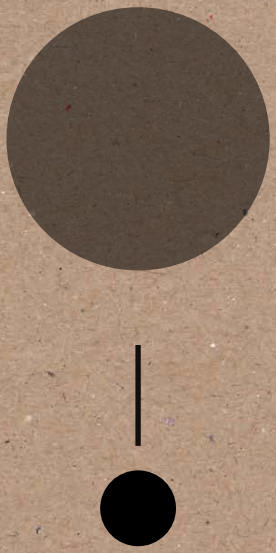
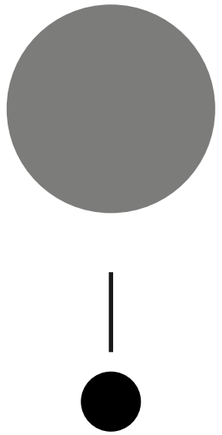


edited by
**ANNE KAUN AND JULIA VELKOVA**

# *Beyond academic publics*

**CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SCHOLARLY COLLABORATIONS WITH CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS**



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ANNE KAUN AND JULIA VELKOVA

# *Beyond academic publics*

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SCHOLARLY COLLABORATIONS WITH CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

***This publication is the result of a collaboration between the Tema Datalab at Linköping University and the Hub for Digital Welfare at Södertörn University.***

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# *Beyond academic publics: conversations about scholarly collaborations with cultural institutions*

**ANNE KAUN & JULIA VELKOVA**

In the spring of 2023, we invited scholars at different career stages from our departments to share their experiences of collaborating with cultural institutions in their research and communication.[1] We wanted to create an inclusive space to talk about the process of enacting such collaborations in practice. And, we wanted to learn from each other about the possibilities and challenges that are part of materializing such collaborations. Our primary interest was not the final product, outcome or success of such collaborations but what it meant for scholars at different career stages, with diverse personal interests, life and professional experience to start, become part of and complete a collaboration in a "good" way. We wondered: What form do such collaborations take? What are the pleasures, difficulties and possibilities that scholars explore in such collaborations? What have scholars learned from them? What do they find inspiring to try out next, and what would be their advice to others? In other words, we prompted a conversation about the "backstage" stories, dilemmas, failures, and possibilities that arise and change in scholarly collaborations with cultural institutions, broadly defined. We were curious to explore possibilities and limits of outreach beyond the conventional academic paper/conference/book, and how it could look as shaped by our differences, scholarly backgrounds, preferred genres and political agendas. We also hoped to spark new ideas and possibilities for explorations that emerge "across" our distinct experiences, in the encounter between different processes and collaborations that scholars brought up and shared. This collection is

1
The workshop was hosted as a collaboration between Tema's DATALAB at Linköping University and the Hub for Digital Welfare Research at Södertörn University

one small artifact that emerged from the polyphony of stories and lively discussions that sprouted in the warm and noisy makerspace at Linköping University in Sweden where the workshop took place. It represents a modest attempt to provide inspiration for a different kind of scholarly practice to colleagues and scholars who want to transgress some boundaries of doing "conventional" scholarly work but do not know what might be coming, how different collaborations could look like, nor where to start or how to find out what is their "cup of tea".

Our interest in these questions was prompted by our own position as scholars working within Swedish universities. We, Anne and Julia, share a background in media and communication studies and were socialized into academic and disciplinary cultures where professional success is measured primarily in terms of writing "conventional" scholarly papers and books, applying for research grants and communicating results predominantly in the form of scholarly publications. Having written way too many of them, we felt increasingly daunted by the repetitiveness of the genre and boundaries of audiences and type of conversations that come with it. We turned to inspirations from other fields, such as science and technology studies, gender studies, feminist technoscience and design studies who have a very long tradition of working with different ways of presenting and communicating research — scholars sew clothes and wear their arguments, build devices, and organise short fiction competitions.[2] Yet we recognize too that not all scholars are artists, and many of us are best in simply crafting words on paper/screen. In many of the more humanistic oriented corners of academia and our own practice, the conventional paper and research project supplemented occasionally by media publicity, remain the dominant practice. And, yet, the theoretical possibility for working differently or organising their research differently holds a strong allure.

## BEYOND ACADEMIC PUBLICS

Academic research and knowledge production are rarely as monolithic as they are presented to be in public discourse by funding institutions. More often than not, surprising paths are taken and collaborations emerge that no one imagined at the outset of the project planning. This is also due to the character of research as being always collaborative, and going beyond individual researchers. At the same time, knowledge production and practices of talking about research — in bureaucratic lingo called outreach — are often siloed due to institutional arrangements, including funding. It was hardly surprising that the latest research proposition[3] in Sweden was focusing extensively precisely on "outreach" (in Swedish *samverkan*). The underlying premise of such "outreach" is that academics produce research decoupled and isolated from the "surrounding society" (formulation of the research proposition), but should be encouraged to interact and collaborate with "external" actors to broadly disseminate their research. We encountered a similar expectation in European Union research funding which demands "collaborative partners" in the role of disseminators of "results" to the world outside of the ivory towers of academia. Of course, researchers are never isolated islands. Most good research is aimed at tackling difficult societal questions and emerges from social, cultural, political and economic arrangements outside of academia. Nevertheless, outreach has become an important pillar for academic work and is increasingly written into funding allocation frameworks, evaluation criteria and individual measures for academic merits. For example, the evaluation system in the UK is taking this aspect even one step further, requiring measurable impact in their Research Excellence Framework (REF) on which funding allocation is based.

Beyond taking its starting point from a siloed understanding of academic research that reinforces a binary between academic and non-academic knowledge production, the understanding of how such a collaboration could look like, tends to be rather simplistic and linear. It rests on a view that knowledge is first produced by researchers, and after that carried out and disseminated to a public. However, the interactions and entanglements between researchers and arenas outside of the academic world, as well as forms of knowledge production are much more complex. Here, we can think of the long histories of research in, research with and research about non-academic milieus, actors and institutions including cultural institutions. It is this context of entanglements and transmissions between academia and other institutions, especially cultural institutions that triggered our attention. We wanted to learn and understand these entanglements better. As we found out that there were a number of impressive projects around us that in many ways have taken alternative

2
Nina Lykke, Feminist Studies A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing (Routledge, 2010); Donna Haraway, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). Jungnickel, Kat, ed. Transmissions: Critical Tactics for Making and Communicating Research. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020. In addition, at conferences such as 4S or EASST there are often sessions on scholarly fiction, poetry or other experimental forms.

3
In Sweden, the government proposes a budget for public funding. How the budget should be allocated is specified in the research proposition over the period of four years. The latest research proposition entitled Research, freedom, future - knowledge and innovation for Sweden (Forskning, frihet, framtid - kunskap och innovation för Sverige) covered the period from 2021 until 2024. The proposition mentions the term outreach (samverkan) 306 times compared to other key terms such as internationalisation (111 mentions) or teaching (20 mentions).

paths in collaborating with cultural institutions for academic knowledge production and sharing, we thought to start with a modest gathering and inventory of inspiring examples and provocations that emerged in that workshop in Linköping. In what follows, we present eight short pieces in which scholars open a conversation that we hope could be a source of inspiration and an informal guide to others.

## OPEN-ENDEDNESS AND POWER

One shared theme that surfaced in all contributions is the unruliness of collaborations. What scholars and their collaborators - museums, artists, curators, non-profit organisations - set out to do in a project quickly spirals out of its original shape. It turns into a shared process of thinking through unplanned encounters with new people, techniques, spaces and questions that take shape while bumping against walls of budget posts, permitted costs, overheads, timelines and workplace agendas. Collaborations thus take shape in the tension between institutional-organisational logics, and personal desires and capabilities for creative maneuvering to go out of certain "beaten paths".

This tension requires managing evolving relations of power and trust that emerge in the calibration of control over collaborations. Scholars might sometimes step into the role of data collectors and resource providers for cultural institutions around a theme of shared concern. They might refrain from defining the outcomes of collaborations irrespective of their economic or leadership role in the project (e.g. life around a nuclear power plant, as discussed by Edberg and colleagues). This approach — of surrendering power over one's own research material — strikes us as quite bold and uncommon for the cultures of "conventional" scholarly practice but at the same time being immensely meaningful and rewarding. Scholarly work that engages different forms of expression, expertise and audience creates spaces of autonomy, evens out power relations between collaborators, and generates trust. Scholars might also adopt the role of workers for museums. Then they have to face the challenge to rethink and remediate their own research to fit in a form and a narrative that their preferred approaches might defy (see for example Mary Bartlett's contribution). Scholars might also assume a much more dominant role in a collaboration with cultural institutions, such as assessing and intervening in the data practices of museums (see the contribution by Thor Tureby and colleagues). Yet at another time, scholars might enrol institutions to serve as platforms for other types of collaborations and conversations between academics and other actors in society — like the Swedish church or the Red cross (as documented in Lagerkvist' and colleagues' contribution). All through, these engagements require a constant negotiation of power relations between collaborators and the institutions that they involve. These negotiations impact not just the outcome of collaborations but also redefine research and participant identities. This is evident for instance in Isabel Löfgren and Patricia Goùvea's contribution where the authors move out of their "daily" work as researchers-lecturers and artist-researchers to practice what they term, research-based art as a collaborative process of situating different and differential knowledges, gathering information and engaging in public dialogue that intervenes in colonial materialities and discourses in Brazil.

A third theme that runs through the contributions is scholars' will to experiment with form, method and their own research practice. Experimentation calls upon authors and collaborators to deal with discomfort[4] — the sense of not fitting in an "environment", not knowing enough about "procedures", or not knowing how to pose potentially discomforting questions. And yet, it is in the exploration of what emerges in discomfort that collaborations gain their transformative charge. Authors in this collection explore issues of memory, vulnerability, legacy, and data through experiments such as developing novel methods like distant listening (Thor Tureby and colleagues) or photogrammetry (Berret and Yu); through creative combinations of sculpture as a technique of narration and research (Benjamin and Marila); or through dynamically recomposing mutable exhibitions that gain their distinct shape and content as they move through towns, reworking spaces of colonialism and racial politics (Löfgren and Goùvea). The authors show, first and foremost, that regardless of the form of experimentation, collaborations require stepping into uncharted territories and exposing oneself to the openness and unpredictability of encounter with objects, spaces and temporalities of serendipitous encounters. They might also bring up tough questions such as the ethics of remediating vulnerabilities.

4
Jungnickel, Kat, ed. Transmissions: Critical Tactics for Making and Communicating Research. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020

What we see emerging from the contributions in this book, is an understanding that collaborations are always a stepping stone in a trajectory of evolving curiosity, individual and collective development of ideas, methods, and forms of expression. Despite the diverse challenges that collaborators face — economy, personal relationships, time — it became obvious to us that they keep fueling desires for trying out different approaches to making and communicating academic knowledge. The contributions also raise important questions for further exploration. For instance, Arnelid and Lisy ask about the afterlives of scholarly exhibitions and materials. Once the artifacts that belong to an exhibition are no longer in active use, the question of storage, preservation and display looms on researchers. Just like disused digital electronics, exhibition objects tend to amass in office rooms and dusty cupboards. What should happen to them? What are their possible afterlives? As anachronistic objects, they can always be reactualized in the present but most of the time remain lingering traces and memorabilia in spaces not meant to accommodate them.

## CONVERSATIONS

We have organised this collection in two parts. The first one, called "*Navigating institutional logics*" deals with the tensions that emerge in the productive frictions between different institutional logics and agendas. The four contributions in this section open each a conversation about a distinct challenge in setting up a collaboration with cultural institutions, and show the issues that emerge from choices about negotiating control and power relations. **Karin Edberg**, **Yvonne Magnusson** and **Anna Storm** open the section with a reflection over their work of setting up a drawing activity with children who live around a nuclear power plant in Sweden. Based on collaborations between Linköping University and Malmö Museum, they discuss the challenges of aligning expectations, resources, mutual learning and explorations of form for "data". **Flora Mary Bartlett** reflects on her collaboration with the Nordiska museum in Stockholm on an exhibition on climate change in the Arctic. She discusses the challenges of joining as a researcher into a collaboration in which the logic of production and framework of exhibition are already predefined, and require the work of fitting narratives and materials that she had to undertake. **Maria Arnelid** and **Dominika Lisy** share their experience from working with the Museum of Work in Norrköping on their research on robots and care. Curating the exhibition while being doctoral students, their perspective reflects a process of learning not only about working with a museum, but also about the governance mechanisms at play in their own department as they lost a significant amount of money for the exhibition to overheads. The section closes with the contribution by **Amanda Lagerkvist**, **Matilda Tudor**, **Jenny Eriksson Lundström**, **Maria Rogg** and **Jacek Smolicki** who describe their process of creating "The Human Observatory for Digital Existence". This is a multi-vocal chapter in which we hear different voices and experiences from participants in the making of the Observatory and their ideas of setting up an environment to discuss questions about the meaning of being human in a technological era. Their reflections convey the idea of an Observatory that acts as a societal and scholarly therapeutic resource - a shelter for reflection that tries to carve out breathing spaces[5] in an algorithmically saturated life.

The second part of the collection is titled "*Critical interventions*" and focuses on collaborations that take the form of experimental and methodological interventions. **Charles Berret and Rosalie Yu** describe their methodological-artistic experiments into questions about the nature of digital media and the messiness of datasets through "collaborative photogrammetry" — a method that they created to capture a collective experience of datafied intimacy and vulnerability. Through their collaboration and the method, **Berret** and **Yu** created an event of collective learning, methodological experimentation and interventionist research on data that was eventually documented in the form of sculptures that the participants could return to and later see in an exhibition. **Jeffrey Benjamin** & **Marko Mikael Marila** reflect on the process that led them individually to create outdoor sculptures and statues amidst the ruins of limestone quarries and abandoned places. They reflect upon their enchanting encounters between landscapes, literature and animals, and the power of these encounters to shape and remain in one's lifetime, research and artistic practice. **Isabel Löfgren** and **Patricia Goùvea** describe work behind their prize-winning *Mãe Preta* exhibition in Brazil through which they explored Black Motherhood over the course of seven years during

5
Savolainen, Laura, and Minna Ruckenstein. "Dimensions of Autonomy in Human-Algorithm Relations." New Media & Society, Vol. 26 (6), 2022

which new artworks kept being added to the collection. Starting from an experience of differential birth-giving, over seven years they problematized racialised motherhood through amassing 70 artworks that they eventually donated to Rio's Art Museum. The section ends with the work of **Malin Thor Tureby**, **Kristin Wagrell** and **Jenny Sjöholm** in which they present their work on digitalised testimonies of Holocaust victims and their families, stored in two museums in Sweden. They raise vital questions about archival ownership, Jewish vulnerability, and the ethics of accessibility and digital remediation.

We hope that this little collection of stories can be a handy inspiration to others to test unknown waters and move out of the usual ways of academic knowledge production. While this is not a step-by-step guide, we hope that the shared experiences are helpful to you who want to try out new collaborations. Our hope is that the volume will be extended by many more conversations to come.


## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Navigating
institutional logics

# *“Should I ask our photographer to come?” Logics of collaboration between museums and universities*

KARIN EDBERG, YVONNE MAGNUSSON & ANNA STORM

During a three-year period in the early 2020s, Malmö Museum and Linköping University, Sweden, formed two out of sixteen formal partners in the international project NuSPACES, funded within the EU JPI-CH program and centered on the topic of nuclear cultural heritage. The project involved three professional groups: museum curators, university researchers, and representatives from the nuclear industry, in three countries: Sweden, Lithuania and the UK. In total, the group amounted to circa twenty people.

Each year, the group met for roughly a week in one of the countries for a participatory workshop including study visits, structured as well as informal discussions, and public engagement with key stakeholders in the concerned country. The aim was to form an arena for exchange and learning through the intensive and recurring meetings, to increase public awareness of critical issues of nuclear cultural heritage, and to provide a context and a basis for doing critical research on the topic.

Within the context of the larger project activities, Malmö Museum and Linköping University successively realized there was potential for more concrete collaboration. What emerged as an idea for generating research data soon turned into a jointly planned drawing activity at an elementary school. Circa 60 school children aged 10–12 years were asked to draw what they came to think of when someone said “Barsebäck nuclear power plant”, which is the nuclear facility located just a few kilometers from the school, currently shut down and on its way to be dismantled.

**Figure 1.** Participants in the NuSPACES international research and knowledge exchange project during a visit to the Barsebäck nuclear power plant. Photo: Liv Willer, Barsebäck/Uniper

**Figures 2-4.** Children at a school nearby the Barsebäck nuclear power plant make drawings about how they think about the plant, its past, present and future. Photos: Andreas Nilsson and Axel Schiller, Malmö Museum

The children were introduced to the task during a preparatory visit by curators, teachers and photographers from the museum and university researchers – including ourselves but also some of our colleagues. A few weeks later, we came back and met them in their classes, circa 20 children at the time, and for two hours they worked with their drawing and wrote in words what it showed. The children who gave their consent were photographed together with their drawings. In the afternoon, the drawings were put on display in the school, and parents and relatives were invited to the exhibition, to mingle and talk about the meanings and significance of the Barsebäck nuclear power plant together with their children.

**Figure 5.** Parents and relatives engage with the children's drawings of the Barsebäck nuclear power plant. Photo: Andreas Nilsson, Malmö Museum

During the drawing hours as well as during the exhibition and mingling, the curators, teachers, and researchers talked to the children, their parents, and relatives, and made notes of the conversations. After the exhibition, the drawings were acquired by Malmö Museum and became part of the collections, available in their online digital object catalog named "Carlotta", and potentially to be exhibited also physically at the museum in the future. Two months after the activity, the drawings were put on display digitally during a semi-public afternoon at Malmö Museum, organized as part of the NuSPACES participatory workshop in Sweden.

During the same period as the drawing activity at the school, simple posters inviting people to share their memories and thoughts about how it is and has been to live near the plant were displayed on public places such as libraries and notice boards in the vicinity of the nuclear power plant. The aim was to collect different generations´ perspectives as a complement to the drawing activity with the children. A number of residents in the area responded to the call and were either interviewed or submitted a written story to us.

In the following, we reflect on what worked well and what challenges we faced, based on the drawing activity described above but including also other types of collaboration within the larger NuSPACES project. The text ends with a few pieces of advice to consider for future collaborative projects between universities and cultural institutions.

**Figure 6.** International scholars, museum curators and nuclear industry representatives discuss nuclear cultural heritage while watching the children's drawings. Photo: Andreas Nilsson, Malmö Museum

## REFLECTIONS ON WHAT WORKED WELL

A first reflection on the many benefits of our collaboration is that these clearly differ between the different collaborators, that is, the benefits were not the same for the various participating professional groups and their respective organizations. In the overall international NuSPACES project, for the university researchers it was most valuable to get facilitated access to archival material, artifacts, sites, and interviewees for their research, both at the museums and within the industry. For the museum staff, it was valuable to engage in national and international networks which is often not too easy to fit into regular museum work. For the industry representatives, who in general worked as communication officers, archivists or in fact industrial heritage officers within their companies, it was valuable to get a context in which they could discuss issues of nuclear cultural heritage, as they as individuals were often rather lonely working on these topics within their organizations.

Among the Swedish participants, the project also brought increased collaboration between three regional museums: Malmö Museum, Regionmuseet Skåne and Kulturen i Lund, with the Barsebäck nuclear power plant as a common focus. The NuSPACES project made clear the benefit of working together on one concrete topic, which allowed better use of the three museums' different competencies. The museums also benefited from the university researchers, for example, by bringing an outsiders' attention and emphasis to the museums' ongoing heritage documentation of the Barsebäck nuclear power plant, which may have had an impact on prioritizations of resources internally at the museums, and possibilities for individual staff to work on the topic.

When it comes to the drawing activity, the university researchers benefited substantially from collaborating with the museum in a number of ways: by the museum's already established credibility when contacting the school teachers, by the personnel and material resources of the museum as an organization, such as a photographer, a teacher, a car for transport, and drawing equipment, and by adding local knowledge and contacts – as Linköping University resides far from the Skåne region where the Barsebäck plant is located. Another benefit was that interest and engagement of the participating children was sparked when they realized that their drawings were to be added to the museum's collection, and thus on display for everyone to watch, not only now, but in the future. This engagement probably made the drawing activity more fun and rewarding for the children than it had been otherwise.

For the museum, it was positive that researchers from the university participated in the work, who with their experience contributed to a sense of safety and professionalism in the contact with the children and teachers at the school. The drawings furthermore make up an important documentation for the museum, well worth saving for the future and for generations to come. In addition, the collaboration in itself, representing two reputable societal institutions with different focus areas, provided credibility in the contact with school representatives and members of the local community.

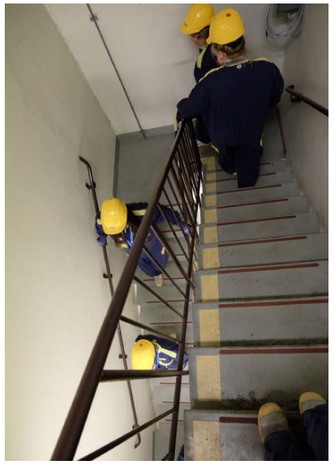

**Figure 7.** Participants of the NuSPACES workshop visiting the Barsebäck nuclear power plant. Photo: Anna Storm

**Figure 8.** Researchers and museum staff visiting a school close to Barsebäck nuclear power plant in preparation for the drawing activity.
Photo: Anna Storm

A second reflection concerns the reasons for the overall success of the larger project, as we perceive it. One key reason was the size of the NuSPACES group. Around twenty people allowed for vivid and still concentrated discussions. You get to know everyone, while the group is still big enough to avoid ending up in one or two people to dominate. Another reason was the continuity in the meetings and the substantial length of the yearly workshops. If you meet for 4-5 days from early morning to late evening, and then again next year, and the year after, relations and trust are built between groups of professionals and between national groups. This allowed for deepened collaborations to take shape within the group, such as the drawing activity in the Swedish national group.

The design of the participatory workshops, where one country team acted as host, forced the national groups to collaborate in very practical terms which also contributed to the building of trust and thereby created a basis for productive exchange. In addition, we have the impression that everyone participated out of interest and their own identified needs, that is, no one was just given the task to represent their organization but wanted to be part of the project and the motivation for collaborating was therefore high.

