

Tutke Research School, Uniarts Helsinki, January 25th 2018

Artists in doctoral studies

Keynote: When Cultural Policies Are Failing

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I think: The concept of language is manifested in words. Beyond what is said there is nothing. Or is it? Words are used to manifest power. Words are there to be claimed. The words of politics could as well be ours. How can we use them?

I say:

When Culture Policies Are Failing

When we want to improve professional skills, when we need new networking opportunities, partnerships and contacts – what do we do? How do we develop the innovative models in capacity building, cross-disciplinary exchange and co-creational approach for artistic production and presentation? How do we get beyond current norms and systems? What does it really mean to work as an artist in Europe today? These are questions I struggle with in my work as the director of Dansehallerne in Copenhagen, a house for production, collegial discourse, residencies, research and public presentations. In my work I carry hope for change, doubts in relation to the current political situation in Europe and hesitation in relation to the passiveness I experience in many situations. In this talk I will give you some reflections on the current situation with a specific focus on Europe and raise some urgent questions I would love to discuss with you.

I think: I would love to hear what you are not saying, so I will have to focus on listening meanwhile speaking. Maybe I manage...

I say:

What is going on?

In the wake of populist challenges to a unified and inclusive Europe, we can identify the rise of fear and discomfort in societies and the changing understanding of common welfare as key for access and inclusion. Access to art and the sense of cultural belonging, is highly influenced by these factors, as is freedom of speech. To whom are we listening?

Cultures develop when people live together. Culture is our common foundation, our societal

contract. The arts spring from their cultural foundations to describe and express the incomprehensible, inviting us to dialogue. We need each other. It is a mutual dependency for a democratic society: art/culture/policy. Or you could say: artist/audiences and the public/politicians. Art nourishes imagined futurities. Therefore we need to upgrade strategies and activities in relation to today's societal and political changes. We need to focus on the inclusive activities that will leave indelible marks on the cultural ecosystem of Europe by delivering beyond current norms.

When cultural policies fail, there is much at stake. With this in mind, we need to strengthen the capacity of the artistic community towards transnational and global mobility, audience engagement and cross-disciplinary capacity building. This can only be done by the integration of citizens, a search for common values and a widened dialogue and knowledge transfer within research. All this will promote accessibility, diversity and social inclusion through an inter-disciplinary and co-creational approach, and open up new perspectives for artistic representation. If we succeed, it will generate new knowledge for a sustainable cultural development in Europe.

***I think:** Words, words, words. Are they comprehensible? Some things have to be said, to be said out loud. Is this the way to do it?*

I say:

An inclusive approach will allow us to capture the benefits of diversification and integration, engaging a far wider segment of the population in and through artistic processes and projects, thereby strengthening the social role of the arts. Easy to say, but how do we do that? What can nourish our curiosity and creativity? What would give substance to insights and an understanding of life?

When subsidies are re-drawn, artists are forced to be more creative than ever to make a living. Artists are by desire and necessity experienced entrepreneurs, active in developing new formats for working, sharing and presenting, creating our own working opportunities and thinking outside the box. New models for organisation, production and presenting (you could call it business models) create new markets. As artists we need knowledge, training to improve, tools and platforms for expression of ideas, dreams and narratives. We need new tools and models also for participation in the direction of cross-disciplinary research and dialogues which will improve cultural values, skills, social and urban competences. This in turn is linked to the type of trail-blazing activism that pioneer a disruptive approach, using the creative power of art to explore paths towards norm critical innovation.

I think: Can one identify with the concept of entrepreneurship? Of Innovation? I know most artists don't, but still it's the words in use. Can we claim it to match our need? We know from research that our work has an effect on societal developments in terms of creativity and innovation, so why not?

I say:

During the first decade of this century, the dialogue between art, humanities and business focussed on the development of creative industries. This was stimulated by several infrastructural investments. The arts were more or less forced into a utilitarian perspective. Later the focus shifted, and today it's mostly about how collaborations between art, science and business can trigger innovation, develop creative tools and strengthen cultural identities as a precondition for growth, and the arts has again its role as art. "Heart of the Matter" is a report on the state of humanities (including the arts) delivered to the American Congress in June 2013.¹ What's really interesting with that report is the ideological discrepancy between the politicians and the market about the role of the humanities and the arts. It shows that representative C.E.Os. see a greater value in the arts and humanities as important factors for success.

The role of the artist and the relevance of art have changed dramatically the last few years. Art relies on our ability to imagine, on a broad definition of the concept of language, identity and culture, and pushes us towards a widening of cultural norms and the formal set of rules employed in our society. Art helps develop both an individual and societal sense of self; it sharpens our senses and demands action, participation and reaction. Art is what feeds our ability to think beyond the given.

The rapid expansion and diversification of Europe's population is excellent news. Population diversification has been associated with increases in innovation.² But the opportunities to be an artist, to reap the benefits of innovation, are not evenly distributed across city populations.³ Whilst a handful of exceptional individuals succeed, many more struggle or simply do not take

¹ http://www.humanitiescommission.org/_pdf/hss_report.pdf

² Nathan. M. 2015. Same difference? Minority ethnic inventors, diversity and innovation in the UK. *Journal of Economic Geography* Vol 15 (1): 129-168.

³ Jung. T, & O. Ejermo 2014. Demographic patterns and trends in patenting: Gender, age, and education of inventors. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* Vol 86: 110-125.

part. In several cities around the world, this has led to an increase in social tension as the *knowledge society* delivers extreme wealth to some - and very little to others. Some experience being included, some being excluded.

I think: Yes, but has not this always been the case? That seem to be unavoidable in a capitalistic and neo-liberal society. I simply can not see the alternative. Still we must work to change the system. I must work to make a difference. Doubts. What to do...

