



**ARTISTIC RESEARCH FOR THE ADVANCED**  
**Ten Proposals from TAhto Research School**

**Julius Elo**

**Henna-Riikka Halonen**

**Dirk Hoyer**

**Sirkka Kosonen**

**Kiril Kozlovsky**

**Elina Lifländer**

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**Tero Nauha**

**Kirsi Törmä**

**Itay Ziv**

**A**

**ARTISTIC RESEARCH  
FOR THE ADVANCED**

**Ten Proposals**



# **Artistic Research for the Advanced *ten proposals!***

by TAhTO Research School for The Artistic Research

Research Pavilion

6.5.-30.7.2015

La Biennale di Venezia - 56th International Art Exhibition.

# INTRODUCTION

This booklet will give some answers to questions about artistic research that you have been too ashamed to ask from your professors, supervisors, colleagues or other artists.

## RESEARCH PAVILION

Experimentality

Venice, 7 May – 30 June 2015

University of the Arts Helsinki will establish a Research Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale. The first pavilion in the history of the biennale to be dedicated to research, it will consist of a top-notch international contemporary art exhibition and a platform for events that feature artistic research. The dynamic between artistic research and contemporary art will be explored through the theme of experimentality.

University of Arts Helsinki – pioneering artistic research



**Artistic Research for the Advanced  
*ten proposals!***

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Julius Elo "Dialogues" (2009)  
Photo Jan Ahlstedt



## HOW TO BE A GOOD

"I explore what I do when making art"

Sounds simple and apparent, doesn't it? The basis of artistic research is that there is knowledge that can be gained only through making art. Thus, my main research method is the production of performances, their perception and analysis.

Studying one's own art sounds luxurious. I feel privileged to be able to determine what to study and how. The field is open up in front of me and I can surrender to dream about whatever is closest to my passions – which question in art and performance I want to immerse myself in.

As an artist I am used to writing grants, where I describe the forthcoming performance. Sometimes the description is correct and the performance turns out as intended. Quite often, however, plans change during the process and the performance turns out somewhat different.

The same logic is present in artistic research. It is, however, much more apparent and unforgiving for the researcher. When changing the language or medium, e.g., from art to research and from practical work to writing, there is a risk that the content changes. It may mislead the researcher on his artistic path into unknown seas.

## ARTIST, RESEARCHER AND WRITER

As an artist researcher, you should accept the fact that gaps will always exist between the research plan and the research itself. You must learn to tolerate and live with the gaps throughout your artistic research process.

There is an unspoken demand that I didn't understand before starting my artistic research project:

"An artistic researcher not only needs to be a good artist, but also a good researcher and a writer."

The basic educational degrees in art, depending on the art school, includes 4-6 years studies of artistic practice. Research and writing, however, rarely are part of the study programs and remain more or less on the student's own responsibility. When starting an artistic research project these skills assume a major role. First you must turn your artistic practice into artistic research. You must find the right methods to study the question you want to explore. You must choose the means to interpret the material you have gathered. Finally you have to compile the data in a written form.

For me artistic practice has been the easiest and most natural method. The professors have helped me with the research. But when it comes to writing, I am pretty much on my own.

How to find a form for what you want to write about? How to put into words your own artistic practice and research? What kind of a voice do you want to give it? Or maybe, the question is ultimately, what kind of a voice you are able to give it in written form.

Writing about your art is difficult. You must make numerous choices. How to remain honest enough? How not to slip in gritty description or, on the other hand, smooth out what happened? You must continuously try to find out what is significant, what is worth writing about. What is the new that your research produces?

Repeatedly I experience how my object of interest seems to escape despite my efforts to approach it. It seems always to hide behind the next step – the next exercise, demonstration, performance, article, theory, description, interpretation or concept. The target is not that easy to isolate, clarify and put into words, as it is mixed, fused and entangled with countless other issues.

Probably there is no existing word or concept to describe the object of your research. This is something that you must ultimately invent on your own. It is good to be prepared that this might happen after years of research, when you are finally writing the introduction of your artistic commentary.

Welcome on board!

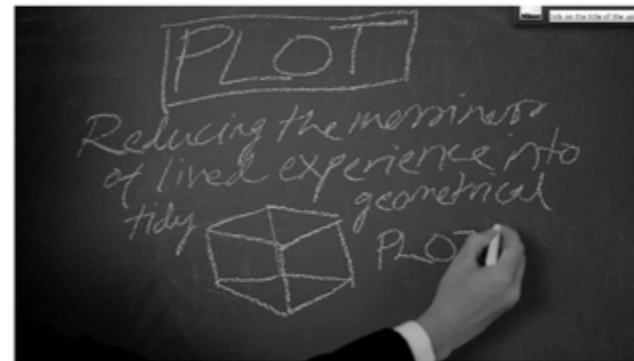


## STAGING FRICTION

The aim of my research is to approach the concept of staging friction through fiction as a strategy and starting point for artistic critical reflection. In this an artistic practice is something that finds disagreement, discomfort and multiple viewpoints reflexive components of the work. This notion will be examined through fictions and objects previously executed by others, embedding them within present social and political changes. It explores possibilities of creating space in which social frictions and interactions are both rehearsed and performed and are used as productive sources.