A third reflection is that, despite the different types of concrete benefits, the most important positive outcome of the collaboration for everyone was to be inspired and learn from engaging with each other's perspectives on a topic of shared interest.

## REFLECTIONS ON CHALLENGES WE FACED

We are now moving on to what, at times, felt less easy in the collaboration.

A first challenge concerned the impact of different organizational logics. Who could contribute with what, in terms of personnel and material resources, in terms of working hours, and in terms of money? What was easy and what was difficult, what was of vital importance to do or rather not to do in each organization in relation to its internal logic, policy framework and management? This was not always obvious and explicit and at some points created some uncertainty in navigating expectations and in the communication between participants. This counts for the drawing activity as well as the larger project, for example in relation to organizing the participatory workshops in each country. Physical location of the participants is one example. Even though we live in an increasingly virtual world, there are still things that must be organized locally. This tended to create an uneven workload at times, especially in preparing for the participatory workshops.

Another example, connected to the drawing activity, was the number of different forms of consent that the children and their guardians had to sign, something that they found hard to understand and also tiresome. Being very practical indeed, it still illustrates how formal matters tend to multiply rather than minimize when several actors are involved. Connected to this was that not all children were allowed or willing to leave their drawings to the museum to be saved for the future. Even if these pupils were few, they were naturally not as interested in participating and had a more skeptical attitude towards the drawing activity as such, which demanded extra motivation from us.

A second challenge concerned professional approaches, where the different working cultures entailed different expectations on, among other things, formal distance to research participants. To give a concrete example related to the situation when meeting the children during the drawing activity: for the university researchers, it was of critical importance to always pose strictly open questions and not to steer the response of the research participant, in this case the school child, in any way. In general, this was the approach also from the museum staff, but not always and maybe not as a conscious principle. The difference was so small that it didn't call for a meta discussion among ourselves, but still it created an extra layer of attentiveness and attunement to the interaction.

Something that at the beginning felt like an obstacle in the work in the international project for some of the museum staff was that all communication was in English. In the university world, English is the everyday working language, but this is not the case in the museum world. Successively, in connection with the project entering year two, it felt more comfortable to use English in conversations, discussions, and reports. This was partly because we got to know each other better in the group, but also because it became more of a habit.

Yet another example relates to the practices of gift giving when meeting international colleagues. In the working culture of industrial companies and municipal representatives (the latter have also participated in the project events to some extent), it was common to bring gifts for the country hosts of the participatory workshop and to the project management team. These gifts could for example be pens with the company or municipal logotype, glass trinkets, or coffee table books about the company/municipality. For both the university researchers and the museum staff, this was slightly unexpected and a bit tricky to handle. On the one hand, a researcher, for example, needs to keep formal distance from actors which in some way is part of one's research, to maintain the researcher's integrity and strive for objectivity. On the other hand, stakeholder interaction is critical for being able to do high-quality research, not the least within the special field of nuclear cultural heritage, and within such interaction, it appears as very impolite to refuse a gift presented by a project partner at, for example, the final dinner of a participatory workshop.

A third challenge, which we have not yet faced in practice, but which is likely to happen, concerns a relation that centers on, on the one hand, collaboration and, on the other hand, researcher–researched. In the beginning of the project, the explorative and collaborative parts of the project were in focus. Towards the later stages, there are plans that the researchers will also follow the work of the museum staff and the industry representatives, for example the creation of a new exhibition at Malmö Museum and the repurposing of an old Expo building at the Barsebäck nuclear power plant, along with visitor programs and archival practices at partner organizations in Lithuania and the UK. Here the trust and relationship between professional groups and between individuals will be put to test. Will the researchers be able to balance between the different roles – as partner and outsider – and how will the museum staff and industry representatives experience being "investigated"? With openness and mutual constructive dialogue, we are confident that this challenge can be turned into a means for developing the nuclear cultural heritage field, which would eventually benefit everyone involved.

**Figure 9.** Section of one of the control desks at the Barsebäck nuclear power plant which might end up in a museum collection. Photo: Anna Storm

## SOME PIECES OF ADVICE TO OURSELVES AND OTHERS FOR FUTURE COLLABORATIONS

We believe all truly rewarding collaboration builds on mutual trust, and trust takes time to build. In the short-term project-based work situation many of us find ourselves in, it may be challenging to find enough time for establishing such trustful relations, outside of one's organization-based work relations. The advice here is to try to build groups stepwise, to include long-term colleagues and partners along with new ones, and to enlarge or change the composition of the group in small steps and thereby build bridges between different projects and people over time. Then the trust between some of the participants is sometimes "inherited" by the newcomers, as cultures of collaboration can be transferred between contexts.

Trust is also built between individuals, not primarily between organizations. The organizations are however the context within which everyone must act. The second advice here is therefore to consider formalized partnerships, as this makes it easier for individuals in different organizations to contribute and spend time in the project. A formalized partnership, that is, a signed document where concrete expectations on each partner is stated and approved, helps keeping up the commitment over time as well as argue for the project internally in relation to, for example, pressure from organizational changes. In addition, one cannot be too clear in the communication between the different partners. What might appear self-evident within one's own organization is easily misunderstood or lost in the contact with others.

We also want to bring forward a third piece of advice of a slightly different kind. When entering a collaboration, a key question to ask is whether all the participating partners have a basic salary for their work, that is, if the project is something you do within the frames of your ordinary employment. If that is not the case – for example, a common situation for freelancers or artists – this must be properly acknowledged, either by applying for funding for salaries for these partners, or by acknowledging that they might not be able to participate on the same terms as other partners. For example, if an artist is involved in the project, the expectations on this person's commitment and spent time needs to be adjusted to the agreed payment. Overall, it is important to foster a dialogue in which all participants are comfortable to articulate their needs and wishes related to the collaboration to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings and too uneven conditions.

Finally, our primary advice to others is definitely to engage in collaborations with people from other countries, types of organizations and professional backgrounds as it creates new and unique knowledge, insights, and skills.

**Figure 10.** View of the Barsebäck nuclear power plant from the nearby old fishing village of Vikhög. Photo: Anna Storm.

## THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO TRY OUT NEXT

Among the things that come to our minds when thinking of new potential collaborations, those of us being university researchers would like to try being directly involved in creating a museum exhibition, not only – as in the current project – to take part in brainstorming around exhibition themes and potential material objects to be included. Another thing we as university researchers are keen to do, is to explore ways of collaborating more deeply with artistic researchers, not only – as in the current project and several previous projects – inviting artists at special occasions to reflect and comment on the project topics, and to some extent intervene into the project dynamics.

We are also thinking about potential collaborative formats for reaching new audiences, outside the museum and outside of academia, which is a critical challenge for all of us. Maybe we could write more together, both to develop as professionals, and to increase the relevance and visibility of our work from a broader societal perspective.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Collaborations of all kinds can be time-consuming and challenging, but also very rewarding. In our current collaboration, we have all received new insights, not only within the field of nuclear cultural heritage, but also about how procedures and working conditions vary among different organizations. Taking advantage of each other's strengths and resources as well as being patient with and having an open dialogue is key to making the collaboration mutually beneficial. To ask a photographer to come along for an event comes naturally for the museum curator, as visual documenting is a central practice in the museum realm but also because the service is available within the organization, while it appears as an amazing and extraordinary resource in a university research context.

**Figure 11.** A museum photographer documenting the drawing activity. Photo: Axel Schiller, Malmö Museum

# *Navigating thin ice: The joys and dilemmas in collaborating on an Arctic climate exhibition*

**FLORA MARY BARTLETT**

In this contribution, I discuss a collaboration with the cultural history museum Nordiska museet in Stockholm in 2018-19. I focus on the successes of the ongoing exhibition *Arktis – medan isen smälter* (The Arctic – while the ice is melting), hereafter referred to as *Arktis,* and the dilemmas I faced when integrating my research within this space. Namely, how to weave in perspectives from the field that diverged from the exhibition's key messages about anthropogenic climate change. In keeping with multimodal research practice (see Bartlett, 2021; Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón, 2019; Westmoreland, 2022), images from this project are woven into the text alongside press images from the museum and a photograph from collaborator and filmmaker Camilla Andersen.

## FROM THE FIELD TO NORDISKA MUSEET

My doctoral research examined lived experiences of landscape and climate change in Arjeplog, in the subarctic rural North of Sweden. As is often the case in anthropological studies, my research shifted course as I spent time with residents and my assumptions were challenged. Interlocutors were often wary of the topic of climate change, so rather than a study on landscape change I focused instead on the issues connected to the *rejection* of national climate discourses. These issues included historical resource extraction by the state, devastating impacts of hydropower projects built in the drive towards modernity, and the lack of resources for rural communities, all framed as ways in which the South meddled with

**Figure 1.** My footprint at the intersection of two cracks in lake ice, during filming in collaboration with Nordiska museet. Photo: Flora Mary Bartlett.

the ways of living in the rural North with little understanding of local realities. The discourses of climate change and mitigation were seen as the latest in such out-of-touch interventions from Stockholm (Bartlett, 2020). Furthermore, perceptions of global environmental issues must be understood in the context of local practice, in this case dependence on fossil fuels, local stewardship of nature on the immediate and visible scale (Bartlett, 2023a, 2023b), and an understanding of global climate change influenced in part by local understandings of nature and in part by exposure to misinformation. Anthropologists, I argued, must apply the same approach in understanding different perspectives of climate change as they do elsewhere, in order to understand how climate change affects our collective future as both physical change and cultural discourse (see also Callison, 2014).

**Figure 2.** Nordiska museet, Stockholm. Photo: Mats Landin

In the midst of this fieldwork, while still untangling these threads, I heard about the ongoing collaboration behind *Arktis*. The exhibition was being scientifically led by Lotten Gustafsson Reinius, an ethnologist with dual affiliation at Stockholm University and the museum, and would explore life in the Arctic in light of climate change. I wrote to express my interest in contributing not only as a researcher but as an intern supported by my doctoral grant, and in August 2018 I finished fieldwork and went straight to work at the museum for six months.

## SUCCESSES IN THE EXHIBITION PROCESS

The overwhelming impression from this process was the robust collaborative foundation on which the exhibition was built. Prior to the physical construction of the exhibits, Lotten Gustafsson Reinius organized various multidisciplinary arenas including lectures, inventories, workshops, and a seminar series. Artists, scholars, curators, and cultural institutions participated, and there was a specific reference group providing ongoing critical reflection until the exhibition opened in October 2019. Gustafsson Reinius (2020a, 2020b) describes this as the "tentacular museum", inspired by the work of Donna Haraway, in which material and methods are gathered from a dynamic range of sources including local collaboration, research, art, exhibition work, and documentary film.

The museum produced a series of short films to be exhibited in *Arktis*. These were primarily produced by Exhibition Coordinator Jon Johansson in collaboration with Norwegian filmmaker Camilla Andersen to provide windows into different aspects of contemporary Arctic life. Two films were externally produced. Many involved active collaborations with researchers, who were sometimes the subjects of the films or who provided introductions with the local communities in focus. My main contributions to the exhibition were to assist in producing a film about mine closure in Nautanen together with KTH researcher Camilla Winqvist and to produce a short film about my research in Arjeplog, which I discuss more below. Other films depicted tourism in Iceland, hunting in Qaanaaq (Greenland), industry in Svalbard, life in Clyde River (Canada) and Jamal (Russia), reindeer herding and climate change in Laevas (Sweden/Swedish Sápmi), glacial archaeology in Abisko (Sweden/Swedish Sápmi), and ice fishing in Näätämö (Finnish Sápmi).

These films brought local communities and ongoing research into the physical exhibition space. They provided vibrant contemporary perspectives from different Arctic regions, visualising one of the main points of the project: the Arctic is not a homogenous empty space of ice and snow. It is a multifaceted region with many different cultures, languages, industries, and complex histories. This defies historic polar expedition narratives, in which European and American men attempted to "discover" and conquer the Arctic with rhetoric "characterized by nationalist and masculine-coded heroism" (Gustafsson Reinius, 2020b: 11). Instead, focus is given both to the lives and histories of the four million people who have long made their home in this region and to situated research in different Arctic regions.[1]

Working as an intern as well as contributing researcher meant that I had behind-the-scenes access into the design processes and logistical issues of exhibition production, which opened my eyes to the many actors involved in this colossal task. I witnessed the producers ordering fabric to cloak a giant iceberg. I listened to discussions of how best to visualize the position of the Arctic, what objects best told the multitude of stories making up this region, and how to preserve a whalebone hat. It was captivating to observe the various movements of material culture and the processes of knowledge translation into a physical and pedagogical space: by carpenters, project managers, exhibition producers and designers, curators, conservators, cleaners, archivists, librarians, press and communication experts, security and IT staff. All these skills came together in the realms behind the exhibition façade.

1 These perspectives can be accessed (in Swedish) in the hybrid exhibition catalogue Arktiska Spår containing 40 short texts by contributing researchers, artists and curators. Five full length peer-reviewed academic articles from the catalogue are also published in English in the Journal of Northern Studies 14, no. 2 (2020).

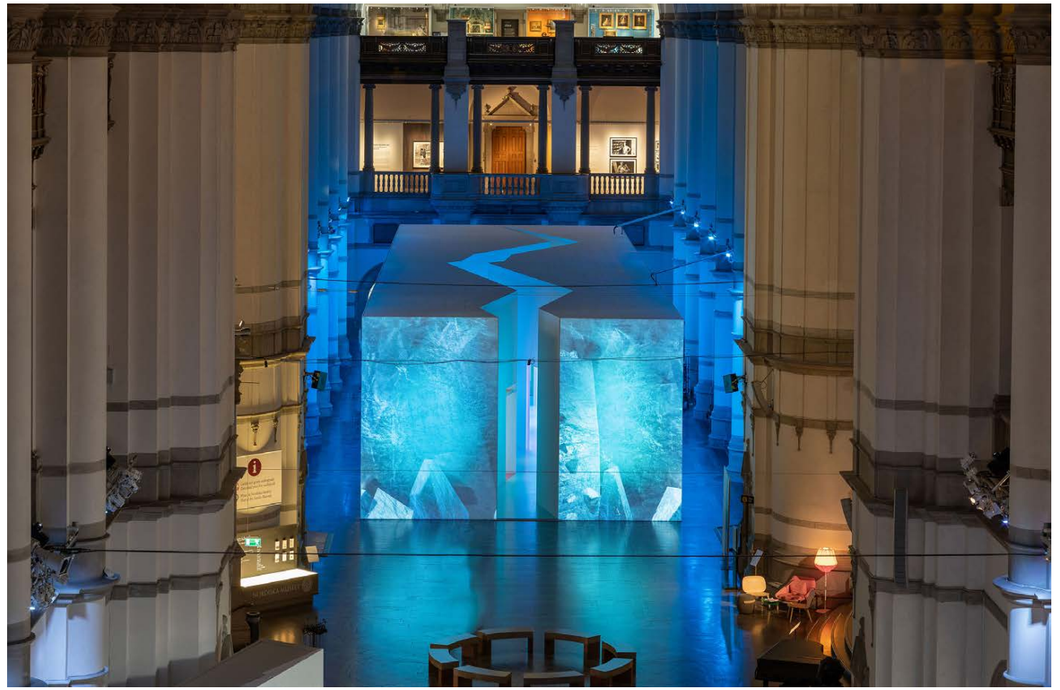

**Figure 4.** Visitors enter the exhibition through the iceberg, brought to life with ice projections and glittering walls. The first room of the exhibition introduces the visitor to the Arctic and the power in different historical ways of mapping. Visitors follow the crevasse to the "panic room", where a soundscape of rapid heartbeats accompanies facts about climate change. The exhibition and iceberg were designed in collaboration with MUSEEA Image: Hendrik Zeitler

**Figure 3.** View of the Great Hall with the exhibition entrance in sight. Projections on the ceiling were partly taken from the film projects. Arktis was produced by Matti Shevchenko Sandin and led by Elna Nord. Image: Hendrik Zeitler


**Figure 5.** The end of the crevasse from the inside. Here the visitors can explore the ice as an archive on the right and transport on the left. Just visible is the Arjeplog film in the far-left corner. The rest of the exhibition presents aspects of life in the Arctic, including transport, hunting, clothing, homemaking, research, and resource extraction. Image: Hendrik Zeitler

## DILEMMAS

An exhibition is a process in which certain layers of nuance must be cut if the narrative is to be coherent, and there are practical restrictions and deadlines to deliver content to the production timeline. In this next part, I discuss the dilemmas that emerged in translating and visualizing my research into a five-minute film, navigating the thin ice of capturing what I understood of Arjeplog without subjecting any interlocutors to unfair judgment.

The exhibition team was keen to include a film about Arjeplog and were intrigued by a major local industry often linked to the town's economic survival. Car testing emerged in the 1960s when a couple of engineers and small plane enthusiasts realized they could create a landing strip on the vast frozen lakes surrounding the town. A few companies then began preparing vast networks of tracks, and today new car models are sent to Arjeplog to be tested on the ice while a luxury French company offers guests the chance to try "ice driving" in Porsches and Lamborghinis.

What struck me during fieldwork was the lack of concern for climate change, despite the industry being dependent on lake ice that had, thus far, been reliably thick during winter months. Few interlocutors were concerned by reports of global warming, and fewer were willing to attribute changes to human behaviour. In an intriguing twist of fate, our plans to film in November were scuppered when I was called by my industry contact and told there was no ice yet and we would have to reschedule to January, when ice on the lakes was guaranteed.

Including climate change explicitly in the film was challenging in several ways. Interlocutors did not want to talk about climate change when I was there as a researcher, why would they do it on camera? Furthermore, integrating material in which they questioned climate science was ethically challenging. The basis of *Arktis* was that anthropogenic climate change is scientifically proven, breaking with recent widespread practice to give both sides of the supposed "debate" equal airtime. As Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway (2012) have demonstrated, this practice has led to bias in which both sides are presented as an even split, despite this not being the case. Centering the scientific consensus as fact was thus powerful framing.

An unexpected side effect, however, was the challenge of integrating perspectives that had been exposed to such equal framing of a scientific "debate" in the media. Many interlocutors in Arjeplog were used to the idea that scientists were not in agreement, having consumed social media that exploited this uncertainty on behalf of fossil fuel companies and politicians. Featuring local perspectives that repeated these claims, within an exhibition so clearly presenting climate science as fact, presented a troubling dilemma for me as an anthropologist and as a friend to many of those with whom I worked. I did not want to silence their opinions, nor did I want to expose them to judgment by placing them in this setting.

Furthermore, I was still trying to understand this research that had to neatly fit into a five-minute format ready for audience engagement outside of the academy. This forced me into a complex negotiation between ongoing analysis, nuance, design, and storytelling. I could not include all the key analyses emerging from my data, which eventually took a 289-page thesis to explore. Instead of deciding in advance what story to tell, I eventually decided to let the filmmaking process and discussions with museum colleagues guide which themes to take up in the final edit.

During filming in Arjeplog, Camilla Andersen and I interviewed Åse who worked at one of the major local companies. I realized there were interesting threads to pull from the interview that spoke to the broader themes of my fieldwork: the knowledge necessary for working on the dynamic and sometimes capricious lake ice, the care she feels for the local landscape, how the company tries to minimize local pollution, working in a male-dominated space, and how cars tested on the tracks must meet rapidly changing environmental standards. Regarding the navigation of thin ice more literally, Åse was concerned about being filmed talking about the risks of vehicles falling through ice and being hauled out again. As she and I had already talked about that aspect for my research, I saved it for the written catalogue and thesis where more context could be given.

The film is intended to spark reflection, connected to the themes that emerged during fieldwork, rather than providing a complete or pre-determined narrative. What is the future of this industry based on ice, in the

context of the rest of the exhibition framing it as melting? How might local care for the environment – hunting, berry picking, outdoor life – be negotiated with the global, as smoke pumps visibly from the trucks preparing the ice? How is a community surviving in a world dominated by a capitalist economy and an international transport market, whilst also facing global anthropogenic climate change? The film nods to these dilemmas and contradictions within a vibrant rural setting, raising questions that have no clear answers - neither in the film nor in Arjeplog.

**Figure 6.** Arjeplog's main street during the dark winter testing season. Image: Flora Mary Bartlett

**Figure 7.** Åse, Camilla and I discussed Arjeplog together prior to filming. Here, Åse shows Camilla a moose she recently saw in the forest. Åse's interest in nature and in hunting was important to bring into the film as it pointed to wider local discussions of sustainability and living off the land. Image: Flora Mary Bartlett

**Figure 8.** Filmmaker Camilla Andersen on the frozen lake, while filming Åse. Image: Flora Mary Bartlett

**Figure 9.** A still from the film by Camilla Andersen showing Åse in her truck, which is used to spread water thinly on the ice to make it more slippery for brake-testing. Camilla's cinematic choices were also a key part in weaving together the themes from fieldwork with the interview material, which we edited together collaboratively.

**Figure 9.** Åse driving away, spreading water onto the surface of the lake. Image: Flora Mary Bartlett

## CONCLUSION – A REWARDING CHALLENGE

This experience was highly rewarding both in terms of the collaborative process and the challenges it presented. *Arktis* is a clear example of an institution taking research and collaboration seriously, in which many disciplines from the natural and social sciences were brought together to tackle a complex issue not just in the initial planning but in continuous dialogue and collaboration, keeping the communication lines open and fostering a multidisciplinary network. This reflects the commitment to the process by both Lotten Gustafsson Reinius and the Nordiska museet leadership.

I had the unusual opportunity of being both a contributing researcher and an intern and am therefore doubly grateful for this experience. It was memorable and rewarding to witness the dance between different areas of expertise involved in the process, including among museum staff, researchers, and Arctic communities. Despite the dilemmas in integrating my research, this process helped me understand my material and conclusions. Like writing, multimodal research including filmmaking and photography is a highly valuable tool for processing ethnographic knowledge. It also expanded my understanding of anthropological responsibility and care, forcing me to think deeply about ethics of representation towards what Ines Faria calls "more trustful and collaborative relations that, all things considered, are the foundations of ethnography" (Faria, 2021: 25). Furthermore, it was invaluable experience in how to work with dissemination beyond the academy to broader publics.

