't valued before.
Desire to create the new kind of future that is based on another kind of past
Moreover, utopian thinking is about re-writing history and it's about writing the future.
How about this in the context of artistic research?
What we haven't heard, felt and seen yet?
What kind of connections and relations we like to value?
Is there a need to re-write past (or presence) for another kind of future?
What is utopian aspect in artistic research?
What does it promise for us?
What will change?

THE WIDOW, THE CANTOR, THE SOPRANO, and THE PREACHER rise and throw their paper airplanes to the audience.)

A Communion

(From left to right THE WIDOW, THE CANTOR, THE SOPRANO, and THE PREACHER sit at the table. THE SOPRANO distributes *mämmi*, a Finnish easter delicacy, into small glass bowls. Each performer adds cream to the *mämmi* according to their preference. THE PREACHER turns on the action camera on the table to record the image of the bowl of THE WIDOW, who is not eating, to be projected live on the screen. THE SOPRANO and THE CANTOR have an improvised conversation on the following topics whilst eating *mämmi*:

- Necropolitics
- Its connections with anthropophagy
- The colony and cultural appropriation
- The holy texts and universals in art, e.g. 'the modern'
- Power, heretics, and the inquisition of art?

- Art as an Eurocentric and colonizing construct

THE SOPRANO:

First explain the eating part for the audience. Next: definition of necropolitics, although let's leave this for another time – in short, we're not there, yet, in art. The precarious has not yet reached the level where conditioning of life (biopolitics) has become the conditioning of death (necropolitics) through terrain of terror no longer in control of the sovereign/state.

But what connects this to antropophagy: Bataille and the thematics of the victim – are these interesting? Postcolonialism – both are, after all, postcolonialist notions arising from the specificity of the colonial condition. This leads to the question: is us using these kinds of concepts some kind of cultural appropriation? (Of course, Finland was a colony first of Sweden and then of Russia, but I for one do not identify as a (post)colonial subject.)

Cultural appropriation: Is the line of what is appropriation that which is holy or sacred? Can the state be something sacred (as it is in certain nationalist understandings of statehood)? What of art? What in art is sacred? The canon, perhaps. A canon is the collection of holy texts and holy people – for example, modernists.

What of uses of power: are there heretics in art or is there an inquisition of art? Art is a Eurocentric, colonialist and colonializing construct: art forms are defined from the specific tradition of Eurocentric ideas as to what constitutes art – cf. what is art and what is artefact; who is an artist; what is 'music' and 'theatre' and 'dance' and why these are separated? This links to how these are researched: any music outside of European tradition is studied with ethnomusicological tools (Dabashi 2013).

Today, we no longer live in the world of public, corporeal punishment but in the era of surveillance (Foucault 1975), we have internalised the power function into self-surveillance and self-censorship.

The colonialist relation within art is the reply that one gets when questioning the sacred in the canon for their appropriative behaviours is 'yes, but?' I.e. so what if Picasso used African art works as his source, that was his colonialist right. Should this not be questioned?

THE CANTOR:

What is Anthropophagy? 'I am interested only in what is not mine. Law of man. Law of the cannibal,' writes Oswald de Andrade (1999, 92), in the *Cannibalist Manifesto* in 1928. This is, still, a western and a modernist perspective to anthropophagy, and yet it was de Andrade who has from then on instigated the whole development of the *Tropicalismo* movement in Brazil. Lygia Clark stated in 1969 that: 'when the artist digests the object, he is digested by society which has already found him a title and a bureaucratic function: he will be the future

engineer of leisure, an activity that has no effect whatsoever on the equilibrium of social structures' (quoted in Rolnik 2007). In regard of this sentence, Clark does not claim that we should keep innovating only ephemeral and conceptual works of art, in order to escape the 'bureaucratic function', but rather, that we should not *only* 'digest' the past, but rather keep churning it, feigning it, chowing on it, cloning it and imitating it — but never let it become part of our system. But how could this be?

Tupi, or not Tupi, was the question de Andrade asked in his manifesto. This group, Tupinambá from the Brazilian coast had a system of war and cannibalism of a elaborate kind, where captives of war often lived long periods of time with the captors group, where they were treated almost as equals and they were given women as spouses, also. They became the brother-in-law, *tojavar*, which also meant an enemy or an opponent. Predatory logic is implicated as in affinity, and not in alliance. However, after a while the captive was subjected to a solemn ritual killing, in the village center, which was also an initiation for selected executioner. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro writes how after the initiation, the initiated

thereby received a new name, commemorative scarifications, the right to marry and have children, access to paradise, etc.) and was followed by the ingestion of his body by those in attendance—guests from neighboring villages as much as their hosts—with the sole exception of the officiant. Not only would he not eat the captive, but afterward he would also enter into a funerary confinement, a period of mourning. He entered, in other words, into a process of identification with this 'opponent' whose life he had just taken. (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 140-41).

My question is to think about the relationship 'predator' logic of the 'bestial', here presented by de Andrade and Clark, which is twisted in the fabric of Tropicalismo and further, where anthropophagy is a central term—which is not cannibalism. But can we comprehend this, at all? Is it at all possible that de Andrade and Clark would have avoided the same pitfalls as we do in our epistemological violence toward the Tupinambá, Arawate, or any other non-western axiom of thinking?

At least we could start, from the comprehension, that post-tropicalismo culture still have a relation with predator logic. But that it is not the *substance* or *matter* that is being eaten, but also not a metaphysical virtue. 'What was eaten was the enemy's relation to those who consumed him [...] his condition as enemy. In other words, what was assimilated from the victim was the signs of his alterity, the aim being to reach his alterity as point of view on the Self.' (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 142) So, what is being consumed is a condition and a point of view, a

different perspective is being consumed, and it becomes part of a new host, or does the host turn into a hybrid, an alien form, and an enemy? But the difference from the necropolitical war, is that in this ritual killing, that there is 'a zone of indiscernibility between killers and victims, eater and eaten.' (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 148). The predator logic is not a universal or orthodox logic, but accommodate strangers, and strange behaviours.

Who has been eaten now?

(THE WIDOW, THE CANTOR, THE SOPRANO, and THE PREACHER clear the table.)

A Hymn

(THE SOPRANO sings standing in front of the podium, accompanied by the CANTOR with synthesiser. THE WIDOW and THE PREACHER repeat and sing along with the audience the chorus verses. The video *The Pine on the Shore Revisited*, 17 min., is projected on the screen.)

THE SOPRANO (sings the first verse of the folk song "Taivas on sinen ja valkoinen" without accompaniment in Finnish, and then says):

All rise for the Hymn

(sings)

1. The sky is a-blue and the sky is a-white and the sky is filled with starlight.
(chorus repeats)
So my young heart' s filled with wonder filled with looming sorrow.
(chorus repeats)
2. Don't ask me how to do things with performance nor with artistic research.
(chorus repeats)
Onl y the woods and the sky' s bright brilliance will fill my heart with ideas.
(chorus repeats)
3. Artistic research may eat itself and the world will barely notice.
(chorus repeats)
Performers all, we'll stand united and guarantee art matters.
(chorus repeats)

4. (TOY BIRDS, held by THE WIDOW, sing the last verse without lyrics into the microphone held by THE SOPRANO)

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Documentation

Some images and audiovisual material from the performance are available on the Research Catalogue

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/281037/281038/3516/1221>

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