The research investigates from a visual arts perspective, the apparent intricate need to counter political and economic turmoil with fictional visions. All this dispense with the fiction that an image(or an object or an event) can ever be see all at once or seen objectively. It proposes that perhaps fictions can be used to perceive the contours of what we describe as reality, to re-articulate the frame through which we perceive the world. As a result, the aim is to create works that test our own limits and those of this world by creating worlds within worlds, systems within systems. More particularly, the research explores the extent to which an art practice can make positive use of the practice's inevitable implication within the structures (frame) that it would critically address. In this my artistic work undertakes a reflexive investigation into the limits of practice by using a strategy and technique of Mise en abyme, a formal technique in which an image contains a smaller copy of itself, in a sequence appearing to recur infinitely.

### HOW TO FIND A BALANCE BETWEEN COMPLEXITY, AMBIGUITY AND CLARITY?



### AGAINST REDUCTIONISM

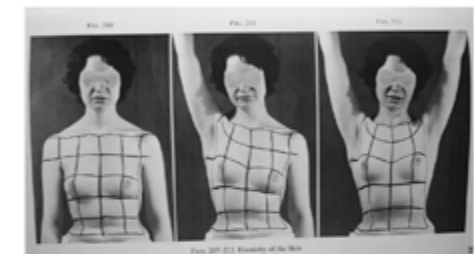


### A,B,C...E = EXPLORING THE GAPS BETWEEN EXPERIENCE, EXPLANATION, ENTERTAINING AND EXPERIMENTATION



### WORKS TESTING OUR LIMITS

### MISE EN ABYME, DOUBLING, REPETITION



Images from: Eden The Po(w)der of Fear (performance/film by Henna-Riikka Halonen and Living anatomy : a photographic atlas of muscles in action and surface contours / by R. D. Lockhart.

## THE SMALL WHITE SPOT



In Jørgen Leth's 1968 film "The Perfect Human" one of the protagonists muses while he looks at himself in the mirror: "In the middle of my heart there was a small white spot". The perfect human has a small white spot in the heart. In addition he is living in a room which is "boundless and radiant with light it is an empty room, here are no boundaries, here is nothing." Standing in the light he and the other characters hope to understand what is happening to them.

So: a small white spot in the middle of the heart, a room with no boundaries, nothing. Welcome to the starting field of the Artistic Research Game. A group of perfect humans trying to find out what the white spot is all about. Move around in the radiant white room and trying to figure out the boundaries in a borderless space. Like *flâneurs* of the emptiness. All of a sudden perfection appears to be like a distorted mirror that is hanging on the wall. Remember, it's just a game. Not a play. No open space. You have to reach the finishing line.

The only border. Find the words for the journey, failure is OK. Really. But something has to materialize. Be productive. Don't ask questions about the room, just fill it with some meaning. Art. Aha. The people outside of the room are of strictly no concern. No concern. And remember: no questions about the room.

Perfect. What are we waiting for? Something should happen, something that feels real, raw, meaningful. Something that blows the narrow grid of the brain into pieces and opens up a new space. There has to be a new space in the interstices. An in-between world, a nano-universe at the cutting point of academia and art that can be inhabited. The empty room. Find it, name it, design it, decorate it. Don't feel claustrophobic, invite people in. Pretend that you understand each other. The last three letters of pretend are end. "In the middle of my heart there was a small white spot, I don't know what it is supposed to mean."



## HOW TO DO ARTISTIC RESEARCH IN FOLK MUSIC?

Choose your topic carefully. If you plan to bravely develop your skills, have an open mind to the ideas you get from the process and be prepared to re-direct your plan. If you are strong, humble and not afraid of challenges and willing to study other folk musicians' work, I warmly recommend artistic doctoral studies for you.

When I started my doctoral studies, I knew what improvisation is. I had a strong view about improvisation and the use of human voice. I knew my strong and weak points as singer. and I knew what kind of singer I would become through the studies.

Also, I would get a deeper insight in learning ethnic voices. I would become really skillful on certain areas. through new challenges I would get my vocal artistry to a new level, internationally and nationally. By developing free improvisation in folk singing I would create new pedagogical methods and new stylistic dimension to folk singing.

Now in the last stage of my study I feel that new knowledge crates new pain. I cannot define what free improvisation is. I am now more brave as a singer and a performer, mostly through experiencing challenging situations. Those challenges have sometimes been rather practical: how to get the performing group's total commitment to the project? how to tame the bureucracy of the Music Centre? I have not got one paid gig as a free improviser, but rather many as an accordion player.