I heartily encourage others to collaborate with cultural institutions, particularly in exhibitions, as it offers truly multimodal environments in which to navigate different approaches to communication and visualization while remaining guided by research ethics. I also implore cultural institutions to thoroughly integrate multidisciplinary research perspectives into exhibition processes, as it leads to nuanced narratives and fosters relations between the academy and the institution. I very much look forward to further navigation in this "tentacular museum" space (Gustafsson Reinius, 2020b) and hope to try my hand at curating within it in the future.

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# *Public Research Communication as a PhD Student: Experiences from a Social Robot Exhibition*

**MARIA ARNELID & DOMINIKA LISY**

Public outreach is supposed to be an integral part of academic work. Generally, it is highly encouraged but the practicalities and possibilities for researchers to do so remain obscure. From the perspective of a PhD student, the meaning and purpose of public outreach during the limited project time can feel even more elusive. It is not always clear what kind of public outreach is feasible within the departmental structure and formalities of PhD requirements, or what exactly counts as public outreach. Further, outreach work is rarely compensated in the same ways as courses or teaching is, so it can be difficult to comprehend what the benefits are for furthering one's education or career. In this text we want to share our personal experience as PhD students engaging in public outreach through collaborating with cultural institutions, museums specifically.

The project that we will discuss is a temporary exhibition about social robots that we showcased at the Museum of Work in Norrköping, Sweden. We will reflect on how the exhibition came to be, how we went about putting it together, what difficulties we came across and most importantly what we took away from this project - all against the backdrop of our positions as PhD students. The purpose is both to share some practical knowledge that we gained from the experience with others wanting or planning to engage in similar projects, and to reflect on the challenges and benefits of engaging in creative public research communication with cultural institutions as PhD students.

**Main take-away:** Being involved in public research communication during the PhD is a great learning opportunity for the thesis and development of one's researcher identity as well as communication skills, but there is often a lack of support structures to do this and it requires commitment and openness.

## THE BACKSTORY AND THE EXHIBITION

In December 2021, our research group[1] visited the Museum of Work in Norrköping to get a guided tour of their contemporary exhibition called ”Digitopia”[2] which explores the effects of digitalization on work life. This topic is related to the research we are doing on the ethics and social consequences of care robots. Towards the end of the tour, the guide showed us a smaller exhibition room, where they regularly invite institutions, individuals, and groups to put together temporary exhibitions that fit the overarching theme of the Digitopia exhibition. They suggested the venue to us as a forum from which to communicate our research ideas, processes, or results.

Around the same time, heard of the Utilisation Verification (VFN) Programme at Linköping University which offers grants for communicating and sharing research. We wrote an application describing an exhibition which framed our research on “imaginaries of the social robot”. Our application was approved in January 2022, which marked the beginning of the practical work preparing the exhibition. The resulting exhibition was showcased for fourth months, from August to November 2022, as displayed in the following pictures and description of the exhibition space.


1
The ethics and social consequences of AI and caring robots. Learning trust, empathy and accountability. Available at: https://liu.se/en/research/caring-robots (Accessed on 31.10.2023)

2
Arbetets Museum. Digitopia: https://www.arbetetsmuseum.se/utstallning/digitopia/ (Accessed on 31.10.2023)


ROBOTIC IMAGINARIES
Depictions of robots in novels and films are influencing our ideas about what robots are, how they might look like, what they can do and
In this research we are calling this robotic imaginaries, because the way we imagine them will guide current development and design of robots.
ROBOTFÖRESTÄLLNINGAR
Skildringar av robotar i romaner och filmer påverkar våra idéer om vad robotar är, hur de kan se ut, vad de kan göra och hur vi kommer att leva med dem.
I vår forskning kallar vi detta robotföreställningar, eftersom hur vi föreställer oss dem kommer att styra människors utveckling och design av robotar.
STORY COMPLETION
To understand robotic imaginaries better we are using story completion as a tool, to explore how people imagine robots in stories. Below we created the first sentence of a story. Please help us and asked people to continue telling the story as creatively as they like. Click the button to listen!
THE PROMPT
BERÄTTELSEKOMPLETTERING


DO YOU ALWAYS SHOW YOUR EMOTIONS ON YOUR FACE?
EMOTION
WHEN DO YOU FEEL CARED FOR? AND HOW DO YOU SHOW CARE?
CARE
WARD
IS IT IMPORTANT THAT ROBOTS LOOK LIKE HUMANS?
ANTHROPOMORPHISM
ANTROPOMORFISM

***The Exhibition Space:***

The exhibition room was a trapezoid-shaped room of about 6,63m$^2$ with a glassed front and a glass door to the left, so that it could either be used as a display window for exhibition pieces or with an open door which visitors could enter to get a closer look. Next to the door was a screen that provided the title of the exhibition, a summary, and our names. We exhibited three social robots: the Joy for All Companion Pet Cat, the Cozmo robot, and the NAO robot, which were all placed in plexiglass containers and mounted on wooden pedestals. The robots were placed up against the window, easily visible for passers-by. Upon entering the room, there was more information about the robots on the backside of the pedestals. Screens higher up on the walls showed the robots in action in commercial videos as well as videos from our own and colleagues' research material. Underneath were posters that briefly explained the concepts *care, emotions, anthropomorphism,* and *touch* in relation to robots. In the back corner of the room we installed a listening station (one in Swedish and one in English) where visitors could listen to fictional stories about robots, as part of our study on the *robotic imaginary*.

## THE PROCESS: CHRONOLOGY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The realisation of our exhibition project progressed in steps such as developing a shared aim and overall content, creating each exhibition piece, finding resources and materials, managing budgets and lots of communication for bringing it all together. Additionally, when the exhibition was over, we were faced with important considerations regarding maintenance of and future plans for the exhibition material. Each step had its particular challenges and teachings that we will detail chronologically below: starting at the *planning stage*, moving to the *design and building stage*, and finishing at the *presentation and afterlife of the exhibition stage*. We included tips that resulted from these experiences and might help other PhDs to think, plan, and execute their own public outreach work.

## 1 | PLANNING STAGE

### *1.1 Boundary objects: deciding on a shared vision and aim*

While we are part of the same research project on the ethics and social consequences of care and companion robots, our individual PhD projects have different foci. Lisy explores a theoretical framework for the boundary between human and non-human robot through concepts of the skin, affect, and relationality. Arnelid's research focuses on what kind of care is imagined in the development of robots for care for older adults in Sweden and makes use of ethnographic methods to do so.

Hence, after receiving the invite for the exhibition opportunity and planning to write a grant application, we first sat down and brainstormed ideas about what would suit the exhibition space as well as integrate both of our research perspectives. It became evident that finding a common ground — or what can be called *boundary objects* — was the first step. Boundary objects serve as a common reference point and help to orient different (often interdisciplinary) perspectives in order to reach one goal together.

For our exhibition, we identified the "sociality" of robots as well as "imaginaries" about robots as key concepts that were relevant in both of our research and that we found most important to bring into public discourse with regards to the overall digitalisation theme of the museum's exhibition.

**In short:** It is helpful to agree early on (if possible in writing) about one or two key concepts that overlap different interests. Hold on to these specific concepts that you can agree on and find interesting.

As an explanation, *social robots* are a particular subset of robotics that are developed with the intention to be used in social contexts and with social skills that revolve around emotion reading and expressing, acts of care, multi-sensorial interaction and design of robots. The concept of *robotic imaginaries* describes the wide variety of cultural and historical resources that shape how robots are imagined, be it through literature, film, media, politics, etc. It not only concerns imagination but also the material consequences of imaginaries: how ideas of what robots should or can be shape robots in certain ways. Identifying these as our boundary objects in the very first meeting and agreeing on them in writing was important for when we got lost with ideas or had to navigate restrictions later in the process.

### 1.2 COMMUNICATION AND TASK DIVISION

Communication frequency and the division of tasks was not necessarily something we discussed in advance but looking back at our collaboration and communication style, it might be worth considering in the planning stage. Since we were new to public outreach work, we wanted to keep the museum in the loop with our ideas and always check what was possible given the space. This was helpful in focusing our creative ideas on what was possible.

It was also crucial to communicate regularly between us so that we could rely on each other for the tasks that we planned to do. Some tasks easily divided themselves up with regards to different skill sets and access, such as creative design work, overview of budgeting, or emailing. There were also tasks that we deliberately decided to do together such as writing the summaries for the posters with the different concepts, as well as deciding how to spend the grant money. Finding these moments where we worked together at the same time and when we could work individually, also allowed us to refocus on the boundary objects and help each other to not get lost in details but enjoy the collaborative part of doing this exhibition together.

**In short:** Figure out what kind of personalities and skill sets are in the room, because this can determine how much communication and task division has to be managed and decided on together.



## 2 | DESIGN AND BUILDING STAGE

### *2.1 "Translation" work: When academic knowledge moves into public spaces*

This section concerns the work of translating the ideas that we had established through writing the application to concrete, physical elements that could be exhibited to a general public. In attempting to do so, we again and again ran up against the difficulties of translating a vague and quite academic aim - *to explore imaginaries of the social robot* - into accessible pieces of text and images for a broader audience to grasp and think about.

To us it was clear (albeit complicated) that care, touch, emotions, and anthropomorphism related to the issue of social robots. These were concepts derived from our research which we had spent many hours thinking, reading and writing about. Our plan was to include posters with short bits of text explaining their relevance in terms of use and development of social robots. It surprised us exactly how difficult it was to, in around 100 words, explain in "accessible" language why these concepts mattered. For example, how to convey in three or four sentences how care robots relate to bigger issues and changes in how healthcare and elder care is structured? How to capture the effect of the design of robots on the philosophical understanding of what it means to be human in a paragraph, or the multiplicity of theories and perspectives that can be taken to view emotions? After discussing different phrasings, we realised that, in order to create something that people would have time to digest in a short museum visit, we had to accept a certain level of simplification of these nuanced issues that we come across in our research.

**In short:** Remember your audience and the pedagogical value of a simple message.

While the work of translating complex ideas into short and concise pieces of text was frustrating, it was also a rewarding learning experience in hindsight. Especially when it comes to understanding the value of our research for society. The practice of creating small bits of text and images to make visitors think about social robots in society required the same kind of translation work that teaching requires. It was an issue of deciding on a few clear points that we wanted to communicate and finding the clearest and most intriguing way of conveying those. Thinking through such pedagogical translations and formulations in another context and for another purpose

**In short:** Dedicate time to the "academic-public" translation work because it can be a big learning opportunity for your own research projects.

is helpful. However, similarly to creating a good lecture or presentation, it takes a lot of time. In the case of the exhibition, much more time than we had expected. This is important to realise from the beginning and make room for.

### *2.2 Organisational hurdles*

This section concerns our experiences of the organizational and administrational elements of putting together an exhibition that are (at least partly) specific to the different institutional logics of Swedish universities and cultural institutions. These are issues that we had *no clue* about from the beginning, partially because we were new to collaborations with non-academic institutions with different work practices, and partially because there were no formal support structures in place at the university to help guide us through the process. In contrast to the translation work with the posters, this was not a work of reflection and discussion, but of ignorance, followed by a sudden realisation, followed by intense emailing or chasing after our boss in the hallway with questions. We present here a list of practical things that we had to learn about budgeting, insurance, and copyright (which might be obvious to those more experienced and involved with Swedish university organisation and administration, but perhaps not to fellow PhDs and other junior scholars)

- ***Budgeting***. Quite a large portion of the grant went back to the university for administrational costs (overhead), leaving us with 15 000 SEK less than we had thought. We were not aware of this and it impacted the possibilities we had for buying exhibition material. In our project it was circling around the question of whether to buy or borrow robots, that either could be useful in other contexts after the exhibition, or low in cost and in collaboration with labs who own robots. In the end, we chose to borrow two out of three robots from colleagues at Linköping University.
- ***Insurance***. When we chose not to buy but rather to borrow robots for the exhibition, the question of insurance came up. We had no trouble finding colleagues willing to lend us the robots, but rather ran into trouble quite near the exhibition opening, when the museum started asking questions about insurance. In our case, the museum did not cover insurance for the items that we exhibited. As it turned out, neither did the university. We did not manage to solve this but instead spent a portion of the grant money to allow for the museum technicians to build secure plexi boxes for the robots.
- ***Copyright***. In some cases, we felt that the concepts were better illustrated with pictures. This was the case with one of the posters – on the theme of emotions – which referred to a well-known theory of basic emotions. We realised that we could not use the well-known original depictions of emotions used in this theory due to copyright issues. Our solution here was to recreate the emotions shown in the images using our own faces. In another case, for the poster on anthropomorphism, we emailed the authors of a journal publication that had a useful graphic for this theme, and we received consent and permission to print it on our poster. Copyright issues are, in other words, important to think about when using photographs, graphs, videos, etc. in exhibitions or other forms of outreach.

**In short:** Expect that you might ask very simple questions and use the resources around you and ask others for help early on.

These are only a selected few examples of the hurdles that we encountered in the process of creating our exhibition. Due to structural differences between different types of organisations, these are predictable issues to happen and, therefore, cannot be fully prevented. Asking knowledgeable colleagues and our museum contacts for insight and tips always helped in these unexpected, stressful situations.

An important part of the learning process was to mould and adapt our initial ideas to these organisational hurdles. In designing our exhibition and building piece by piece, we often found that easier solutions were those closer to home (such as when borrowing robots from a robotics lab at our own university has not crossed our minds in the beginning). We think therefore it might be helpful for someone considering a similar project, to identify local resources and not shy away from asking questions.

### *2.3 Putting it all together*

Once the exhibition pieces were finalised, we brought them to the museum and the technicians (who had also built some pieces for us) put it all

**In short:** Allow enough time and planning for the installation so that last-minute changes are possible.

together based on our plans and instructions. It took two days and some final fixes (such as purchasing hangers for our posters and additional material for setting up the screens). The museum purposefully asked us to bring everything a week in advance so that there was enough time to solve problems if they appeared.

## 3 | PRESENTATION AND AFTERLIFE STAGE

### *3.1 Getting feedback: Making the most of the project*

Since the exhibition was limited to three months, we were from the beginning thinking ahead in terms of how to *use* it afterwards. Early on, we had ambitious plans of organising an opening event, inviting different speakers to reflect on the role of social robots in society. However, given that the exhibition had already taken up a lot of time, we decided that this was not a possibility. Instead, we made use of the exhibition in smaller, more impromptu, ways.

For example, we brought a group of Bachelor's students to the exhibition, inviting them to think about technology and values in relation to robots. Together, we also presented the exhibition to our PhD colleagues in our graduate school The Wallenberg AI, Autonomous Systems and Software Program – Humanity and Society (WASP-HS). The exhibition was also highlighted in a post on the WASP-HS web page and our own departmental communication newsletter. These were helpful ways to make use of our work with the exhibition to have conversations about imaginaries about social robots, and what role they might, should or should not have in our society. It was really rewarding to get positive feedback from our colleagues and students, and it served as a mutual benefit for us to use this space in the museum as well as for the museum to reach people through our networks.

**In short:** Use the outreach project as a platform to get into conversation because it allows you to receive rewarding and important feedback for your work.

### *3.2 Afterlife of the material*

Another aspect that we considered was the longevity of the material after the exhibition had closed. The borrowed robots and screens were returned and what remained were the posters that now decorate our offices. This limits, of course, the repurposing of the exhibition. In the planning stage, we had ambitions to take the exhibition "on tour" to other venues, after the temporary exhibition at the Museum of Work was finished. However, in the end, this proved to be difficult. Partly since continuing the exhibition elsewhere would, again, require a lot of work and energy which would conflict with thesis work. Continuing the exhibition was also difficult due to the choice to borrow instead of buying important parts of the exhibition. The choice to borrow exhibition items was made partly since our funding was limited, but also with ideas of sustainability: why *buy* robots, or screens, which we would have limited use of later on, and which might end up only collecting dust in our offices? We do not have a clear idea for a solution here - how to make creative outreach projects live longer - but would recommend colleagues to have discussions about this issue when making plans.

**In short:** Sustainability in terms of the material and the experiences should be integral to any project but also keep ambitions reasonable.

## CONCLUSIONS: A PHD STUDENT LENS

Having described the experience of putting together the exhibition, and what we learned from it, we want to conclude with a PhD perspective on public outreach in cultural institutions. To summarise, the work of translating complex ideas into short, accessible, and intriguing texts doubled as a pedagogical training exercise. Working together along the way – envisioning the exhibition, creating the exhibition, and presenting it – taught us a lot about how to navigate collaborations. In general, the project forced us to think about our research in new and creative ways. Perhaps especially in interdisciplinary PhD educations with PhD projects closely connected to pressing societal issues, it seems like an experience that could be helpful for many PhD students.

However, there are some structural hurdles which complicate the engagement with this kind of public outreach – especially as PhDs with little previous knowledge about university organisation. We had to spend a lot of time emailing different people to find answers to organisational or administrative questions, answers which appeared surprisingly hard to find. It would have been helpful if there would have existed a document or space where this kind of knowledge was gathered. Hopefully, this contribution to the catalogue can contribute to this.

Another issue from a PhD student perspective is that there was no structure in place at our university to formally acknowledge the work hours

spent on this kind of public outreach. This experience was shaped by the context of doing a salaried PhD in Sweden, at Linköping University, and collaborating with cultural institutions in Sweden. In Swedish academia, we would therefore welcome discussions on the future role of public outreach in PhD educations, having to do with the possibility of creating clear incentives for engaging in outreach, support structures at departments, the inclusion of outreach work in PhD courses or as a form of assistance work, for example. Generally, it would help if the encouragement to take part in public outreach came with a similar level of structural support and acknowledgement.

In conclusion, we cannot overstate how much we have learned about and for our own research from this exhibition project. It has put our research efforts into perspective and taught us to be concrete about the societal importance of our work. We therefore encourage PhD students to dare engaging in this important work, and hope that this chapter provided some insights as a baseline from where to start.

# *The Human Observatory for Digital Existence*

**AMANDA LAGERKVIST, MATILDA TUDOR, JENNY ERIKSSON LUNDSTRÖM, MARIA ROGG & JACEK SMOLICKI**

This text by the team of the Uppsala Informatics and Media Hub for Digital Existence (the Hub), at Uppsala University, recounts the birth and developments of a particular form of outreach activity and collaborative research, the Human Observatory for Digital Existence, through cooperation between the Hub and a cultural institution: The Sigtuna Foundation. It is structured in three parts. In *Part I. Beginnings: a chronicle by Amanda Lagerkvist*, she tells the story of how she founded this initiative, its rationale, main upshots, a few challenges and the creation of new academic values. *Part II. Experiences and voices from the Human Observatory* is compiled by Matilda Tudor, Jenny Eriksson Lundström and Maria Rogg. Here members of the research environment and Human Observatory report about rewards and experiences of the activities of the past years. A final part, *Part III: Conclusions for the future* is jointly written by Amanda Lagerkvist and Jacek Smolicki, and points toward innovative directions in which the Human Observatory may be taken in its next phase.

## PART I. BEGINNINGS: A CHRONICLE BY AMANDA LAGERKVIST

We live at a point in time when advanced technologies co-forge our very idea about *what it means to be human*. To tackle the existential implications of all-pervasive media, we must move beyond the default frameworks of analysis. Similarly, we have to challenge the boundaries of our academic institutions, both between disciplines and towards society at large. This was

**Figure 1.** The Sigtuna Foundation. Photo: Magnus Aronson

clear to me when I, in 2013, was appointed Wallenberg Academy Fellow, entrusted to head the project "Existential Terrains: Memory and Meaning in Cultures of Connectivity" at Stockholm University (2014-2018). With a unique aim to examine what happens to the most profound existential experiences in an era of digitalization, and a particular but not exclusive focus on death online, commemoration and bereavement, the project could not succeed in scholastic isolation. Through personal experiences of loss, I had been thrown into what the existential philosopher Karl Jaspers calls a "limit situation," which called on me to search for an existential language outside of disciplinary and academic borders. As life and scholarship merged, my mission was thus to refigure media technologies with the help of existential philosophy in order to "existentialize" media studies. This work – and our international research as well as public outreach activities – resulted in a young conversation that we now call *existential media studies*.

### *A novel existential conversation about technology at an old cultural institution*

Early on, relevant representatives from society as a whole were to be invited into the conversation about an ethical and existentially sustainable future with advanced technologies. That way, the project would allow for early and continuous learning by sharing work in progress with people who experienced existential repercussions of the digitalization of their professional practices, such as support organizations turning from telephone support lines to also include digital lifelines; pastoral care via email and its communicative challenges; or support groups for the bereaved that moved online.

Further, I wanted to enable a network that could last over time, where trust could be built and conversations could be ongoing. The main partner in civil society for existential media studies is and has been from the onset the Sigtuna Foundation: a cultural institution that has for over a hundred years represented and promoted unexpected meetings, boundary crossings and dialogues between culture, art, religion, science, and the humanities (https://sigtunastiftelsen.se). Initial exchanges took place already in the spring of 2014.[1] Here, I was given the privilege to build the platform for collaborative research and interventions, with a reference group spanning NGOs, authorities, cultural institutions, health organizations, public intellectuals, and industry. The Sigtuna Foundation, a pecaceful citadel outside of the city, with winding staircases crisscrossing the monastery-like building, has been the home of my outreach work, the organizing of international conferences, numerous network and project meetings, public activities and a book launch.

Initially, and due to the project objectives, stakeholders with a particular interest in the field of bereavement in the digital era were invited: The Swedish Funerary Directors Association, the Red Cross, the Swedish Media Council, MIND (An independent NGO working for promoting psychic health), Nationellt Centrum för Suicidforskning och Prevention, NASP (the National Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention) at Karolinska institutet, the Church of Sweden, SAMS (Collaboration for people in bereavement), and Randiga Huset (The Association for Children in Bereavement). The reference group was to meet annually at the Sigtuna Foundation throughout the Existential Terrains project from 2016-2018, under themes such as *Cyber security in times of exposure*; *(Digital) grief and security and new privacy protection in the EU;* and *Existential health and suffering in the digital age.*[2]

Methods of engagement have over the years included a range of formats: lectures and roundtable discussions in public, an exhibition, a filming session with the Public Service broadcaster, showcasing a documentary film, workshops, meditation and dialogues and discussions in smaller groups in relation to visual materials or other prompts. These interactional modes were also naturally chosen depending on the existing resources, the funding body's framing and the project aim. Overall, the meeting format often included invited speakers from within or beyond the reference group, who would introduce the thematic focus that members then could react to from their respective fields of experience and expertise. In hindsight, zooming in on a common topic via lectures, has served as an excellent mode of engagement, when working with a reference group with disparate organizational logics and a plurality of experiences.