I have not yet been able to test my pedagogical methods with my ideal group, but I am using improvisation in every singing lesson that I give.

artistic research has made me painfully aware of my rehearsing habits and my time management for both work and free-time. I am getting a bad conscience when I read something else than literature from my research area., when I play old dance music and folk music on the accordion and the kantele and when I work with my choir. However, these all are important parts of my musicianship.

In free improvisation every rehearsal and performance is a new situation, we always start from a clean table. The feeling is frightening every time. The only strategy is to have an open mind. So I never get a feeling of being a confident and experienced performer when I start a performance. It is difficult to me to evaluate my own progress, but through the feedback from the evaluators and audiences I have got positive signs. However it does not take the stage fever away, which is propably the nature of free improvisation and a very positive thing for the creative process.

It is yet to be seen how the doctoral degree will reward me professionally. Can I get any paid work because of it? Maybe continuing in the university as a post-doc, how to finance it? There is also a danger of being over-educated for some teaching jobs!



## MY THING IS RESEARCH. ARTISTIC RESEARCH.

How does one end up being an artistic researcher? Obviously at first one has to be an artist of a kind. When it comes to performing classical musicians, the road is pretty obvious: one starts playing at least one instrument as a kid, eventually grows up, starts performing more and more and finds himself being a professional at some point. And then one comes across this term: "artistic research".

At first one thinks "that's so much fun, I can do things I do anyway – and that's still a cool academic thing called research". Then one becomes a doctorate student. And the very moment he or she starts figuring things out, a bunch of besserwissers with a higher academic status starts telling the poor wanna-be-artistic-researcher how wrong he or she is about pretty much everything. And on top of it there is always the ultimate, crushing argument: "Well, you know, this is not really artistic research..." So, what should one do then?

The first thing would be not to lose one's head. What do we know about artistic research? What is artistic research? What is good artistic research? What is bad artistic research – an even more important question. If a certain research project strikes us as an uninteresting or simply a lousy one – can it still be artistic?

My answer is simple. No one really knows. I haven't yet met a person that could define artistic research in an unambiguous and non-tautological way. I have been longing to meet a person like that for some time – someone sent from heaven, an angel in disguise giving me inner peace and soothing my striving towards an answer. Now I do not want to meet this noble prince of truth anymore. I do not care. Is what I do artistic? Yes, it is – in my opinion. Does it fit into a definition of research? I certainly think so. So, the only plausible definition of artistic research that would be unambiguous is a tautology:

Artistic research is an activity conducted by a person that could be seen as artistic researcher.

I am more than content with this definition. It does not prevent or stop me from doing what I do – and that is pretty much enough for me. For, as Tennyson has put it "that which we are, we are". If someone thinks that what I do, is not artistic research – well, I couldn't care less. Oh, by the way – the quotation in question came to my attention in a 23rd part of the James Bond -movie franchise, Skyfall. This movie had a substantial impact on my artistic research project. I have never asked anyone if it is ok to acknowledge a 007-movie as an important influence on my project. Maybe I should be ashamed of it – I do not know. I guess, I just do not care. I guess I would just like to say – paraphrasing a certain character:

My thing is research. Artistic research.

## GHOSTS OF THE RELEVANCY

It requires a lot of time, energy, funding and motivation to accomplish one's research process. This brought up the dilemma about relevancy; who else really cares about this particular research, than my own field of contemporary performance designers and spatial artists. This idea has haunted me time to time during the research process. I became more aware about it, when I started with TAHTO –group, where artistic researchers from different fields have been challenging each other's in the seminars, group works and exhibitions. This was expanding my perspectives, but how far is it good to expand, when at the same time a researcher should define and focus to the own specific research area, even if it doesn't feel so urgent alongside of the evident problems in the society and environment. When global changes are affecting artists and designers as well, the pressure of attending to those through artistic research is understandable, but shouldn't be too direct or obligatory. In my opinion it limits the nature of art making and exploring matters differently. Also the other fields of research require openness and not the goal orientation to reveal something new (Gadamer).

ELINA LIFLÄNDER



What happened at my study case about *spatial* rhythms was that through rather free artistic practice, by making live installations and participatory performances I found that the spatio-temporal approach and the rhythm are the fundamentals that I need to focus deeper. Rhythm cuts through different art fields and daily life, by sound, visual composition, movement and daily routines of the human. While reflecting the artistic parts and studying about eco psychology, evolution history and human geography, it came clearer that the laws of the body and nature are based on the rhythms (Lefebvre) and are now suffering under the continuous acceleration of the contemporary society. Ancient human has already bond with each other's by dancing, marching, rowing, drumming and building empires together by using rhythm (W.H. McNeill).