What made these meetings deeply meaningful was also what united the members, despite the different environments they represented, in their thirst for articulating lived, professional and existential experiences in an

1
I must acknowledge the role of Professor Mia Lövheim for connecting Existential Terrains to the Foundation very early on. In the spring of 2014, meetings took place with the Executive Director Alf Linderman and Communications' Manager Sofia af Geijerstam who strongly supported us, as the project was in affinity with one of their profiles within the research division at the Foundation: "media, culture and religion."

2
See: https://urplay.se/program/205980-ur-samtiden-att-vara-manniska-i-en-digital-varld-digitaliseringens-inverkan-pa-var-halsa

**Figure 2.** The Tower Room. Photo: Magnus Aronson

era of technological transformation. For me, this required having a strong vision that could encompass difference as well as tentative trials to formulate a common ground: *the existential terrain*. As one member said to me: "You are both captain and helmsman," and indeed the project was initiated by me, but then guided and fueled by the clout of my vision itself, and by the commitment of all aboard.

One challenging aspect of inviting experts from different fields outside of media studies to share their apprehensions about the digital landscape, is of course to be able to harbor tensions and allow for discrepancies in basic understandings of media and communication models. Patience and generosity are required for achieving a good conversation, despite different vantage points between the research team and the invited members or guests. Furthermore, a challenge but also a great opportunity in a culture of digital buzz, individualism and micro-celebrification, is to create a solemn and collective space in which all voices and experiences are equal, and where we are there as human beings with a shared cause. In a few situations, members may have misunderstood the aims, and felt there is an opportunity for them to pursue their own more specialized and breakneck agenda, in the name of the group. In these situations, clear leadership and candid communication about what the group is about and what it cannot be, is of the essence. These have however been rare exceptions. One lesson though is that to keep the group on track, it is important to formulate a shared vision or declaration of intent early on. Both the conditions for the collaborative research itself and the terms for our external communication about our objectives, must be repeatedly communicated.

Thanks to new funding,[3] our cooperation with society in continued collaboration with The Sigtuna Foundation takes place since 2022 within The Human Observatory for Digital Existence,[4] inaugurated as a regenerated form of the reference group and a platform for collaborative research. It continues to invite society into the conversation about an ethical and existentially sustainable future with technologies, now with an enhanced focus on automation. Our declaration of intent is: to monitor what happens to human value and the human condition in an era of dramatic technological change. While the word "observatory" invokes something standing sentinel, overviewing and watching – thus stressing the sense of sight – the intentions are more diverse. The term was first of all inspired by "citizen observatories" within environmental movements of our time, but the idea, it turned out, also resonated with the legacies of the Foundation itself. For us the term underlines the fact that we are observers, that is observant of and thus followers of "human values." In addition, the Human Observatory invokes at once a sense of being attentive to and tending to our inner worlds – our inmost human compass – as key for cultivating a healthy society with technology. As will be discussed further on in detail, an open, personal and trustful dialogue has continued to lead the way for our meetings. However, with an intention to not only invite society into the research process through collaborative research, but also to bring our collaborative conversations back to society, we have enhanced the cooperation with further cultural institutions and initiated more outward activities in combination with our intimate meetings at the Sigtuna Foundation. In this respect, the vision has been to create encounters across divides of traditional scientific boundaries, and across vastly different fields such as theology, media studies and AI engineering, and to engage a broader Swedish audience with an increasing interest in existential issues in an era of rapid technological development.

### *Slowing down: academic value beyond measuring*

As a researcher I now have almost 10 years of experience working with cultural and other institutions and agencies in society, and looking back I can conclude that this type of work forces us to slow down. The combination of researching ultimate issues (such as death and mourning online or the existential implications of new emergent technologies) and working extensively with society through one particular cultural institution, has not resulted in a quantitatively impressive number of papers within the conference industry. Rather we have been part of the slow movement. Don't think about this as a spring board for speed and acceleration. It's to the contrary part of what I, in *Existential Media: A Media Theory of the Limit Situation* (2022, cf. forthcoming) call a *slow field*. Working both with cultural institutions and on vital, sensitive matters, takes a lot of time and care and fosters and requires a particular ethos of slowness, silence and waiting.

**3**
In 2019 I was granted funding within the WASP-HS program (https://wasp-hs.org/) for the project "BioMe: Existential Challenges and Ethical Imperatives of Biometric AI in Everyday Lifeworlds." It is hosted by The Uppsala Informatics and Media Hub for Digital Existence, in the Department of Informatics and Media at Uppsala University. The purpose of the project is to investigate how people live with automation and to address the existential possibilities and ethical risks of increased digital-human vulnerability, as our embodied existence and everyday lifeworld become ever more entangled with biometrics.

**4**
Humanobservatorium för digital existens: https://sigtunastiftelsen.se/projekt/humanobservatorium-for-digital-existens/.

Entering into a slow field, I will caution, may thus seem to ruin your academic resumé. One might wonder if this is a good idea at all for junior scholars? Maybe not within the current system. But it ultimately depends on whether we want to reproduce the prevailing norms of the neoliberal university, or find ways to dispel them. I argue that many secret treasure troves of insight, together with imperative implications for society and technology, are in fact in the balance. Our universities have for a long time devalued these activities. They don't really count, as it were (although this seems to be changing as the Higher Education Act of 2021 reinforces a stress on the importance of outreach as a key task of the Academy). Yet this is how we build new academic values. To produce new critical thinking enabled in these collaborations, and the knowledge needed in what I call the digital limit situation – that is, an era of increased crises of which technologies are also part, and in which we are facing a grand transition – we also welcome new forms of knowledge production to provide existential direction, purpose and provocation. But these are practices that take time. These meetings of the Human Observatory, and reference group before it, have typically produced a particular language, a form of value and a clear "impact" beyond academic metrics. This also means that collaborative efforts with and through cultural and other institutions can be an antidote to the neoliberal university and its individual-centered obsession with quantification and speed, numbers and data, and its detachment from our deepest and most prized relationality; from each other and from a world that howls to us to care for it. So, in a sense this work is about valuing the immeasurable. It may be perceived as an act of rebellion, an unruly practice of worth beyond measuring. The goal as well as incentive for working with cultural institutions must thus be to raise and reformulate the deeply existential and perhaps provocative question, also for us in academia: *Why are we here?*

In the ensuing overview of what has transpired within the realm of the Human Observatory, we in the BioMe research group reflect on experiences and rewards of collaborative research, but also afford room to voices from stakeholders representing different sectors, organizations and professional environments. Part II is written by Matilda Tudor, Jenny Eriksson Lundström and Maria Rogg, and Part III is a joint conclusion by Amanda Lagerkvist and Jacek Smolicki.

## PART II. EXPERIENCES AND VOICES FROM THE HUMAN OBSERVATORY

*What happens to humans in the new media and communication society? I have lived with that question as a news journalist, as a teacher in media education and as a leadership consultant in the media sector. Now there is a Human Observatory at the Sigtuna Foundation as a forum for conversations about the human in an increasingly digitalized existence. A far-sighted investment that enables dialogue and meetings across professional boundaries about common challenges in media culture. An observatory founded in a humanistic outlook on life with trust in human creative power and ability to take responsibility for our actions. With the Human Observatory, Professor Amanda Lagerkvist and her colleagues have not only created an urgent meeting place and a timely discussion on media issues, but also brought new life to the Sigtuna Foundation's humanistic ethos.*

***Lisbeth Gustafsson,***
***Journalist, Author and Honorary Doctor of Theology***

### *Establishing a format for long-term investment*

Throughout the BioMe project we have met annually with the Human Observatory under different themes directly related to our research interests. This has been a rare privilege. But how do you establish a format for such long-term investment by a group of professionals and intellectuals, all of which are of course torn between different obligations and expectations, such as we all are? For the kind of research that we are doing, focusing on existential questions that often require a particular mode of conversation, this sense of continuity has been what we aspired to. Building on the structure already established by Amanda Lagerkvist in her previous work together with large parts of the reference group, we have opted for a retreat-like structure with overnight stays, returning to

the Sigtuna Foundation over and over again. This has clearly benefited the consolidation of the group identity and built strong personal bonds between members, which might not always be a top priority in collaborative research. However, it has also been clear that this kind of intensive investment really requires a profound interest in the questions that have brought us together in the first place: *What happens to vulnerability and finitude in a time when embodied presence is no longer relevant? Are there indispensable values that we need to cherish, defend and perhaps enhance in face of rapid technological developments? And how do we take responsibility for an existentially sustainable human future with machines?* The common denominator has thus been individuals either working with existentially charged issues such as death, grief, spirituality and depression with a clear interest in the technological changes within their domain, or individuals working with technological developments with a clear interest in the existential challenges brought about by technology in general and automation in particular.

Thinking about the intensified public interest in AI, which literally exploded after the launch of the large language model-based chatbot ChatGPT (GPT-3) in November of 2022, it is clear that AI reinforces the need for conversations about eternal, perennial questions of existence that must involve us all. Furthermore, after our initial Human Observatory meeting in March of 2022, it was requested by members that we should continue with and develop further such broader public conversations across society, beyond the realm of our internal meetings. Over the years we have thus developed a structure, within which the group first turns inwards towards each other with different internal activities, and then outwards towards a broader audience with open activities in cooperation with cultural institutions. Since our research group includes artists and artistic research, extending into exhibitory environments and museums has served a natural starting place for developing further collaborations.

First, the research group instigated a long-term collaboration with The Swedish National Museum of Science and Technology in Stockholm, which at the time of the project's initiation was working on the five-year exhibition *Hyper Human*, exploring issues such as AI, genome editing and body hacking together with questions about aging, death and human values. Being a perfect fit for us, we were invited by the museum's curator Magdalena Tafvelin Heldner, to contribute with an installation in cooperation with industry representatives working with biometric face models. The exhibition and the museum thereafter constituted an exemplary site for the Human Observatory's more public activities and field work. Here, we have arranged open lectures in connection to the exhibition, curated tours involving engineers, but also returned to this living dynamic space for research interviews, workshops and interventions.

Next, Amanda Lagerkvist was invited to contribute to the exhibition catalogue *Evigt Liv* (*Eternal Life*, 2022) with a piece called "Sex evigheter i den digitala ekologin. Om existentiella gränsmedier" ("Six Eternities of the Digital Ecology: About Existential Media of Limits"). The exhibition, curated by Clara Åhlvik from the Nobel Prize Museum and hosted by Liljevalchs Exhibition Hall in Stockholm, thereafter constituted the ground for the Human Observatory's ensuing public activity in relation to our meeting in January 2023. This was right at the start of the ChatGPT-chock wave, and right before debates began to run high about the potential extinction of the human race and other technologically determinist dystopias. The Human Observatory together with the Nobel Prize Museum co-arranged an open lecture at Liljevalchs by Arch Bishop Emerita Antje Jackelén, entitled "Is conversation possible? AI and communication about eternal issues."

It was followed by a panel consisting of Antje Jackelén, Magnus Sahlgren from AI Sweden, and our own Amanda Lagerkvist, about what it means to be human in a world of language models and chatbots. On stage they tackled several questions, from the more pragmatic issue why we should build a Swedish large language model in a world of giant tech corporations with enormous assets, to issues of whether machines can conduct an existential conversation and whether language is the actual code to the human. No final answers were given – as ChatGPT would have seemed to have done instantly. Instead, attendees testified to being pleased to hear a respectful conversation, without too much certainty and without antagonism. The panelists did not completely concur about the prospects or risks of a world of large language models – that is generative AI – but they respected that difference. The main lesson from this special evening was

**Figure 3.** Carin Klaesson (Moderator), Amanda Lagerkvist, Magnus Sahlgren & Antje Jackelén at Liljevalchs 19 January, 2023. Photo: Maria Rogg

the need for reclaiming the irreducible value of face-to-face conversation across divides about matters of great importance for our common future. As interlocutors between the university, civil society, cultural and religious institutions and industry, this is what we can contribute with at this moment: enabling conversations that can still matter. Working with cultural institutions provides one avenue for doing so.

### *Holding space for other ways of knowing*

Long-term relationships are, as we know, a precious rarity in the gig economy. And yet this was established with the involved institutions and organizations. How was that possible? First, aiming to draw members of the Observatory into the very heart of the research process, the team have continuously kept participants updated on our sub-projects and preliminary research findings. Doing so has not only been a way to get feedback from members, but also to somehow give something back in terms of a privileged insight into up-to-date knowledge. This has proven to be appreciated by the represented organizations and individuals. This is also something that has been vocalized among several members as an imperative motivator for staying involved. For example, long-term member Ulf Lernéus, CEO of the Swedish Funerary Directors' Association stresses that the digitalization of their sensitive working procedures must stand in dialogue with the research community. When given the chance to reflect on their participation, members thus highlight how they use what they have acquired for their own everyday professional activities in complex areas such as mental health, funeral and bereavement support and governmental policy work. Johanna Nordin, Chief Strategist for Knowledge Development at MIND (The Association for Psychic Health), stresses this type of value and its immediate role for her in her work:

> *I have appreciated being able to participate in discussions and contexts that leave room for deeply meaningful conversations. We use what I have learned in the form of existential reflections in several parts of our organization's activities, for projects on mental health and in the work and training of the volunteers in our support activities….*

And in the words of Kjell Westerlund, Chair of SAMS (The NGO "Collaboration for People in Bereavement"):

> *For SAMS and its member organizations, it has been of utmost value to have a close connection to research areas pertaining to existential issues. When life is turned upside down in connection with the death of a close relative, the existential questions are brought to a head. In an organization that works to provide support to vulnerable people in these situations, it is extremely important that that work is anchored in both own experiences and state-of-the-art science. Not least when in recent years we have seen an increasingly rapid development of digital support, the contact with research in this field is most significant.*

Second, members obviously see the meetings as a much-needed pause for existential reflection and conversation from and beyond individual and professional boundaries, one that has mostly been lost in working life and public conversation. "In a cultural climate dominated by reductive naturalism, which excludes other world views from the philosophical discourse", says Edward Harris, Minister of the Church of Sweden, "I experience this forum as a dynamic context where different world views can enrich each other, in a spirit of openness, respect and rationality." Another Human Observatory member, Lisbeth Gustafsson, testifies to having lived with these questions about human existence within the new media and communication society her entire life as a news journalist, teacher in media education and as a coach and mentor for leaders in media institutions, but without necessarily having a natural outlet for them. Thus, members have also been the ones to set the tone, by leading different activities during the meetings. This has included Ted Harris' theological contemplation on the existential question: how do I want to live? – providing a theory, history of ideas and approach to living and acting ethically by cultivating intuitive, intentional and contemplative sensibilities beyond cognitive and emotional capacities. Exploring such sensibilities even further, the group has also been led by Lisbeth Gustafsson in a workshop on stillness and dialogue as an existential method, starting with a meditation in the crypt of the Sigtuna Foundation's Refugium. Contemplation was followed by a conversation based on self-reflection, story-telling and intimate dialogue.

Directed by the members' own experiences, yearnings and unique expertise, the Human Observatory meetings have thus assumed forms that might be quite far from our ordinary working methods as researchers and university employees. And not only for us. While such existential working methods might have been common ground for our members representing religious or spiritual institutions, it has presented other members with new insights. For example, long-time member Yvonne Andersson, working as a Senior Analyst and Researcher at the Swedish Media Council, describes the significance of "being able to reflect on questions and dimensions of existence for which we otherwise, whether in our working life or in public conversation, rarely find the place or time." Specifically surveying and compiling the knowledge base for Swedish children's and youth's media lives, the Human Observatory meetings have helped her shed light on other parts of young people's digital existence than the "bad role models" or "harmful content" discourses may cover. The way we see it, this is what this kind of long-term investments can do, when you allow for a common exploration – beyond academic norms of objectivity, detachment, and intellectual debate – to unfold freely. For us as researchers, such working methods raise our awareness to lived and embodied experiences of our fields of interest, in ways that we would never be able to reach only by reading or thinking among ourselves. They have had the ability to cultivate sensibilities, activate new directions, and make possible explorative discussions that entail diverse personal and professional viewpoints on our preliminary work in progress. We have come to think about these as *existential ways of knowing* (cf. Rogg in progress, Lagerkvist 2023).

A more specific existential knowledge can further be nourished from artistic interventions. Working with a reference group within the framework of cultural institutions have provided the possibilities to engage with and interact through aesthetic, material and artistic interfaces. In relation to the *Hyper Human* exhibition, Human Observatory members were divided into smaller groups thematized according to BioMe's three areas of interest: the integrity of the body, the future, and human dignity. The groups were then shown around selected parts of the exhibition that had been chosen for their ability to shed light on the different themes and to evoke questions of particular interest for the team members, provoking engaged discussions. Similarly, at the *Eternal Life* exhibition members were invited to think about both scientific discoveries and existential questions through the associative movement between art, science and cultural history with the aim of providing different perspectives on our lives. Among other things, through a chatbot developed by AI Sweden, we were encouraged to engage in a friendly and philosophical conversation that focused on the exhibition's theme and eternal life at large. Through such active involvement – moving between the abstract and the concrete, the aesthetic and intellectual, the personal and the collective – the Human Observatory has been able to open up for artistic and existential ways of knowing, in areas otherwise largely governed by metric logics.

**Figure 4.** The Human Observatory at Hyper Human, the National Museum of Science and Technology in March 2022. Photo: Jacek Smolicki

## PART III. CONCLUSIONS FOR THE FUTURE

With the past activities of the Human Observatory as a backdrop, we may conclude that it has focused attention on *what it means to be human* in our technological era, through key existential concepts and themes such as death, security, vulnerability, loneliness, suffering, human and data integrity, the ethics of automation and conversation as well as silence as existential methods in the digital noise. In a time of increased crises and unprecedented technology developments, where do we take the Human Observatory in the Future?[5] Observation (and consequently, the Observatory) is often associated with visual and optical methods of witnessing. The term's close connection to practices of overseeing or monitoring further reinforces this association. However, it is important to bear in mind that observing encompasses much more. This is why in our current and future endeavors with the Human Observatory, we aim to keep on embracing a wider range of modes, senses, and metaphors related to observation. Consequently, we seek to expand the array of conceptual and practical approaches through which we address the contemporary human condition. This expansion can occur in different ways. Firstly, one approach could involve giving precedence to other senses and techniques in guiding or enriching our discussions. This means intentionally shifting focus towards senses, media, registers, and practices that have been underrepresented in our perception of the world around us, such as sonic practices and acts of listening. Secondly, we could work towards broadening the conceptual perspectives from which we seek to understand what it means to be human today. In this regard, we might

**5**
Our directions will rely on some of the projects we are already involved in. Find out more here: Uppsala Informatics and Media Hub for Digital Existence

**Figure 5.** Sofia och Duvan. Photo: Hans Hartman

delve deeper into the concepts of *subjectivity* and *positionality* – as well as reinvest in *existential relationality* and *community* – inviting a range of epistemologies, cosmologies, and worldviews.

Positionality has recently gained importance in studies related to how we listen to each other and the world around us. In the recent surge of interest in sound within humanities and media arts, we are already witnessing a growing inclusion of underrepresented and marginalized perspectives from which the world can be heard. Listening, perhaps more than any other existential or artistic practice, seems to lead us towards this necessary plurality more quickly than practices involving other senses and media (Smolicki 2021). Nevertheless, the task is not without its challenges. Like any form of observing and witnessing, listening always occurs from a particular vantage point. We, as individuals, will never hear each other and the world around us in exactly the same way. Therefore, positionality and inclusiveness in listening might be more about becoming aware of, and respectful towards, this inherent diversity and even incompatibility in how we perceive the world. Similar to spoken language, the act of listening possesses its own dialects. And like spoken languages, acts of listening share similarities, common origins, and resonances. In this context, the role of the Human Observatory could be, and to some extent already is, to create conditions for resonance. It can serve as a temporary space for resonant listening and sounding. In physics, the term ”resonance” describes object-subject relationships as a system in which each element stimulates the others in a specific manner.

From an existential standpoint, resonance can be seen, or heard, as a form of coexistence, a dimension in which two or more forms of existence or living entities establish and maintain a certain synchrony and mutual understanding over time. Our Human Observatory meeting in January 2024 was devoted to the theme of *Digital Resonance* and included a public podcast (*På spaning efter själen – "In Search of the Soul"*) recorded by Kerstin Dillmar, Chaplain and Human Observatory member, with guests who use digital media in therapy, counselling and pastoral care.[6] This evening revolved around the question whether we can "hear" and respond to one another and thus create authentic encounters in an era of digitality. The meeting also highlighted and explored the ethos of listening in thought and action by placing extensive focus on the concept and practice of listening positionality and by listening to the Sigtuna Foundation in a sound walk exercise. Listening gave us some profound clues, although the real question that inevitably followed is: *how do we proceed after listening?*

In continued partnership with the Sigtuna Foundation we have the aim to both carry on with, and to step up our collaborative research efforts and dialogic endeavors. In this spirit The Human Observatory for Digital Existence continues and reinvents its custodian quest for bringing about an existentially sustainable (life)world, by observing and hearing out that which resonates with our deepest existential needs – that which is audible despite the digital noise – calling on humans to respond and engage in the digital limit situation.

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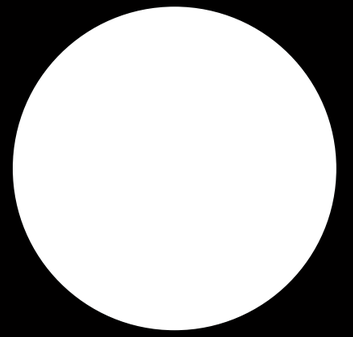
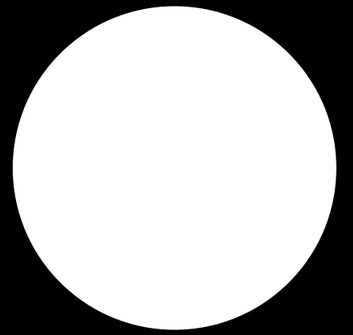
På spaning efter själen, **Episode 76: Digital resonans:** https://open.spotify.com/episode/4lFzla1ziecp90vBLqLdC4.





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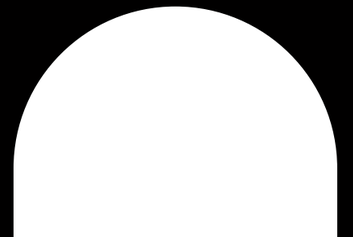


# *The Lifespan of Ephemera: Reflections on Collaborative Art and the Embodiment of Data*

**CHARLES BERRET & ROSALIE YU**

This chapter offers a retrospective account of an art project called "Knowing Together," which was performed at Columbia University and later exhibited in both New York and Los Angeles in 2018-9. Although the project was conceived during a longstanding collaboration between the two authors of this chapter, artist Rosalie Yu and media scholar Charles Berret, the work was deeply collaborative in several other respects. The project showcased a novel imaging technique called collaborative photogrammetry, which was employed for the first time during a workshop involving twenty participants, and both this workshop and the exhibition that followed were collaborative efforts with a dedicated group of creative technologists at Columbia.

We, the authors, first began collaborating in 2016 at the Brown Institute for Media Innovation, a research center based between Columbia Journalism and Stanford Engineering. The Brown Institute was founded with a goal of developing new storytelling techniques, and its unique environment encouraged open exploration of creative projects by artists, journalists, computer scientists, and others interested in new forms of narrative. This collaboration grew out of mutual interests we discovered as we initially worked on separate projects at the Brown Institute. Rosalie's practice centers on the experiential nature of art and technology, so Charles's background in the history and philosophy of technology made for productive conversation. We both enjoyed asking questions about the nature of digital media that we didn't know the answers to — questions

that possibly didn't have concrete or straightforward answers, but nevertheless rewarded the challenge of pursuing them. Just trying to answer those questions was essential in solidifying our key point of inquiry for this project: the entanglement of embodied experience in creating a collaborative dataset using the principles of data feminism (D'Ignazio C and Klein L, 2020).

We conceived of "Knowing Together" as an experiment testing the mundane limits of conventional 3D modeling techniques by centering embodied experience over objective realism. Photogrammetry is a means of creating 3D models by stitching together multiple photographs of an object from different angles to capture a static digital mapping of its surface (Debevec et al. 1996). To view an object from every angle in highly granular detail carries the promise of absolute fidelity, an ideal representation of the object to be viewed onscreen or printed. This is how photogrammetry stands between the domains of photography and sculpture, typically offering a convincing imitation of physical objects according to principles of photorealism. Museums often use photogrammetry to catalog and archive highly detailed, physical models of items from their collections. These 3D renderings are frozen in time, stored as ideal records of an object's shape and contours, sometimes even used as digital building blocks for other applications. Departing from these conventional uses of photogrammetry, we wanted to push the limits of this highly representational artform and explore its deeper expressive potential beyond the scientific appeal to some stable mode of absolute truth. Our goal was to test whether collaborative photogrammetry could offer a means of capturing the momentary, fragile expression of embodied experience in three-dimensional art.

With "Knowing Together," we thus inverted the conventional logic of photogrammetry by centering time and subjectivity, which are dynamic, situated factors usually excluded from 3D models of physical objects. We started by designing a workshop that would create an immersive, embodied experience for participants—not immersive in the artificial sense conventionally used for virtual reality applications, but rather experiential immersion in heightened awareness of one's mind, senses, body, interpersonal relations, and surroundings. To this end, we imagined a workshop (described below), in which we designed an experiment that would challenge a group of people sharing an experience to create something more formally expressive and personally meaningful through photogrammetry than simple photorealism. While it's easy to look at emerging technologies and technical skills as valuable in themselves, we wanted to teach the use of photogrammetry in a way that challenged the prevailing wisdom about how to use this technique and what we should value in its results. To this end, we designed a collective experience that could be captured and modeled through unconventional use of photogrammetry, rendering software, and 3D printers. It was important to us that the collective element of the experience be reflected in our fundamental critique in this project. A 3D model made through photogrammetry does not, in itself, convey the perspective of a single, universal observer. Instead, photogrammetry captures a multiplicity of viewpoints surrounding the object. Our collaborative approach to photogrammetry treats each participant as the source of a single perspective among the many needed to construct the sort of synoptic image a conventional 3D model appears to be, and yet still preserve the noise generated through the human idiosyncrasies of the image-gathering process in this workshop. In other words, we wanted to test the expressive limits of 3D scanning techniques using critical and creative approaches where conventional photorealism was not our core objective.

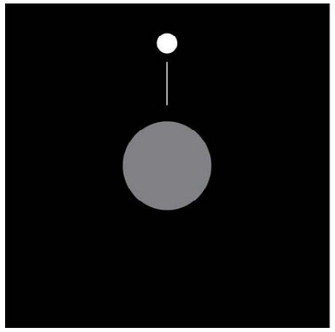
We found support for this project through EdLab, an organization similar to the Brown Institute in its focus on creative technology, but based across the Columbia University campus in Teachers College (TC), a school devoted to educational research and the training of teachers. EdLab's mission is to "engage in conceptual development, demonstration projects, and new educational research to explore and document diverse possibilities for the future of education." EdLab announced a call for funding from the Myers Foundation Art fellowship, a grant intended to bring art with educational significance to the students and staff of TC. We applied, they awarded the grant, and thus began a cross-campus collaboration combining art, media, and pedagogy. What appealed to EdLab about the proposal for "Knowing Together," according to former lead designer Zoe Logan, was the project's "beautiful

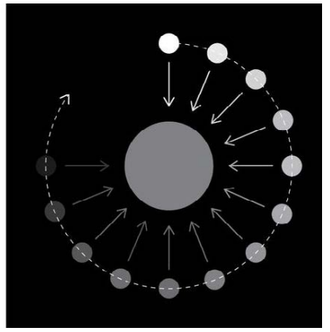
melding of education, practical experience, and technology as an entry point for a more meaningful, personal connection. Art does not necessarily result from just using a 3D-scanner, although that can be an excellent draw. Such was the case with 'Knowing Together,' a piece that leveraged curiosity and enthusiasm for scanning technology and collaborative art in the service of meaningful interaction."

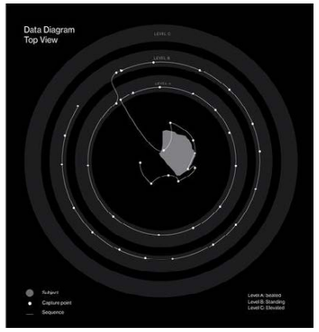
## A COLLABORATIVE PHOTOGRAMMETRY WORKSHOP

The workshop was a day-long exercise exploring intimacy and vulnerability, in which groups of participants platonically embraced for about 10 minutes while the other participants collectively captured images of them by forming a circle and taking turns snapping photos with a single-lens reflex (SLR) digital camera. When combined, these photos yielded a 3D image of each performance. During these performances, a microphone between the subjects captured sounds that were not otherwise audible: breathing, heartbeats, and whispers.

The project was appealing to the TC EdLab because it centered on a workshop combining instruction in an advanced technological skill (photogrammetry, fig. 1) with a hands-on exploration of physical boundaries and intimacy (the workshop, fig. 2) for the sake of creating artworks (the sculptures, figs. 3, 4, 5). This offered an unconventional approach to each of these subjects, merging performance and digital image-making in a pedagogical setting that was inherently collaborative. The workshop was designed to teach participants an image capture tool and turn it into sculptures which the students could return and see in an exhibition. "Knowing Together" was conducted at a venue called the Learning Theater, an interactive education space located at TC's Gottesman Library. The Learning Theater is a flexible space with moveable walls, and as each phase of the event progressed, participants were literally discovering new areas designed to facilitate their work.







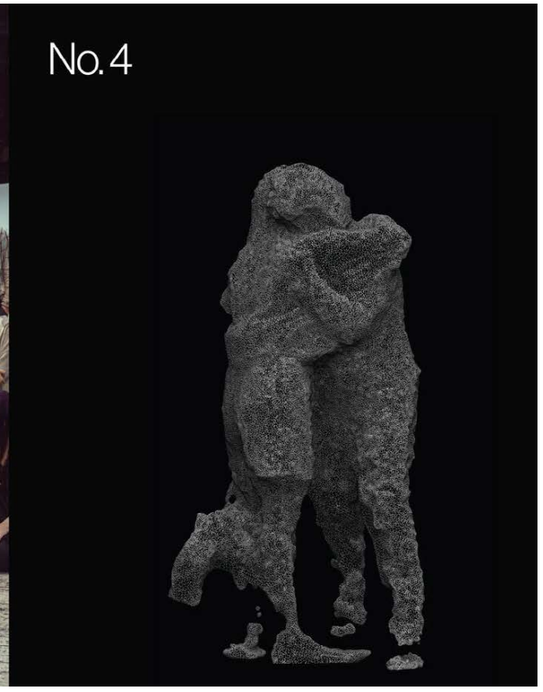




**Figure 1:** Diagram by Kimberley Gim.

**Figure 2:** Photo by Andrew J. LeVine. 3D model by Rosalie Yu.

**Figure 3:** Photo by Roy Rochlin.

**Figure 4:** Photo by Roy Rochlin.

We selected seven groups for the workshop, mostly pairs of strangers, who would each pose for collaborative photogrammetry and become the subjects of 3D-printed sculptures. The experience was meant to induce a natural feeling of discomfort as these groups figured out how to embrace one another, transgressing a basic boundary of physical intimacy, albeit in a safe setting. To make it feel safe, we developed means of establishing consent, discussing boundaries, and building trust. Before the image capture began, the workshop included an exercise in platonic intimacy, with one minute of eye contact and two minutes embracing a complete stranger, giving them your full attention. Rosalie and four EdLab staff were present during the workshop, and everyone was free to leave for any reason at any time. Despite these precautions to help participants feel comfortable, some level of discomfort was actually a key component in the experience curated for the workshop. Many participants noted the phenomenal strangeness of the performance itself, reporting that their embraces felt much longer than a few minutes, just as any unfamiliar experience can distort the perception of time. As the exercise progressed, many reported that their personal barriers fell as the experience moved from feeling awkward and contrived to becoming comfortable, meaningful, even powerful. For these participants, an initial feeling of discomfort was steadily replaced by empathic connection, streams of ideas, and even a feeling of physical disembodiment in a few cases.

> *"The act of intimacy, of consensually breaching personal space, shared and documented by participants, reached deeper resonance by requiring stillness as the camera was passed along the outer circle, a process which took several minutes," Logan recalls. "The importance was clear to see: that moments of affection, of presence, and of inclusion are fleeting, but universal and precious, even among strangers."*

Another EdLab staff member, Ruta Kruliauskaite, also remembers the inclusive elements of the project as especially rare and important. "What was actually nice about artistic-academic collaboration, in my view, was to allow the participants into the art process," Kruliauskaite said. "The workshop also allowed everyone to learn the more academic side of the art, which introduced them both to deeper, conceptual knowledge as well

as understanding what photogrammetry is. Usually that's limited to one paragraph next to the art piece in the museum."

After the workshop, we asked participants to share written reflections on their experience that came to mind in the following weeks. These reflections helped us to better understand their thoughts and feelings during the workshop and the significance it would come to have in their later recollection. Selections from these participant reports were posted on the gallery walls alongside a full set of source photos, maps of the photo capture patterns, and the sculptures themselves (figs. 5, 6). Some reflections were especially poignant, displaying the participants' willingness to be open and vulnerable not only with each other, but also with the unknown audience of the upcoming exhibition.

One participant, Jasper Lo, found that the workshop led to lasting philosophical questions. "Here's something strange I've been thinking about: how long is the lifespan of the ephemera we create? When I embraced Jarret, or as we passed around our cameras, I wondered if we had prolonged the lifespan of our print with each extended minute." This reflection suggests that the format of the workshop—at once technical, performative, and intimate—gave meaningful context to the otherwise mechanical activity of capturing images for photogrammetry. Rather than teaching the group to make a perfect 3D image of a teacup or other static object (as many photogrammetry exercises would), our workshop instead centered the human role in gathering data, and revealed that the data is inherently embodied, situational, and imperfect, but all the more meaningful for these reasons.

Another workshop participant recalls that during the embrace she began by closing her eyes, then pictured various scenes to calm herself, and eventually lost track of time even during this relatively brief exercise. When the pair began to pose, she said her legs were shaking with anxiety; by the end, she remembers her legs falling asleep. Indeed, for many participants, what began as an emotional challenge eventually became a physical one. In conventional photogrammetry, the object must remain completely still throughout the scanning process, but this is impossible for human subjects. Every participant moved as their image was captured. Some shifted their weight from leg to leg. Others squirmed or fidgeted. A few even slumped with fatigue or lost their balance, creating a highly revealing sort of noise in our image data that embraces the tactics of aesthetic dissent found in glitch feminism (Russell, 2020). As a result of this noise in the relatively small number of photographs for each performance, the final 3D scans present an expressive and highly revealing range of glitches that embody the group's collective work as both performers and photographers. Even the room, its moving shadows, and ambient lighting created unintentional visual artifacts that are preserved in the sculptures for "Knowing Together."

**Figure 5:** Photo by Roy Rochlin.


**Figure 6:** Photos by workshop participants (listed below in Acknowledgments).

## EXHIBITING OUR IMAGES, DATA, WRITING, AND SCULPTURES

Although we gathered a wide range of data during and after the workshop — digital images, maps of the camera's movement, audio and video recordings, verbal and written reflections — it was not immediately apparent exactly what the creative output of the project should be. We knew we had a gallery space available in the Gottesman Library of Columbia University. We expected to create at least some form of 3D printed sculpture since this is a major focus of Rosalie's ongoing artistic work. But would these sculptures take a familiar form despite the unconventional data we had gathered? Could our data even yield a model that a 3D printer could handle? And would a 3D sculpture alone attest to the meaning and significance that participants reported experiencing?

We stitched together various photos of each performance to generate 3D models, and full photo sets were exhibited alongside the sculptures as source material (Fig. 6). The exhibition at TC also included a booklet of images, writing, and participant reflections designed by Kimberly Gim. In both the booklet and exhibit, each piece depicts one of the group embraces as a model made from the various photos taken by other participants. As noted above, the noise in these datasets produced many visual anomalies that attest to the collective process of capturing these images. In the pose between Jasper and Jarret, the two broke their embrace halfway through, resulting in a telling gap or absence in the resulting 3D model (fig. 7). Rather than view this as a flaw, the scan and sculpture of their performance contains a void that attests to the process and its fragility. In Jasper's case, this void takes on even greater significance as the source of his later reflections on the lifespan of ephemera.

> *"Every person who participated in the event had a stake in the gallery show," Logan noted when we asked for her recollection of the project. "Some were recognizably the subjects of the sculptures, but everyone was an author of the work. In a world where the primary artist retains so much possession over a final piece, this first instance of 'Knowing Together' generously spread the recognition of collaborators by including their names, on the wall of the gallery and the exhibition booklet."*

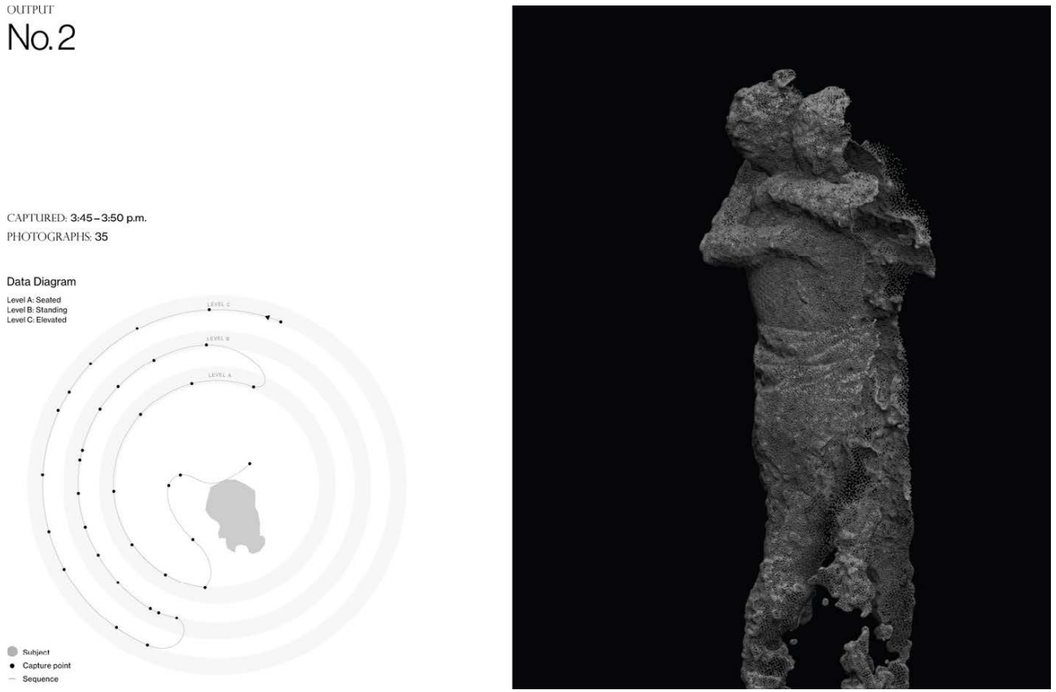





**Figure 7:** Data diagram by Kimberley Gim. 3D model by Rosalie Yu.

After the first exhibition of "Knowing Together" in New York, we submitted the project to the ACM SIGGRAPH conference in Los Angeles, a venue for research and development in computer graphics. To our surprise, the organizers accepted both the sculptures for display in the conference art gallery (Wong et al., 2019), as well as an essay about the project for its art papers track (Yu and Berret, 2019). While it is rare for a project to be included in both venues, our work combined a concrete creative output and an academic component in the form of an experiment in the theory of digital images. In other words, this project had a greater volume of output than many other contributions to the conference due to the nature of the collaboration itself. This signals a strength inherent in many collaborations between academics, artists, and other cultural institutions: if you recognize the broad range of potential outputs in different domains touching your work, the overall yield of the work can extend beyond the initial conception, format, and expected audience of your project.

## CONCLUSION: GLITCHES, EPHEMERA, EXPERIMENTS

There's wisdom in the old joke that discovery is a byproduct of waste, not vice versa. If we had to tabulate the hours spent working on "Knowing Together," the resulting figure would inevitably conceal all of the time spent asking questions we never managed to answer, imagining projects we never managed to build, and talking through philosophical complexities that still remain mysterious to both of us. To recognize this incalculable volume of apparently wasted time reveals how productive it had been to honor our initial sources of curiosity and enduring sources of confusion, because this helped us to identify potent sites of artistic inquiry.

One of the most important lessons from this collaboration was to notice the difference between being experimental in your own field, and finding the opportunity to be experimental in a general sense, feeling unconfined by your background, expertise, status, or the roles typically assigned within your domain and profession. This experimental freedom is what we wanted our workshop collaborators to feel as they approached a complex, unfamiliar technique by questioning and inventing while they learned. In promoting future collaborations between scholars, artists, and cultural institutions, one of the most important lessons we want to share is this: insofar as it's possible to dispense with people's expected roles in a

project and approach it with the basic curiosity that this opportunity brings to the surface for everyone involved, rare and unexpected new directions may emerge when this admittedly precarious approach yields its most striking rewards.

When Jasper, in particular, was led to reflect on the nature of ephemera, not just as a matter of capturing images but also of documenting individual and collective experience, this breaking down of roles was especially rewarding. The goal of our workshop was not so much to teach the practical, accepted use of an established technique (photogrammetry), but rather to create an environment free from those expectations where the technology, method, presentation, and its broader meaning would be radically open and could be confronted as whatever we make of it. Our collaborators have been more than just workshop facilitators and participants, but also agents, witnesses, and ultimately also creators of a shared experience captured in 3D scans and experimental sculptures. This project decenters the solitary observer, displaying a series of shared moments, collectively captured in images that aggregate a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences. The apparent glitches in the resulting sculptures are a testament to the messy, intensely human process of gathering an especially precarious dataset that is all the more revealing as a result.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# *The Past as Palette*

**JEFFREY BENJAMIN & MARKO MIKAEL MARILA**

## THOMAS BERNHARD IN ROSENDALE

> *"It was in the lime works, in the total seclusion of the lime works, that he had always believed he would be able to get it all written down, all at once. A head that was totally secluded, isolated from the outside world, would be able to write this book more easily than one involved with the outside world, with society." (Bernhard, 1973: 71)*

For a period of about five years in the late 1990s, the Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard was the only author that I searched for when I entered a bookstore. For that time period, any bookstore that I walked into – full of its magnificent diversity of voices, approaches, thoughts – was distilled down quite simplistically into a "Thomas Bernhard bookstore," and the same thing was true for libraries. Because of my unhealthy (but necessary) obsession with this one author, one voice, any library that I stepped into – by my simple act of entering it – became a "Thomas Bernhard library," wherein I would seek new volumes and new translations of this author whose musical incantatory rhythmic prose had completely overtaken my mind. Readers of Bernhard may even smile as they read this essay, as they may find traces and evidence of Bernhardian prose expressed herein.

This, of course, is the admission of an absurd obsession. I have since been cured of this obsession, to the point where I often completely

forget about Bernhard when I enter a bookstore or library. However, in forgetting about Bernhard I have perhaps become even more vulnerable to him now, more than ever. This is because – in forgetting about Bernhard, and in particular his book *The Lime Works* (1973) – I have allowed the constant narratory figure of Bernhard's writings to work within me, to find expression through my own unexamined actions and motivations.