When realizing all this, it was not anymore needed to ask if this research is relevant or not, it is what it has become. Ultimately I believe more to the empowering freedom of art making and artistic research that has its relevance hidden in the tacit knowledge and observing systems and phenomenon of society in different angles, where there is time to think and breath, explore and communicate by making artistic experiments. The doubts were vanishing slowly by doing, reflecting, sensing and listening.



## COMPOSING AS ARTISTIC RESEARCH: AN EXAMPLE

Those who are in love with practice without knowledge are like the sailor who gets into a ship without rudder or compass and who never can be certain whether he is going.

— Leonardo da Vinci, The Notebooks

This quote is very important for me. Artistic research is a very heterogeneous area between art, research, practice, theories, policy, visions, avant-garde, experiments and knowledge. Artistic research as a term is a contradictory itself. How research can be artistic?

Maybe artistic research is more question-oriented than science, and maybe artists' knowledge is something special with own characters.

Composing is a great mixture of musical knowledge, artistic visions and hard practical notation work. Composing is usually long and lonely working process with own musical ideas. But in fact, is it the only way of composition process?

One year ago, accidental, I made the first experiment of live composing with pianist Kiril Kozlovsky at the Doctoral Programme in Artistic Research.

Live composing means, that composer makes a new composition in a minute, without help of any instruments, or sketches, and musician(s) premieres the new work immediately after composing, *prima vista*, unrehearsed.

This method is very unusual for composers and musicians. Normally composer makes a lot of sketches and experiments with musical ideas. After that long composition process musicians have a lot of time to rehearse before premiere.

Live composing is also a possibility to collaborate with audience and others. Audience can tell their ideas for composer and also see composing work in progress.

Artistic research for me is *shared art and shared artistic processes*.



# KNOWLEDGE IS NOT KNOWING

For in the beginning there is a belief that knowledge is a system you need to tackle and struggle with. There is maybe a need for agonistic desire for revolt, opposition and organization of the resistance. There are several tactics to get your voice heard, so that hegemony would recognize me.

I thought I knew it all, and I thought that the theory would help me to solve the conundrums the practice tirelessly produced. I thought if and when I have enough knowledge things would become crystallized and streamlined. However, in the end, this was confusion.

In practice I know something, but it is not instantly useful as knowledge, if ever. Of course, in practice there is knowledge, as well, being the production of knowledge, but the knowing is without a territory or a base. The knowing in practice has not reason whatsoever. Knowing is the practice of the heretics, and not the knowledge of the revolutionaries.





**KIRSI TÖRMI**

Kierto performance, Kajaani, Finland  
(premiered at January 26, 2012)  
From left: Kirsu Törmi and Kauko Hyvärinen.  
Photo: la Samoil.





Julius Elo "Circle" (2013)  
Photo: Rami Aapasuo

**How to be a good artist,  
researcher and writer**

**Staging friction**

**The small white spot**

**How to do artistic re-  
search in folk music**

**My thing is research. Artistic research.**

**Ghosts of the relevancy**

**Composing as artistic research:  
An example**

**Knowledge is not knowing**

**[...]**

**[...]**

## Your Notes:

**Julius Elo** is a performance artist working in the field of Live Art. He is a doctoral student at the Theatre Academy.

**Henna-Riikka Halonen** is a visual artist and a doctoral student at Finnish Academy of Fine Art

**Sirkka Kosonen**, singer

**Kiril Kozlovsky** is a pianist and a postgraduate student at the Sibelius-Academy. His research focuses on the contextualization of music by Dmitri Shostakovich.

**Elina Lifländer** is a scenographer and doctoral student from Aalto University, School of Art, Design and Architecture. Her thesis explores: Spatial Rhythms at the intersection of the Installation and Performing Arts.

**Pasi Lyytikäinen** is a postgraduate at the Sibelius-Academy and a he has a Doctoral student post at the Doctoral Programme in Artistic Research. Focus of his studies is interfaces between sound and noise and relationship between reality and performance especially in experimental music theatre.

**Tero Nauha** is a performance artist and a doctoral student at the Theatre Academy.

**Kirsi Törmi** is a choreographer-dancer, who is a doctoral student at the Theatre Academy.

The Doctoral Programme in Artistic Research is a joint project of the three faculties within the University of Arts Helsinki, Theatre Academy Helsinki, the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, the Sibelius Academy; and the Aalto University School of Art and Design.

It is the first joint doctoral programme of Finnish art universities that focuses solely on artistic research and explores artistic practices, thinking and observation.

The four-year programme begun in January 2012 and will end in December 2015.

[www.artisticresearch.fi/tahto/about/](http://www.artisticresearch.fi/tahto/about/)

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**A!**  
Aalto University  
School of Arts, Design  
and Architecture