The archetypical narrator of many of Bernhard's works is a writer who compulsively works, alone, on a magnum opus that torments him day and night – and which he never finishes. I can only sit back and laugh when I think that – about ten years after reading Bernhard's *The Lime Works* (riveted, in one sitting, as was customary) I decided to choose an assemblage of historic limestone kiln ruins in Rosendale, New York, as the location and topic of my PhD dissertation in archaeology at Columbia University (Figure 1). In this work, Bernhard's narrator, Konrad, torments himself over a treatise on hearing which cannot find proper expression. *The Lime Works* ends (and begins) in a somewhat tragic manner, and that is where I can gladly say that my life has departed from the Bernhardian template (I finished my dissertation), but when I chose Rosendale as my research location, I immediately recognized it as a very suitable place to work on something that I may never finish. As expressed by Bernhard, "the lime works, designed as a lordly manor, had [...] all the advantages of a kind of voluntary self-imprisonment at hard labor" (Bernhard, 1973: 25).

**Figure 1.** Lime kilns in Rosendale, New York. Photo: Jeffrey Benjamin (2016).

As a palimpsest of layered patina, any historical site – particularly of an industrial heritage nature – carries enormous potential for artistic interpretation. To an attentive observer, the depth of history and experience embedded within such sites is extremely evocative, where "every architectural detail is the result of a thousand years of calculations" (Bernhard, 1973: 24). For an artist, working within the context of such locations, the past serves as a kind of palette, offering color, texture, nuance and depth to the expressive content of their work.

At the request of the Century House Historical Society in Rosendale, and on two separate occasions (2017 and 2022), I organized two outdoor sculpture exhibits amidst the ruins of the limestone quarries, kilns and refinement structures of the property. The first exhibit was entitled *Eotechnic Sensorium*, and the second (co-organized with Michael Asbill) was entitled *An/Aesthetics*. Along with the writing of my dissertation, I can now see that my academic and artistic effort within the Rosendale lime works mirrored the movement of Bernhard's anti-hero "away from the world which for decades he had regarded as worthless, offering no attraction whatsoever, a world he had always regarded as anti-historical, a world that was merely marking time, out of which he chose to move into the lime works for the sake of his scientific task, which meant his survival" (Bernhard, 1973: 14).

This is a testament to the power of art, the influence that a single work of art can have, how it can reverberate throughout a single lifetime and through the centuries. A typical Bernhard narrative is a cultivated litany

**Figure 2.** Laura McCallum's Tears (hand-blown glass) in Eotechnic Sensorium, a group exhibit organized by Jeffrey Benjamin at the Century House Historical Society in Rosendale, New York, in 2017. Photo: Jeffrey Benjamin

of disavowal and disenchantment that somehow and quite magically leads to a re-enchantment with the world. Looking back, I can see this dynamic at play within my own efforts in Rosendale. My conscious recollection of this phenomenon causes me to muse over the futility of "using" art towards other purposes (i.e., selling real estate, illustrating an intellectual concept or writing an essay). Art will simply not be "used." For instance, by showcasing an artist's work one might indeed sell a building but lose (or gain) a whole country. In other words, art has a power that operates in multiple simultaneous directions and dimensions, often distracting or diverting our gaze just as much as it may hold our attention (Novitz, 1997).

I have elsewhere made the rather preposterous assertion that archaeology, like art, is a form of friendship. This is an assertion that I continue to stand behind. It was in this spirit that, in both instances, I invited friends to the Rosendale site to wander around the grounds to seek inspiration for their potential works (Figures 2 and 3). I recollect with great delight the memories of these simple walks through the wooded property with artists; our conversations were so thoughtful and profound. It was during this time that I was able to witness the development of tentative themes, often based on a great depth of personal experience. I must admit that, in this effort, my appropriation of "the lime works" as a location for artistic effort diverged dramatically from the experience of Bernhard's narrator, for – far from being a narcissistic obsession – it was an experience that was simply shared among friends.

**Figure 3.** Jeffrey Benjamin's World Politics in An/Aesthetics, a group exhibit organized by Jeffrey Benjamin and Michael Asbill at the Century House Historical Society in Rosendale, New York, in 2022. Photo: Jeffrey Benjamin.

## QUEERIN' THE HOGGEE

In the early 1800s, before the expansion of the railroad network, canals were crucial for the safe transportation of building material from the American Northeast to the area's booming centers, such as New York City or New Jersey. One of these waterways was the Delaware and Hudson Canal that opened for traffic in 1828 and came to serve as a route for transportation of mainly coal and wood to the Hudson River, but also cement from Snyder Cement Works in Rosendale, New York, the infrastructural remains of which are now managed by the Century House Historical Society.

The vessels used on the canal were not self-propelled, but instead pulled by horses and mules from a towpath that ran along the side of the canal. In the early years of the canal, the boats were relatively small, capable of carrying a 30-ton load, and towable by one horse. As the canal was widened and deepened with its intensifying use, the barges got bigger. They could now be loaded with as much as 136 tons of material and required two or three mules to pull.

In addition to the animal workforce, a special human profession developed on the canal. It was the job of the *hoggee*, the towpath driver, to walk sometimes 20 miles a day with the animals, tend them, and pump out the barges (Figure 4). The monthly pay of the hoggee was $3 (Osterberg, 2002: 72), less than $100 in purchasing power today.

**Figure 4.** A young child leading two mules along the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal towpath in the 19th century. Photo: National Park Service Photo, public domain.

Especially in the early days of canal operations, the hoggees were mostly young children, many of them orphans. Work on the canal was hard and dangerous. Shallow as it may have been, falling in the water, getting tangled in the ropes and drowning was a real threat. Those who survived the hardships had to look elsewhere for work when the canal froze up in the winter. On top of everything, the profession was extremely disrespected, and the hoggees had to tolerate the taunts or shouts of passers-by (Wyld, 1962: 83):

> *"Hoggee on the towpath*
>
> *Five cents a day*
>
> *Picking up horseballs*
>
> *To eat along the way"*

As the railroad network improved, the transport of goods on the canal waned towards the end of the 1800s. The canal was drained for the most parts after the 1898 season, and finally abandoned completely in 1904. In the final years, only the northernmost stretch was in use, as cement was still being transported from Rosendale to Kingston on the Hudson.

Although originally built for the purpose of transporting raw materials, the canal also saw other uses. In the years of operation, the canal company frowned upon the canal's recreational use, but it quickly became a popular tourist destination, attracting visitors from afar to marvel at the scenic areas, to experience the canal from a rowboat, or skate on its frozen surface. Today the remaining stretches of the Delaware and Hudson Canal are historic sites that serve a purely recreational and educational purpose (Figure 5), much like the Snyder Estate, and especially the striking Widow Jane Mine, a large cavern that serves as a venue for various artistic events such as concerts. Through a process of heritagization, the sites have become locations for aesthetic regeneration, a phenomenological register of enjoyment that stands in stark contrast to the anaesthetic effects of alcohol and medicine that those working in the Rosendale cement mines and, undoubtedly, on the Delaware and Hudson Canal, too, had to resort to regularly (Benjamin, 2022: 30).

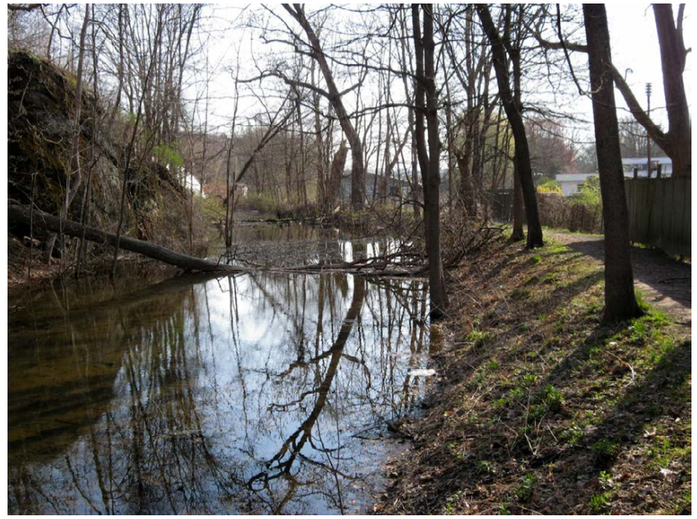

**Figure 5.** Delaware and Hudson Canal, Rosendale, New York. Towpath to the right. Photo: Jeffrey Benjamin (2017).

My research into the history of the area provided a context for my artistic work in the *An/aesthetics* exhibit in 2022. Inspired by my lifelong history in working with and training horses according to the principles of natural horsemanship (e.g., Hunt and Hunt, 1978), I was drawn to a particular feature on the Snyder Estate. A statue of a pissing child and a horse head relief on the side of a small bridge caught my attention, not because of the cultural significance of the *figure pissante* (Lebensztejn, 2016), but because of the combination of the figure and the relief.

The resulting artwork, which I call *Queerin' the Hoggee*, is a site-specific installation consisting of the said statue and relief, both constructed out of cement, a ready-made latex horse mask, and a halter made from

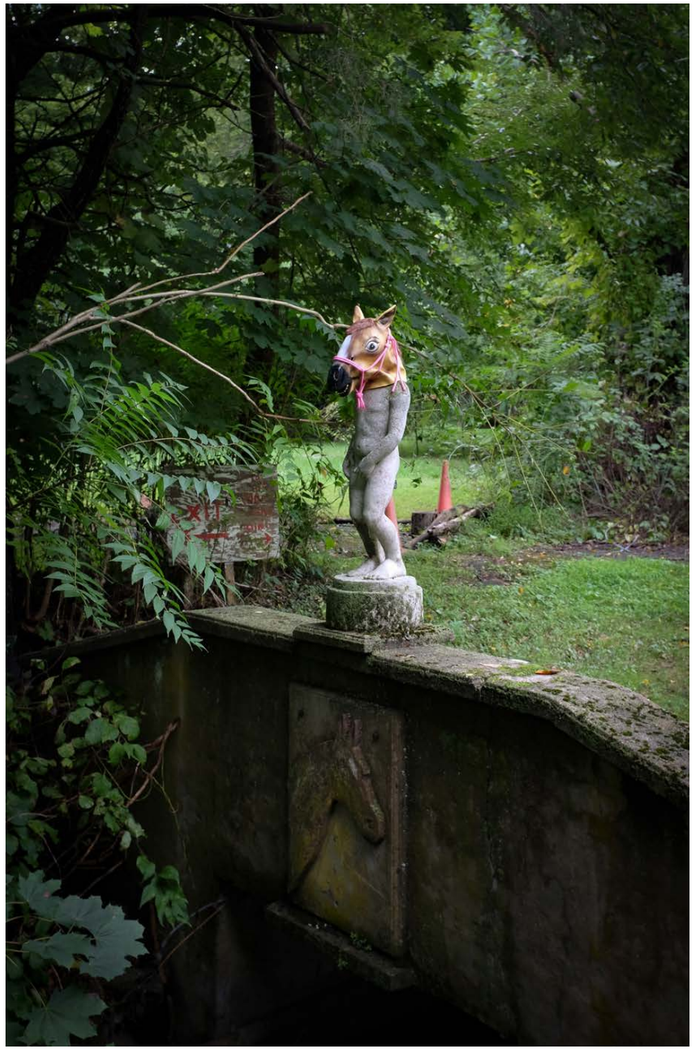

**Figure 6.** Marko Mikael Marila's Queerin' the Hoggee in An/Aesthetics, a group exhibit organized by Jeffrey Benjamin and Michael Asbill at the Century House Historical Society in Rosendale, New York, in 2022. Photo: Marko Mikael Marila (2022).

pink polyester rope (Figure 6). In natural horsemanship, the rope halter is considered a gentle instrument of control and, as part of my career in horsemanship, I used to make and sell them to my clients. Relearning to tie one provided for me a tactile and embodied connection to the historical significance of the hoggee.

With *Queerin' the Hoggee* I want to draw the viewer's attention to the complicated human-horse or human-mule relationship in the industrial past. Forced to work long hours on the towpath – but also in the mines – the human-animal hybrid became vital not only for the functioning of the canal transportation network, but also for the whole "riparian co-ontology" of the waterways, the amorphous intermingling of the multitude of different solid and liquid modes of existence that gave emergence to a complete industry, but which also continues to exist as an ecology in itself (Benjamin, 2022: 176). It is precisely via and along waterways that different parts of the American Northeast were first reached by industrial societies, then transformed through the practices of quarrying, and finally transported elsewhere in refined form.

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# *Reflections on the ethics of digitization: accessibility and 'distant listening' of two Holocaust collections in Sweden*

**MALIN THOR TUREBY, KRISTIN WAGRELL & JENNY SJÖHOLM**

In this chapter we reflect upon our experiences and visions for engaging with memory institutions' archival and digital practices. Our current research project focuses on two memory institutions' perspectives on the digitization of Holocaust collections in their archives, and we suggest that the different ways in which they have approached digitization raises central questions about the ethics of accessibility in digital archival realms. Following from this we consider the development of new ethical approaches to digital archiving and reflect upon how Presner's (2016) ideas on the "ethics of the algorithm" as well as "distant listening" could inform debate and praxis with archival studies as well as the processes of memory institutions.

In our research project, "Ethical dilemmas of digitization: Vulnerability and Holocaust collections" (funded by the Swedish Research Council), we examine how two Swedish memory institutions have differently approached the ethical dilemmas of digitizing Holocaust collections: 'Jewish Memories' at Nordiska Museet (the Nordic Museum); and the Polish Research Institute Archive (PIZ) at Lund University library (LUB). In each case, the collection in question has been treated in different ways by the institutions even though both contain what could be defined as vulnerable as they contain "sensitive" information about Holocaust and concentration camp survivors. "Jewish Memories" remains a protected collection that, even for scholars, is difficult to access. In contrast, even if the names of some survivors were initially anonymized, all the interviews conducted by the Polish Research

Institute with camp survivors have been digitized and publicized on a website owned and managed by LUB. The PIZ archive can be considered trail blazing amongst Swedish archival institutions' digitiziation and online publication of survivor testimonies. The processes behind arriving at an open archive or a partially closed and heavily curated archival extraction demonstrates how ethical choices and understandings can have profound impacts on digitalization and online archives.

Our experience in the field has been key to seeing digitization as an ethical process deeply entwined with professional narratives and shared understandings. As we have discussed in our previous research (Thor Tureby, 2013; Thor Tureby and Wagrell 2020) and through conversations we had with key staff members at Nordiska Museet and LUB within the current project, the clearer it becomes to us that the ways in which archivists and librarians interpret the sensitive nature of each collection is intrinsically linked to discourses on archival ownership and Jewish vulnerability as well as legal frameworks that serve specific ethical considerations. Equally, the history and context the archive develops in has implications for framing those professional decisions and narratives. The PIZ archive is as we discuss below an early post-war testimonial archive, created immediately after the war, and comes with a long history. While "Jewish memories" created in response to what was perceived as an increase in antisemitic and xenophobic sentiment in Sweden during the 1990s.

In contrast, Nordiska Museet has arguably never been comfortable as the custodian and curator of "Jewish memories" which was a project that did not slot neatly into established philosophies and practices at the museum (Thor Tureby, 2013). As the project leader for the collection (externally recruited, as was the entire team) stated in a previous interview, she always felt like she and her team were "strange birds" in relation to the rest of the regular staff at the museum (Thor Tureby, 2013: 69).

Therefore, it has been important for us, in these early stages of our research, to explore the wider *legal, political, ethical, and affective* struggles that Holocaust collections become entangled in. In exploring the ethical dilemmas that institutions face in processes of digitizing Holocaust archives we pay particular attention to perceptions and conceptions of Jewish vulnerability and what this means in digital spaces. However, the digital is also surrounded by the non-digital archival histories that precede it, which include legal, political, and symbolic struggles over what, where and for whom the archive should exist. In all these struggles, there are also affective dimensions that need to be explored further to grasp how Jewish vulnerability is understood, made, and managed, both in the digital and the non-digital world.

## ANONYMIZATION AND ETHICS OF ACCESSIBILITY

In legal discourse on data management the notion of vulnerable groups and "sensitive" information is often used to describe who and what needs to be protected, anonymized and concealed from users. Under EU law (and the Swedish Ethical Review Authority), all processing of data needs to include the anonymization of "personal data revealing racial, ethnic origin" of a person as well as their "political opinions [and their] religious or philosophical beliefs" (GDPR EU). This is based on an ethical "harm principle" that allows data processors to protect individuals that the data describes. However, scholars across national and disciplinary boundaries have warned against the privileging of positivist and biomedical considerations of ethics in the assessment of the assembly, use and dissemination of information involving human beings (Lederman, 2016; Schrag 2009; Thor Tureby, 2019). These scholars remind us that within post-humanist and post-structural approaches to ethics, the notion of "vulnerable groups" and "sensitive" information is not something static but, rather, something that should be negotiated by the users of the data as well as the parties affected by its use and dissemination. Whether ethnic signifiers are "sensitive" or not is thus not a law unto itself but instead contingent on the type of consent given by the human subjects as well as the active involvement of other members of an affected ethnic group in processes of collection and digitalization.

The collection of testimonies contained in the PIZ archive—collected by the Polish-Swedish art historian Zygmunt Lakocinski and a working group of nine camp survivors in 1945 and 1946—had been moved out of Sweden for safe deposit in the United States and returned in the 1970s only to be opened at the end of the 1990s by a group of staff members at LUB who had little to no knowledge of the Nazi camp systems, immediate efforts to document camp experiences in Post-war Europe in general or Lakocinski

and his working group in particular (Sjöholm, Thor Tureby and Wagrell, 2023).

The first stage of digitizing the material happened almost immediately after the archive was opened because of financing from the newly established committee for Living History in Stockholm. According to an Interviewee who was involved with the first stage of LUB's digitalization, the money was conditioned by a request that approximately 25 of the 500 interview transcripts should be digitized and published on a website, each representing a different part of the collection of testimonies, to show the breadth of the archive (Interview no 1, 2023).

Since this was only a small sample of the archive, a second attempt to translate, digitize and publish all the 500 interviews was made in 2014. During this second stint of digitization, LUB also chose to reconsider the question of anonymization. Now, it seemed, the university library no longer needed to err on the side of caution, since so much time had passed since the survivors had given their testimonies. In an interview with a person involved in the second stage of this initiative (Interviewee 2), it was suggested that anything other than full disclosure of the survivors' identities would have been contrary to the aims of the digitizing project: to make the survivors and their experiences visible to Swedish and international publics. It was stressed that the survivors signed their witness statements, thereby giving their consent that testimonies be seen by others (Interview no 2, 2023). However, for the survivors who contributed their experiences in 1945 and 1946, the notion of a digital space in which potentially millions of people could access their stories, did not exist. Their consent was most likely aimed at the goal of justice in upcoming war crimes trials, to hold their perpetrators accountable for their actions. On the other hand, they may have found the potential reach and scope of dissemination that new technologies allow for to be important. Whether their signatures should be used as an informed consent for digital access to their stories is an open question.

A further issue of concern is that only a small portion of the testimonies held in PIZ are Jewish while a majority are Polish Catholic; something that initially led those involved to believe that the collection might not be accepted by Jewish communities invested in the legacy and memorialization of the Holocaust (Interview 2, 2023). These fears were later abated as most of the funding for the second digitization process came from individual Jewish-American donors who, according to Interviewee 2, thought that the non-Jewish victims showed that the Holocaust was a concern, not only for Jews, but for humanity at large. This is not a surprising response given the universalization of Holocaust memory in later decades. Furthermore, viewed as a collection of Holocaust testimony, the act of naming would be crucial. In Jewish tradition the name is very important. Relatives read the names of their dead loved ones at special occasions, they light candles and read Yishkor; at the end of several of the High Holidays the names of over dead family members and friends are voiced.

Consequently, several memory institutions dedicated to research and remembrance of the Holocaust have made it a priority to individualize the victims by trying to collect the names of each victim of the Holocaust. The Shoah Victims' Names Recovery Project at Yad Vashem aims, for example, to memorialize each individual Jew murdered in the Holocaust by recording their names, biographical details, and photographs. The name of the institution underlines the importance of names in Jewish tradition, as it is written: "And to them will I give in my house and within my walls *a memorial and a name* (in Hebrew: Yad Vashem), an everlasting name that shall not be cut off" (Isaiah 56:5). Since 1955, Yad Vashem has been fulfilling its mandate to preserve the memory of Holocaust victims by collecting their names and thereby give back the victims their names and faces and thus to prevent the stated Nazi intention of not only murdering them but also wiping out their memory (Thor Tureby and Wagrell, 2020).

When asked why it is important to deanonymize the digital transcripts, Interviewee 2 spoke of the importance of restoring "the forgotten" to public memory, adding that he had encountered members of the Jewish community in Malmö who were thankful that the survivors' names were being published and made known to the public. However, it is pertinent to at least ask whether the act of naming Polish-Catholic camp survivors carries the same ethical weight as the naming of Jewish Holocaust survivors? One could argue

that "Slavic" as a Nazi category would have led to the same end as befell Europe's Jews had the Third Reich prevailed but that is a counterfactual conundrum rather than an actual consequence of Nazi extermination policy. The ethics of digitizing the PIZ archive seems caught in an anonymization/naming where the nuances around the question why a particular name is important to disclose has been erased.

Nordiska Museet has encountered a similar ethical problem in considering the digitization and accessibility of "Jewish Memories" but in contrast to LUB has chosen not to act because of it. Since no informed consent was retrieved when the interviews with Jewish Holocaust survivors in the 1990s were conducted, the museum decided that anyone who wants to access the material—consisting of both life stories and objects—need to be approved, only after one of the museum staff members has been in touch with the survivor or their relatives. This means that it is incredibly difficult to access any of the material that the collection contains, even though the expressed purpose of the collection was to combat xenophobia and antisemitism through the dissemination of personal stories from before, during and after the Holocaust. Here, as opposed to in the case of the PIZ archive, naming as well as access is central to the ethical treatment of the collection, making its concealment deeply problematic both from a practical and an ethical standpoint.

The context in which "Jewish Memories" was created also impacted the ways in which the Jewish interview subjects were treated in the archive. Most importantly, it meant that legal incentives to protect information about Jewish individuals were more powerful at the time of its creation because the societal climate feared antisemitic violence against those who revealed themselves to be Jewish (Thor Tureby and Wagrell, 2020). Rather than letting the Jewish contributors choose whether they wanted to place themselves in such a vulnerable position, the decision was made for them by the museum; a decision that continues to affect any human interaction with the collection.

Conversely, one of the main arguments for continuing the digitization of the PIZ archive was that it would have a generative emotional impact on its audience which would lead to action against antisemitic and xenophobic forces. Exploring the concept of "affective communities", Zink writes that "transgressing the plurality of socially defined and culturally valorized positions, by means of affectivity, people consolidate intermediary realms of affective exchange and situationally generate a sense of affinity and collective immediacy" (Zink, 2016: 249). In other words, communities are *made* through affectivity: it connects us across identitarian boundaries that have been produced to maintain division according to difference. However, affective responses to Holocaust stories are not exclusively positive or generative in terms of solidarity, compassion, and responsibility for the other. As Dean (2010) and others have shown, the genre of Holocaust testimony is strictly policed according to principles of aesthetic and emotional restraint, moderation, and discretion; sometimes as a way of ensuring that it is effective in its *affective* aims. Discourses that police testimony often do so according to a logic of efficiency or legibility but also according to an ethics/affect dichotomy where the ethical approach to testifying is one of simplicity and facticity; an account where emotion does not occlude the "true" lesson of the story itself. Therefore, these discourses not only police the act of giving testimony but are also concerned with the affective responses that the testimony garners; something that is near impossible to correlate to civic action.

Questioning assumptions about the *affective effects* of Holocaust testimony is not the same as claiming that they are devoid of them. Access to Holocaust testimony is integral to scientific research, education, and, perhaps most importantly, it helps descendants of survivors, to explore, understand and possibly come to terms with their own and their family members' traumatic pasts. However, digitization is not synonymous with access. Unreflexive digitization—where institutions believe that digitization is inherently good, or in this case get on the bandwagon of slogans like "never again" and "never forget"—can also lead to unethical choices of *what* to digitize where knowledge about testimony or recounting as dialogue becomes absent, thereby occluding important parts of the testimony given by the survivor.

Similarly, our questioning of Nordiska museet's protective measures surrounding "Jewish Memories"

has little to do with what we believe to be the collection's ability to affect society and bring people together against right-wing extremism and antisemitism, and more to do with the ethical perspective of bringing witness and listener into dialogue with one another in a way that shows respect for the wishes of the survivor subject.

## NEW ETHICAL APPROACHES AND DISTANT LISTENING

What is the way forward for these two archives? Can Nordiska Museet overcome its legal obstacles when lacking informed consent and can LUB learn from their mistakes in future endeavors relating to the PIZ archive?

One answer to this question lies in the development of new ethical approaches to digital archiving. Although Holocaust archives have been steadily proliferating and expanding since the end of the 1970s, there has been surprisingly little scholarly reflection on the development of data management laws and their potential effects on the preservation, management, and access of Holocaust survivor stories. In response to this Presner (2016) has conceptualized an "ethics of the algorithm" which is characterized by the relational character of witnessing created by an attention to the ways in which metadata—or 'information architecture' as Presner calls it—can include both the content of a testimony as well as the *ways* in which that testimony is given. The digital system becomes a vital part of listening to testimony, not merely hearing the story told but also witnessing the act of witnessing; the absences, silences, insecurities, and uncertainties that disappear in pure content. Presner asks:

> *What is at stake when the ethical philosophies of the humanistic tradition do not fundamentally inform the digitization of the archive, when data and data management 'conform to a model of mathesis that assumes objective, totalizing, mechanistic, instrumental capability'? This is the risk of completely separating content from information architecture, of privileging disambiguated data ontologies over probabilistic knowledge, potentialities of figuration, and interpretive heterogeneity. But computational representation does not have to be this way if it is guided by an ethics of the algorithm (Presner, 2016: 201).*

Inspired by "Jewish ethics" in general and the philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas in particular, Presner urges us to reimagine how computational logics can be governed by an ethics *before* ontology where the former is not dependent on objective truths about who we are but "through bonds of responsibility, vulnerability, proximity and even rupture" (2016: 200). According to Presner, the digital form of such archives can encourage a form of "distant listening" where the digital system is able to "hear" the whole of the archive and notice larger structures, themes and patterns that help us see, acknowledge and take responsibility for a greater range of suffering than what is usually displayed in a small canon of Holocaust testimony. The perspective of distance allows as to hear and discover different things than the perspective of closeness (characterized by close, focused, and particularized listening to a few testimonies) (Presner, 2016: 197-199).

Borrowing Presner's vocabulary, how can we "hear" the voice of every survivor in the PIZ archive using "distant" forms of listening? Can "distant listening" be used as an argument for the digitization of Jewish memories? In line with Swedish policies on digitization of cultural heritage that claims that digitization leads to inclusion and democratization, Presner argues for that distant listening facilitates a democratization of witnessing since it has an effect that all testimonies are granted equal importance, no testimony takes priority or assumes canonicity (cf. Presner, 2016:199). Or could digitization and distant listening lead to the individuality of the victims and their names once again being erased?

Some of the information about the ways in which the survivors gave their testimonies is already there in the digital transcripts as the interviewers contributed short annotations of how they perceived the witness; whether they seemed nervous or calm; if they cried or acted detached or aloof. Simultaneously, a significant portion of the archive is missing in its digitized form. The nine individuals—also camp survivors—who conducted the interviews produced a great number of written sources revealing details about the process of testimony that greatly enriches our understanding of the archive itself. The decision not to digitize this material contradicts what Presner suggests may be a fundamental principal within the practice of humanistic computing characterized by an ethics of the

algorithm. Whether we proceed from an idea of the ethics of the algorithm or not, it may be that for institutions like LUB and NM working on archival digitization one important ethical decision involves the degree to which they make the behind the scenes work, visible and accessible in the same way that the transcripts make interview subjects visible and accessible.

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# *Treading the ground sensibly: Reflections on deep memory and embodied artistic research in the Mãe Preta art project*

**ISABEL LÖFGREN & PATRICIA GOÙVEA**

In this essay, we share our experience as art practitioners working on long-term research-based art projects in contested historical sites in Brazil. Isabel Löfgren has been a visual artist for twenty years in fine art and media production with art exhibitions and public art, mainly in Sweden and Brazil (Löfgren, n.d.). Patricia Goùvea is a visual artist based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, working with photography, film, performance, photography criticism, and cultural production (Goùvea, n.d.). We have also developed academic careers alongside our artistic practices. In time, these parallel paths have informed and influenced one another organically, each contributing concepts, tools, and methods that often seem at odds with each other.

Even though we have academic careers, our individual art practices and co-authored projects are not formally university-based nor funded by research agencies. We are therefore hesitant to pigeonhole our work as "practice-based artistic research" in the terms defined in research evaluation criteria and academic protocols. Since most of our projects received funding from the cultural sector, like art institutions and arts foundations, as well as local governments, the inverse formulation of "research-based artistic practice" sounds more appropriate. Even though public funding may often be dependent on political agendas from authorities and cultural bodies, it has nonetheless allowed us to work more experimentally outside the constraints of both academia and the commercial art world. It also aligns

better with an ethos of civic responsibility contingent on political and social realities where art is of public interest.

There has been a growing tendency in both institutional and commercial art worlds where artists incorporate academic research into their practices. It is partly due to artistic practices increasingly being developed in academicized art environments or being instrumentalized by other academic disciplines, taking different forms, producing different types of knowledge, and creating different ways for viewers to attend to the information assembled (Bishop, 2023). We also prefer to use "research-based" more broadly as a collaborative process in gathering information, situating different forms of knowledge, and engaging in dialogue with a variety of practitioners and social actors. This formulation also widens the scope of research embedded in the artistic process which includes tacit knowledge and embodied techniques (Spatz, 2017:13). In this sense, research becomes in equal parts both *praxis* and *poiesis*.

What follows is an account of the research-based art project *Mãe Preta* ("Black Mother") that we have co-authored since 2015. We have been working as an artist duo for more than a decade investigating art, time, and memory connected to historical sites in our home country Brazil. Our long-term partnership has resulted in a working methodology that investigates the subjective histories of a given site using visual archives and participatory artistic methods. These have been materialized as exhibitions and public installations, and activated through performance, education, and publications resulting from collaborations with art and research institutions, professionals, performers, and several non-affiliated individuals. This essay tells the story of a collective artistic journey according to a scheme that summarizes our process: setting the stage, mapping the site, narratives, archives, and activation.

## SETTING THE STAGE

The genesis of *Mãe Preta* in 2015 is contingent on personal experiences and political realities (Mãe Preta, n.d.). We became mothers at the same time. Whereas Isabel gave birth safely in the Swedish public health system, Patricia suffered institutional violence in a private maternity ward in Brazil which gave her a general infection that nearly cost her life. This difference in birthing conditions led to a growing concern for maternal justice, and we became active in a Facebook group of feminist motherhood activists where members' roles and identities as mothers were grounded in broader context of social injustices in Brazil.

On the streets, the political climate was turbulent. Our hometown Rio de Janeiro was going through many transformations in preparation for the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. Brazil was becoming increasingly polarized by multiple waves of political protests that included the protection of women's rights against systemic gender violence and rising religious and political conservatism.[1] In this context, Black women were especially vocal in advancing intersectional feminist agendas led by Afro-Brazilian feminist intellectuals, activists, and politicians prominent in the arts and social media.

Many issues were discussed in the Facebook group regarding differences in motherhood across racial and social classes, such as structural disparities between white and black motherhood in a country where black women are disproportionately victimized by obstetric violence, and police violence against black youth is prevalent. There is a deep-seated racism in Brazilian society that still reverberates from its slaveholding past. Furthermore, the historical co-dependency of white and black motherhood was often reflected upon in a country where many black women still perform care work for white elites and are underrepresented in e.g. politics and academia – even though this scenario is slowly changing.[2]

1
In 2015, women's and feminist demonstrations were collectively called "Primavera das Mulheres" (the Women's Spring) with many demonstrations on the streets in all of Brazil fighting against conservatism and marking the entry of feminism into popular discourse in the country. This was the first time in the history of Brazil's young democracy that women of all classes and racial backgrounds convened against all sorts of gender and racial injustice, including domestic violence, abuse, the right to abortion, and more. Movements like #PrimeiroAssédio ("#firstabuse"), #MeuAmigoSecreto ("#Mysecretfriend") and #AgoraÉqueSãoElas (#ItsHerTurn). These movements were happening a bit before and also alongside the more widespread #niunamenos, started in Argentina spreading throughout Latin America, and three years before the more global #metoo movement began.

2
Some changes include the creation of The Ministry of Racial Equality in 2023, led by Minister Anielle Franco, sister of the former Rio de Janeiro city councilor Marielle Franco, who was killed in 2018 in a yet unsolved political murder. Marielle championed an intersectional agenda as a Black HBTQ politician from the favelas, and after her death has become an international symbol of racial and gender justice. Marielle Franco was a collaborator on our project.


**Figure 1.** Isabel Löfgren and Patricia Gouvêa, Crossover, 2015, Photographic intervention on wooden doors, Galeria Monique Paton, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Notice the reference image on the right, and the photographic reenactment on the remaining door panels. Image: courtesy of the artists.

At this moment, we were invited to participate in a group show in a small gallery in Rio's colonial downtown area turned upside down with construction work for the Olympics. There was a painting on the front door of the gallery depicting a Black woman carrying her baby on her back, depicted in the style of 19th-century lithographs by European artists.[3] We then initiated a discussion in the Facebook group around this image to gather initial opinions about this type of visual representation of motherhood. After a round of dialogues, we decided to reenact the image using photography, with a non-binary Black model as the main character of the scene as a critique of a heteronormative white gaze (Figure 1). This image became the linchpin to research the visual history of the representation of black motherhood and confront it with current political discourses and emancipatory feminist and intersectional politics.

The name *mãe preta*, or 'black mother', comes from the common term used to designate wet nurses of African descent who cared for the children of their white masters during slavery, a social phenomenon that is common in all former colonial societies in the Americas. According to historian Lilia Moritz Schwarcz (2018), the wet nurses represented "the more 'romantic' side of slavery, as they were tasked with 'offering' the gift of milk" to their white charge and associated them with notions of kindness and abnegation as noble features of black motherhood.[4] As such, she plays the role of a hidden protagonist in the formation of Brazilian society. This led us to explore the visual and social history of Black motherhood in Brazil characterized by complex relationships of affection and resistance toward white slaveholder society. We decided to keep this name even though it is problematic as it has been naturalized by colonial society, and is still being used today.

Later that year, we received a municipal arts grant to expand this research for a solo exhibition at *Instituto de Memória e Pesquisa Pretos Novos* (IPN) ("New Africans Institute for Memory and Research"), a slavery memorial site in Rio's old port area. IPN is a small private family-run institution in Rio de Janeiro that guards the archaeological remains of a former slave cemetery called Cemitério Pretos Novos ("New Africans Cemetery") from the late 18th and early 19th century, and discovered in the late 1990s. It is considered a rare and unique burial site of its kind in

**3**
The visual history of colonial Brazil was thoroughly documented by European artistic and scientific missions to the country since in the late 18th and 19th centuries. These visual accounts were produced for scientific purposes and also to attend to the demands of European societies for learning more about life in the New World, and until today serve as records and main sources of knowledge gathered at that time. They have also cast a "foreign gaze" that has been naturalized as being part of Brazilian identity.

**4**
The counterpart of "mãe preta" in the United States is the "mammy". Like in Brazil, the "mammy" was often portrayed as a caricature of self-servitude and as an instrument of whiteness as a fictional character that hid and erased the real mammy, whose "image served the political, social, and economic interests of mainstream white America. During slavery, the mammy caricature was posited as proof that black people – in this case, black women – were contented, even happy, as slaves. Her wide grin, hearty laugher, and loyal servitude were offered as evidence of the supposed humanity of the institution of slavery". (Pilgrim, 2000/2023).

the Americas (Instituto de Pesquisa e Memória Pretos Novos, n.d). IPN's mission is to honor the thousands of captive African lives lost upon arrival from transatlantic voyages and who were buried anonymously on the site (Medeiros da Silva Pereira, 2011, 2018).[5] IPN houses a permanent exhibition with displays of archaeological remains and artifacts, a contemporary art gallery, and a small research library. The institute is modestly funded by the municipality, private donations, and educational programs while temporary contemporary art exhibitions are funded on a project basis.

Given the site's historical significance, the project aimed to honor Black motherhood in the context of the memorialization of slavery in Brazil while reflecting on the subjective history of the archaeological site.

**5**
The Cemitério dos Pretos Novos functioned between 1772 and 1830, and an estimated 20 to 30 thousand bodies have been put to rest there. Bodies were usually recorded in groups and identified with the name of the ship they arrived with. There are very few records of individuals with accurate names and detailed data.

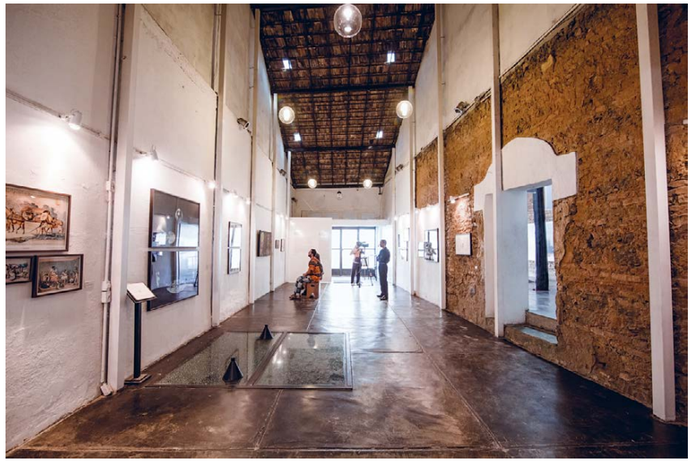

**Figure 2.** Exhibition view of Mãe Preta, Pretos Novos Contemporary Art Gallery, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, July-October 2016. Curator: Marco Antonio Teobaldo. Courtesy of the artists.



## MAPPING THE SITE

To understand the site's significance, it's important to acknowledge that Rio de Janeiro's urban history is closely connected to the memory of slavery, which is a relatively new phenomenon in Brazil.[6] Following the abolition of slavery in the late 19th century, successive urban renewal projects largely erased the city's former role as a major slave port. Yet during excavations for the Olympics, the remains of the Valongo Wharf complex, where millions of African captives disembarked during the 18th and 19th centuries, were rediscovered (Löfgren, 2015). The city finally decided to embrace this legacy and created a cultural circuit that connected the Valongo wharf to other landmarks of slavery and African cultural heritage in the area, including the New Africans Cemetery discovered a few years earlier (Unesco, n.d.).[7]

Accepting an invitation to do an art exhibition on a memorial site with such a painful and contested history was not an easy task. Before we set out to elaborate an artistic proposal, we needed to tread the ground sensibly. Given the sensitivity of the site's historical importance and the political climate, we had to first address the ethical issues involved in such an undertaking. How would a temporary art exhibition affect an institution with limited resources? What justifies two white artists working with a site that holds such symbolic importance for Afro-diasporic populations? As we enter this space, what perspective do we bring and where do we fit in this conversation?

In the beginning, we were unsure if we should continue with the project unless we established a solid network of trust and support. First, we built trust with the institution, who at first was very skeptical of our proposal because the exhibition budget given by the municipality, which was not excessive in comparison with similar exhibition projects, was nearly the same as their annual budget provided by them. To mitigate this gap, we agreed to dedicate a part of the budget to renovations and equipment. We also minimized dependency on their staff by hiring a producer, PR, and pedagogues to lead the public program. Secondly, we both had different perspectives regarding institutional priorities. They believed that investing in visitor infrastructure would be more beneficial for their core business of maintaining the permanent exhibit, rather than allocating funds towards temporary art exhibitions that generated little direct income. Third, As a

**6**
This is significant considering slavery in Brazil began in the late 1500s and ended in 1888, one of the last countries in the world to abolish slavery.

**7**
The Valongo Wharf was an old dock located in the port area of Rio de Janeiro used for the disembarkation of African captives. The slave trade supplied a labor force to meet an increasing global demand for commodities such as wood, coffee, cane sugar, and minerals. According to Unesco, "The wharf's function was originally related to auxiliary structures, such as warehouses, quarantine facilities, the lazaretto, and the New African cemetery. These are either lost or preserved only as underground remains in the buffer zone and are legally protected". In 1843, it was landfilled and part of its activities were transferred to clandestine slave ports farther from the capital city. It became a Unesco world heritage site in 2017 and is the most important physical trace of the arrival of African slaves in the Americas (Unesco, n.d.)

private family-run institution, we were their guests first and foremost. Many of our working processes had to adapt to their decision-making and cost management. Additionally, we required assistance from their staff, allies, and networks to ensure our legitimacy in the space. It was necessary for the curator to play a central role in validating the project within the institution and ensuring adequate working conditions, requiring compromises from all involved and preserving our artistic autonomy.

The next challenge was addressing the ethics of working with the site itself. We saw the gallery space not as a neutral space or "white cube" but more as a medium to propose another reading of the space. We also understood that this experience needed to emerge from a collective "place of speech" in which Black protagonism would be an essential part of the process. Therefore, we had to adopt a relational approach in our practice. Moreover, as white authors working with Black histories, this posed difficulties in finding adequate justification for the project's theme. Besides gaining the trust of the staff, we needed to enter a sensible dialogue with key groups and individuals in Black communities. We turned to dialogue with Black activist mothers in the Facebook group, some of whom agreed to engage with the project in its early stages and became our consultants throughout the process. Without their approbation, the project would have been impossible to conceive. Also, we sought spiritual permission to enter those sacred grounds in consultation with a *Babalaô*, a priest and a sage skilled in divination in the *Ifá* oracle[8] considering the importance of the site for Afro-Brazilian religions (Almeida, 2006: 93). At the end of this process, seeing that our intention seemed appropriate by several collaborators whose trust we could not do without, we felt sufficiently validated to continue. The exhibition, then, would be a medium through which the collective voice of the entire research process could speak and be listened to, as well as a space of mutuality and poetic activation.

**8**
Ifá is considered within the ancient Yoruba religious traditions an oracle consisting of a system of divination. That is, Ifá is part of a religious system of divine communication that has been transmitted for millennia through oral culture, part of the Yoruba religions and cultures from the region of present-day Nigeria. Yoruba traditions form the base of many diasporic religions like Candomblé and Umbanda in Brazil. To this day, the Ifá is accessed by a Babalaô, a sage or a priest who is authorized to communicate with the deities or orixás and provide advice and premonitions for everyday affairs, large and small.

## EMBODIED MEMORY

Our working method began with historical research about the site by consulting experts in fields of history, memory studies, critical race theory, and related fields. In dialogue with a historian affiliated with IPN who had written the most comprehensive historical account of the New Africans Cemetery, we learned about the aspects of cultural violence in burial practices during its operations in the 18th and 19th centuries (Medeiros da Silva Pereira, 2011). Another historian and writer specializing in the comparative history of slavery in the Americas highlighted the fact that those practices are historically equivalent to a holocaust, as practices of slavery are the result of genocidal politics across the colonial world. In a

**Figure 3**. Isabel Löfgren & Patricia Gouvêa, Ways of Navigating (detail), 2016. Mixed media, with a verse from the poem "Voices-Women" (1990) by Conceição Evaristo. Image: courtesy of the artists.

**Figure 4.** Isabel Löfgren & Patricia Gouvêa, Ways of Dwelling, 2016-2018, Photomontage based on photographs by Georges Leuzinger (c.1865), Marc Ferrez (c.1885) and details by Augusto Stahl (c.1865). **Previous page:** Photograph of rocks at the mouth of Guanabara Bay in Rio de Janeiro, ca. 1885. **To the right:** landscape photograph of the Valongo Wharf area with approximate location of New Africans cemetery in 1865. The figure is a photograph of a pregnant enslaved woman by August Stahl, ca. 1865. Notice the jewelry she is wearing as a sign of her African background. Image: courtesy of the artists.

conversation, they both discussed that the legacies of violence from slavery can still be felt in the injustices against Afro-descendants in many spheres of contemporary Brazilian life and that it was important for us to consider the notion of deep memory as we were looking at a past that is also the present (Castro, 2018).

We also turned to architectural mapping to locate the site within its urban setting and combined research of the site's observable and measurable characteristics with *topoanalysis* and the symbolic cultural resonances of the space (Bachelard, 1964/1994).[9] As a result, the site's typology as a cemetery, its function as a sacred space, and its reality as a space of trauma provided an opportunity to explore the notion of *deep embodied memory* (Culbertson, 1995). We understood the embodied memory of the site to be closely related to ancestral belonging. For this reason, the cemetery is today considered by Afro-descendants as a symbolic place of remembrance of African ancestry given that African roots are difficult if not impossible to trace due to forced separation and dispersal, as well as missing data of African captives upon arrival. Despite this, Afro-Brazilian populations have preserved an African imagination by way of oral histories, cultural traditions, and religious expressions that have survived over the centuries through a process of syncretism (Figure 3). Many of these expressions are considered synonymous with Brazilian culture more generally as they are manifest in musical traditions like samba – a musical style derived from drumming and dance traditions among Afro-Brazilian urban cultures – that coincidentally originated in an area not far from the memorial site.

Furthermore, for many Afro-descendants, the cemetery offers an epistemological shift in the understanding that the people lying underneath were presumably born free, which serves as proof of an Afrodiasporic existence not solely determined by slavery. In Afro-diasporic contexts, ancestry is understood as a transformational capacity that can be embodied in individuals through ritual practices, and also as a field of relations across place and time that allows the creation of other possible worlds and existences. It follows that a cosmological understanding of black motherhood liberates it from biopolitical oppression by slaveholders and post-abolition societies and opens up to a wide array of arcane creative, biological, spiritual, and cosmic powers that strengthen communities and society as a whole. In this sense, the term "black mother" becomes associated with empowerment.

Furthermore, the proximity between the cemetery and the sea also speaks to a spiritual dimension. Old photographs and maps of the port area show that the cemetery was once located very near the seashore, something which could indeed be felt from the humidity and salty air inside the gallery space. In some Afro-Brazilian religions like Umbanda, the sea is connected to the concept of the final resting place and known as the *Great Kalunga* ("the dwelling place of ancestors" in Bantu languages), while the *Small Kalunga* is the earth that receives the bodies and transforms them into seeds. The protector of the Great Kalunga is the *orixá*[10](goddess) Iemanjá. Iemanjá is the mother of all *orixás* and the protector of primordial waters which includes the sea and the amniotic fluid in which we are all born. This association of the ocean, motherhood, ancestry, and the site led us to create a piece showing these ancestral connections through water, by connecting the South American and African continents with a verse about women and ancestrality written on a Möbius strip, to signify the notion of an eternal return (Figure 3).We also translated the concepts of the *Great Kalunga* visually in a photomontage of archival photographs of a pregnant woman and the sea outside Rio's slave harbor (Figure 4) and of the *Small Kalunga* with profile images of the pregnant woman siding an oval archival photograph of the area where the cemetery is located (Figure 4, bottom). Here, the play between content and form are crucial – circles, ovals and möbius strips are as significant in conveying meaning as the photographs themselves and are visual elements that traveled across all the artworks we produced.

## NARRATIVES

From there, we tried to understand how these forgotten and imagined histories can be remembered and embodied to shed light on the very act of violent erasure itself as well as the possibility of creating other worlds. We wondered, can the site speak? In what ways can the voices of those buried underneath become embodied in the space? We asked Júlio César Medeiros da Silva Pereira, a historian affiliated with IPN, if he could find any data about women in the cemetery's few remaining records. Indeed, he found a rare entry named "Thereza's daughter", one of the few entries where

**9**
According to Gaston Bachelard, topoanalysis refers to "the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives" and that memories of the house and its various parts are not something remembered but rather something which is entwined with the present, a part of our ongoing current experience.

**10**
"Orixá" means deity in Yoruba language, which is the language spoken in Afro-Brazilian religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda. "Orixás" form the pantheon of Yoruba culture and religion in the region today known as Nigeria, Togo, and Benin, which is the foundation of Afro-diasporic religions in the Americas.

individuals are designated by name. We asked him to contribute with a short essay for our catalogue as a way of making Thereza's daughter speak through his words. In the text, he points to the very act of writing as an act of actualizing the existence of this child who otherwise would have fallen into oblivion (Medeiros da Silva Pereira, 2018). But how could Thereza's daughter's voice be heard as an embodied memory in the space itself?


**Figure 5.** Isabel Löfgren & Patricia Gouvêa, Ways of Speaking and Listening (video still), 2016. Video, 27'27. Courtesy of the artists. Top: Jessica Castro and Glauce Pimenta Rosa, Bottom: Jessica Castro and Gabriela Azevedo. In collaboration with Mats Hjelm (editor), and participation of Carla Gomes, Cristiana Rosendo da Silva, Gabriela Azevedo, Glauce Pimenta Rosa, Jessica Castro, Michelly Ferreira Alves, Nidia Mara Santos.Courtesy of the artists.

In our continuous dialogues with the black activist mothers from the Facebook group, we understood the importance of telling individual stories about birthing and motherhood and how they connect them to a practice of embodied ancestry. In that way, we thought they too could embody the voice of "Thereza's daughter". In our meetings and exchanges, sometimes songs were performed to illustrate certain parts of their stories, which are part of vocal cultures that equally embody ancestral knowledge into the present (See Figure 5).

We proposed to create a video artwork of black mothers telling their accounts of motherhood in a format where each would take turns listening and speaking to each other on screen. The video titled "Ways of Speaking and Listening" was a generational piece where seven mothers of various ages, backgrounds, and professions took turns responding to questions like "What does it mean to be a Black mother today?" and "Who listens when a Black woman cries?" – inspired by the writings of Conceição Evaristo, bell hooks and poems by Audre Lorde, among others. In the exhibition space, the 27-minute video played continuously, and the voices of the seven women echoed through the room and filled the entire space so that their stories could be heard as one experienced all the other artworks in the exhibition. This way, we broke with the normative silence in art exhibitions that confines sound to individualized experiences in headphones and turned this collective research process into an act of collective listening.


**Figure 6.** Isabel Löfgren and Patricia Gouvêa, Ways of Remembering - the Black Heroine mural) 2016-2018, silk-screen on wooden panels.Installation view of the mural, with the Mãe Preta Library in the foreground, Espaço Chão, São Luís do Maranhão, 2018. Image: courtesy of the artists.

Another way of making forgotten black women's voices "speak" in the space was by means of memorialization by creating effigies of significant Black *foremothers* visible in the space. Inspired by young black author and poet Jarid Arraes' series of *cordéis* (a genre of Brazilian folkloric pulp fiction-style poetry) with biographies of Black heroines (Arraes, n.d.), we created a portrait gallery of politicians, priestesses, queens, maroon leaders, feminists, composers, singers, and writers from the 16th to the 21st centuries, accompanied by short biographies of each heroine. It was first installed in IPN's research library, alluding to the tradition of portrait galleries in e.g., national libraries where patrons are celebrated on its walls (Figure 6). That way, the exhibition acquired an art pedagogical function of providing information about significant black women in Brazilian history who are otherwise nowhere to be found in official historiography.

## ARCHIVES

A significant part of our exhibition includes extensive archival research in photography and media archives from the 19th and early 20th centuries which reflects our scholarly interest in the social history of photography and the politics of visual representation. We discovered that one of the paradoxes of the memorialization of slavery is that while many of the physical landmarks from the times of slavery have been erased or buried away, Brazil has one of the most extensive visual archives of slavery in the world (Wood, 2013). After spending a long time immersed in visual archives looking at thousands of images, we realized that the erasure of the memory of slavery is not due to a lack of visual memory. Many of these images, such as engravings by Jean-Baptiste Debret (Figure 8), still circulate widely in Brazilian visual culture and are well known by the public and can be considered as "images of control" which are part of a white imaginary that has become synonymous with a historiography that casts a hegemonic gaze on black bodies and subjectivities in the Brazilian collective subconscious (Vaz and Carvalhaes, 2023). Rather, what exists is the construction of a white gaze that has normalized the way those images are looked at, reproduced, and appropriated which hinders a critical view on that type of representation. We see this process of purposeful forgetfulness by way of overexposure as a kind of *mystification*, which in John Berger's (1972) words is "the process of explaining away what might otherwise be evident".

Also, the image of Brazil, despite the variety of cultures and backgrounds that compose a diverse society, is deeply rooted in Western modes of representation inherited from a colonial past that often marginalizes other forms of expression as folklore or as objects of anthropologic inquiry.

**Figure 7.** Isabel Löfgren & Patricia Gouvêa, Ways of Seeing, 2016, Photography. Visual interference on photograph by Marc Ferrez, "Partida de colheita do café com carro de boi", c. 1885, Vale do Paraíba, Marc Ferrez/ Gilberto Ferrez Collection/ Instituto Moreira Salles Collection.

By challenging the visual politics of slavery, we proposed other ways of looking at familiar images of wet nurses and mothers in slavery archives, which included weaning our own white gaze in a reflexive visual gesture. Inspired by the notion of "ways of seeing" from visual culture studies (Berger, 1972, Mirzoeff, 2011, hooks, 1992/2014), we decided to re-signify several well-known archival images from the 19th century by famous painters and photographers through photomontage and visual interferences to create estrangement within the familiar. We mimicked the researcher's gaze by using magnifying glasses to highlight parts of the images where the protagonism of black mothers became more prominent, aiming to lead the viewer to look at these images in a different light (Figure 7). We also used ritual objects from Afro-Brazilian traditions such as beaded necklaces that are color-coded according to different *orixás*, such as Oxum, the goddess of motherhood, as a way to bestow a sacred dimension to the figures, while other elements are meant to redact elements and hide them from view (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8.** Isabel Löfgren & Patricia Gouvêa, Ways of Seeing, 2016, Photography. Visual interference on prints by Jean-Baptiste Debret, "Uma visita à casa de campo", in Voyage Pittoresque et Historique au Brésil (1834-35)]. Paris: Firmin Didot Frères.

## ACTIVATION

Between 2016 and 2021, the project won numerous grants and prizes and has been shown in five different cities in Brazil, and in group shows abroad. In each new city, we traveled with the core exhibition created in Rio de Janeiro and added new works connected to local contexts of memorialization of slavery and black motherhood to expand the research. Venues included public galleries, private foundations, and independent art spaces, each with different institutional infrastructures, management styles, and budget constraints. In each exhibition, existing artworks were sometimes installed differently, some series expanded while others were taken out, and the exhibition design changed entirely according to the space.

In Belo Horizonte (2017), we turned to newspaper archives from the early 19th century to highlight how black women's breast milk was a highly valued commodity amidst a gold rush in the region. In São Paulo (2018), we addressed the complex process of the construction of the "Black Mother" monument in one of the city's main squares first initiated by the independent Black press of the 1920s to chart the organization of early Black social movements in Brazil and the importance of monumentalization as a tool for emancipation. In São Luís do Maranhão in northern Brazil (2018-19), we traveled to matriarchal *quilombos* (maroon communities) in the Amazon region to highlight the political importance of black motherhood and maroon cultural traditions in the struggles for environmental justice. In Campinas (2021), the exhibition was part of a photography festival, and we explored old photographic methods like cyanotypes with a local Afro-Brazilian cultural center to document their community's knowledge of ancestral healing techniques as a form of political resistance, in a time when the extreme-right government in Brazil was clamping down on Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage and religious expressions (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Ways of Healing (Ancestral Herbarium) (detail), 2021, Cyanotypes on paper. **Left:** Image from workshop with participants. **Top:** detail of the finished work. Authors: Alessandra Ribeiro, Ana Nery Carvalho Lopes, Cleide Eunice Neves Preira, Danilo Soares de Lima, Juliana Ribeiro, Leonardo Felizardo, Maria Alice Ribeiro, Mario Sergio, Zeila Regina Lourenço, Vera Zuim from the Comunidade Jongo Dito Ribeiro, Campinas, Brazil. Courtesy of the artists.

In terms of public engagement, each exhibition was activated and embodied in different ways. At IPN, the exhibition opened with an improvised performance-manifesto by two of the participants of the "Ways of Speaking and Listening" video (Figure 5). We printed a small publication with posters of our artworks as a collectible item, and initiated a campaign for donations of Afro-feminist books for IPN's research library. Our performers continued with us to the next exhibition in São Paulo where we created an internship for art history university students to develop an educational program for visitors. We built a large round table and sitting area in the center of the space where people could read and interact, as a symbol of the importance of sharing knowledge. In São Luís, the independent art space shared the premises with a restaurant serving ancestral African cuisine, and together we created a special *Mãe Preta* dish for the exhibition (Figure 9). In Campinas, the exhibition was activated mainly online due to COVID-19 lockdowns with live performances and virtual tours of the exhibition. Added to that, we gave numerous artist talks with intense conversations with the public. The project has also been part of group exhibitions and academic seminars and has been cited in several academic studies and art publications. We estimate that around sixty individuals were part of the entire project, as consultants, collaborators, staff, and professionals, and around 10,000 visitors have visited all the exhibitions. The entire project is documented in a catalogue with five critical essays by scholars based in Sweden, Brazil, and the USA (Löfgren and Gouvêa, 2018).The entire exhibition with more than 70 artworks was donated to Museu do Arte do Rio's (MAR - Rio Art Museum) permanent collection in 2022. The Museum is located in front of the Valongo Wharf, near the memorial site where this journey began. This way, the artworks we created have symbolically returned to their ancestral home.

**Figure 9.** Different forms of activation. **Top left:** Glauce Pimenta Rosa and Jessica Castro perform during the opening of Mãe Preta at Galeria Mário Schemberg, Funarte, São Paulo, 2018. **Top right:** the team of Espaço Chão, and independent art space in São Luís do Maranhão, 2018., In the foreground, maroon community leaders Dona Zica and Dona Anacleta chant and perform during the opening night. **Bottom right:** a visitor consults the Mãe Preta library, consisting of Black feminist publications. The collection was donated to Quilombo Santa Rosa dos Pretos school community library. **Middle right:** Chef Leila Oliveira from the restaurant "Ancestral Kitchen" at Espaço Chão serves ritual food created especially for Mãe Preta, 2018.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

After several iterations, through this collective artistic journey we were able to develop an artistic approach sensitive to the memory of historical sites with what art sociologist Jacques Leenhardt (2023) has called "a strategy of care, respect, and attention" (p. 119). This process can be summarized in five parallel layers that together constitute a synthesis of our artistic research process: staging, mapping, narratives, archives, and activation.

We hope to have shown how we extracted poetic resonance from the research process in each of these layers, and how these revealed new forms of embodied knowledge thus enriching the experience of a contested site and the public by translating the concept of deep memory into poetic form. This process can be considered a form of "embodied" research along the lines outlined by Spatz (2017) in which the researcher considers the process (the "how") a vehicle for experimentation, empowerment and self-transformation. Moreover, this iterative artistic methodology can also generate ruptures, displacements and critical developments, often transforming the cultural institutions we collaborated with. As Walmeri Ribeiro (2021) inspires us, we position ourselves in this work as "porous bodies", as a "way of being in the world, of connecting, of mixing, creating zones of contamination and contagion, without edges, borders, (...) capable of feeling, listening, and incorporating (becoming a body) micro-movements, micro-sounds, tactilities, and temporalities, as well as macro-movements and the amplitude of the whole in which it is inserted" (p. 23) (author's translation).

In our specific case, the "porosity" occurred in three dimensions. First, by embodying knowledge acquired throughout the process and transforming it into poetic experiences. Second, the embodiment of research and the artistic process in developing our vision, shared with others through artistic, performative and educational devices, and resulting in a greater understanding of what it means to remember open wounds in past history regarding the deep memory of slavery and maternal justice. It shows how research-based artistic processes can also be part of social and political engagement. Third, in contributing to a larger movement of research-based artistic practices in Brazilian contemporary art that Leenhardt (2023) calls the production of *dialectical images* in a "collective action of rupture", part of a larger political and cultural movement that critically addresses the visual history of coloniality (p. 121).

Although our process has resulted in working methodology that we have improved through trial and error, it is important to highlight that it is flexible and open-ended, with the ability to be discarded or reconfigured. After seven years, we have stopped producing new artworks but *Mãe Preta* keeps resurfacing in new contexts, such as in this text, which expands the possibilities for reflection about research-based art practices where research itself can be considered as an embodied poetic form.

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## BIO NOTES

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***Flora Mary Bartlett*** is a visual anthropologist working on landscape relations in the context of environmental challenges in rural Sweden. Photography forms a key part of her research methodology and she has collaborated with museums including Nordiska museet in Stockholm.

***Jeffrey Benjamin*** is an artist and archaeologist living in upstate New York, USA. He received a PhD in Archaeology from Columbia University in 2022.

***Charles Berret*** is an interdisciplinary researcher studying the history and philosophy of media and information technologies. He has taught at Columbia University, Yeshiva University, the University of British Columbia, and Linköping University.

***Karin Edberg*** has a PhD in sociology and works as Assistant Professor at Tema Technology and Social Change, Linköping University, Sweden. Her research concerns energy transition, mobility, and infrastructural siting, with a focus on urban planning and everyday practices.

***Patricia Goìvea*** is a visual artist and researcher specializing in photography, video, film, and installations. She is a PhD student in

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***Anne Kaun*** is Professor at the Department of Media and Communication Studies, Södertörn University, Sweden, and a Wallenberg Academy Fellow studying the democratic implications of automated decisions making, artificial intelligence and digitalization more generally in the welfare sector.

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***Isabel Löfgren and Patricia Goúvea*** have been working as an artistic duo since 2010, with long-term artistic research and exhibitions about visual memory and forgotten histories connected to historical sites and public spaces in Brazil. Their main projects are Benches of Time, 2010-2015 (www.bancodetempo.info), and Black Mother, 2015 - ongoing (www.maepreta.net).

***Yvonne Magnusson*** has a bachelors degree in archaeology and works as a curator at Regionmuseet Skåne in Kristianstad. She has previously worked as a curator at Malmö museum and has many years of experience working in museums with issues related to collections, collection management and documentation.

***Marko Mikael Marila***, PhD, is an archaeologist and artist based at Linköping University, Sweden. His current research deals with the histories, heritage archaeologies, and arts of anti-uranium mining social movements in Finland and Sweden.

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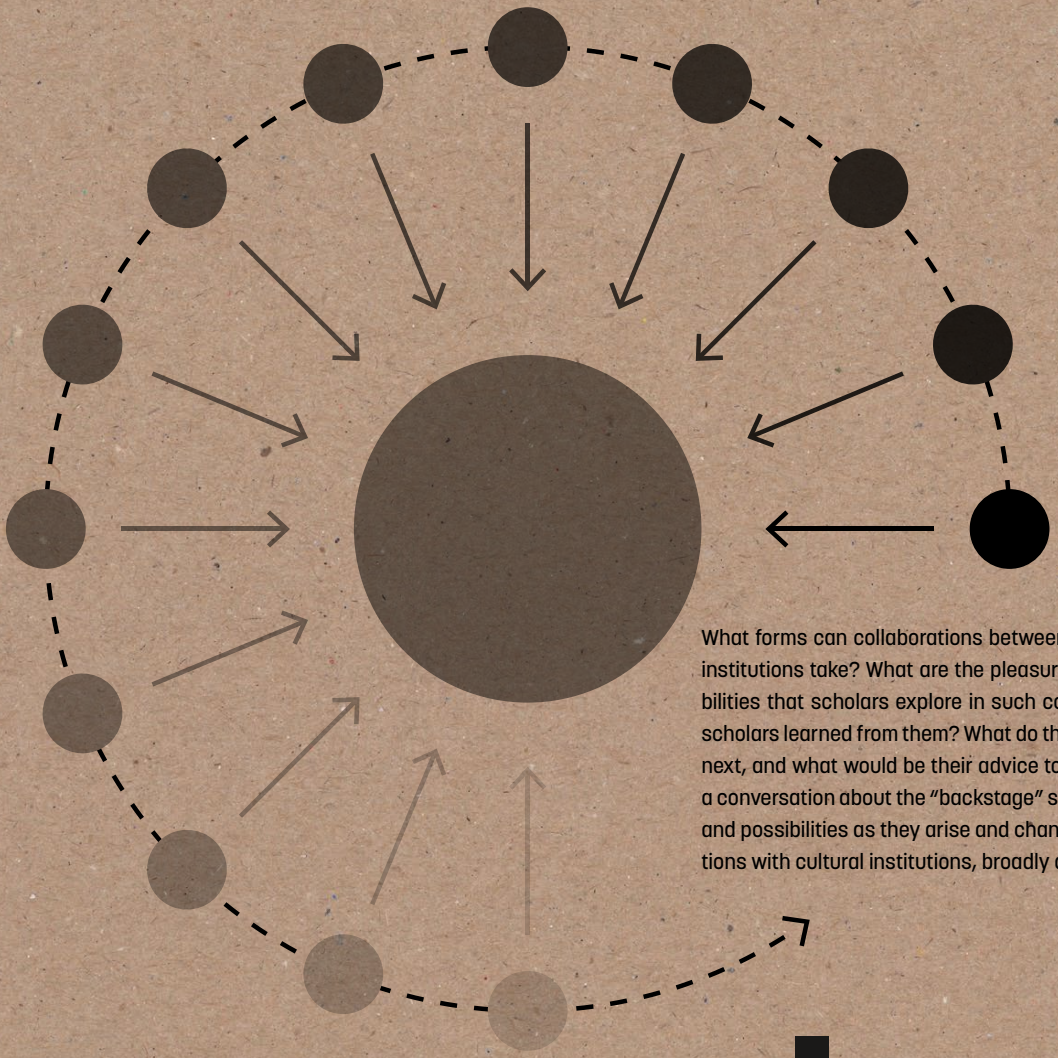

What forms can collaborations between academics and cultural institutions take? What are the pleasures, difficulties and possibilities that scholars explore in such collaborations? What have scholars learned from them? What do they find inspiring to try out next, and what would be their advice to others? This book offers a conversation about the "backstage" stories, dilemmas, failures, and possibilities as they arise and change in scholarly collaborations with cultural institutions, broadly defined.

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