I say:

Europe is made up of diverse cultures, political systems and civil conditions. We must involve stakeholders and communities to achieve inclusive access to art; to artistic action and participatory co-creation processes. I speak from experience, having toured, produced, published and lectured globally. From the European perspective: to work as an artist in Georgia, Turkey, Croatia or Spain, means working under totally different conditions than in Sweden, Germany, Belgium or France. Public accessibility varies just as much.

Many European art institutions (particularly performing arts institutions) have difficulties attracting audiences. At the same time, many artists turn their back on traditional forums and venues, looking for new markets that allow alternative formats of production and presentation. I believe we must work cross-disciplinary and involve stakeholders and communities to achieve inclusive access to art; to artistic action and participatory co-creation processes. This in turn, put new demands on cultural bureaucracies, on institutions, on education and research, on organisations, on audiences, on the public and on the politicians. On us artists. I believe we need institutions as well as the so called independent sector, but there has to be a societal acceptance on more equal footing.

To gain knowledge transfer and policy outreach, we need to implement trans-national multi-stakeholder and policy-maker dialogues. But first and foremost we must question growing borders in Europe and focus on the concept of public, open accessible and inclusive cultural and creative spaces, strongly devoted to the idea of a borderless and open society. A society with plenty of space for the arts. This puts the question of mobility in focus, the kind of mobility that will stimulate curiosity and empathy. Europe must be seen in a global context. Investments in global mobility pay off. A broad involvement of citizens, a connection between urban realities and cultural interdependencies will strengthen ties between citizens

and promote European values as well as artistic and cultural exchange. Participatory and socially inclusive arts invite to close encounters. The idea of *the commons* has to be seen as a key towards inclusion and accessibility.

Diversity invites to a richer future. Diversity in population, diversity in the arts. If diversity is not engaged with, it opens itself up to the corrosive forces of segregation.⁴ As artists we challenge the societal processes by engaging in norm critical interventions. Participation, co-creation and interactive performances in public spaces are central, not only by addressing new audiences but also by strengthening the perception and social role of art and actions in society. Artistic and societal involvement by citizens establish participatory processes, enabling intercultural and interfaith dialogues. Cultural heritage can be an enriching component. And “*an act of hospitality can only be poetic*”, Jacques Derrida⁵

A lot can be done to improve the situation. We can do it by creating art, by focussing on education and research or by engaging in politics and in the development of cultural policies. We need strong cultural policies, not just for survival and material wellbeing, but for long-term, sustainable development. We all need faith in the future based on curiosity, and respect for who we are or long to be.

Article 27 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*⁶ gives everybody the right to participate in culture and enjoy the arts. Therefor, when we talk about the necessity on development and improvement, it's not just about the life of the artists, but about everyone. Together we can move beyond what we are as individuals. We need to come together.

***I think:** I really believe that we together can move beyond what we are as individuals. That is part of the beauty with art, this invitation to share a moment, an event a thinking, a doing. To give space for the subjective experience. Something beyond the rational agendas.*

⁴ Danlida, I & J. Granat Thorslund (eds.) 2011. *Innovation and Gender*. Vinnova & Tillväxverket: Stockholm. MacKenzie D. & J. Wajcman 1999. *The Social Shaping of Technology* (2nd edition.) McGraw Hill Education: New York. Stirling A. 2010. From Enlightenment to Enablement: opening up choices for innovation. In *The Innovation for Development Report 2009-10*: 199-210. Palgrave Macmillan: London.

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jacques-Derrida>

⁶ <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

I say:

Dansehallerne⁷ is a national platform and a leading institution for contemporary choreographic performative art in Denmark, located in central Copenhagen with a small branch in Aarhus. This is where I work. The institution is financed by an operating grant from the Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of Copenhagen to about 50%. The rest comes from private Danish funds, Nordic and European funds, tickets and other sales.

Besides the curated programme, we provide meeting places for everyone interested in experiencing choreographic practices, research processes and critical debate. We take a leading position in the development of new formats for public events, interactive and creative activities for all ages, including the very young and children. We conduct high-level professional training, courses and seminars; provide premises for rehearsals, artistic development work, research and residencies as well as administrative support for artistic production through a Project Centre⁸. We are member of several international and national networks. Beside the great number of visiting artists, there are about 200 in-house artists (DH members) using the facilities of Dansehallerne for training, rehearsing, sharing and presenting. We present around 180 performances in Copenhagen and 300 on tour around Denmark on a yearly basis, with an average occupancy of 82% for approximately 59000 in the audience 2016.

I was invited to take the lead of Dansehallerne about two years ago. My undertakings included re-organizing the institution and turn the “old” way of working with facilitating and renting out spaces and venues for performances, to a curated programme, research and development work and more. This was done in close collaboration with artists and staff with a special focus on empowerment, on activating the artistic community towards more engagement and artist-led activities.

In close collaboration with national and international artists, researchers, academic institutions (where Uniarts Helsinki is one) and art forum, we have initiated an artist driven cross-disciplinary and international artist’s research lab and residency programme to support the progress of contemporary choreographic performative arts. The programme contributes with research platforms, strong networks, collegial exchange and public venues. We have also

⁷ <http://www.dansehallerne.dk/en>

⁸ <http://www.dansehallerne.dk/en/project-centre/>

initiated the *Innovative Leadership Network* as a new cross-disciplinary network, with the aim of giving artists a chance to develop new, innovative methods for managing residence and research activities. The network is based on the needs expressed within the various art disciplines employing choreography as a method; in collaboration with international artist driven and institutional networks. Dansehallerne is also a partner in *Centriphery*, an EU project that incorporates a wide range of inter-connected activities to reach the goals of audience development while incorporating transnational mobility and capacity building. This we do by the establishment of curiosity zones, which include artistic and educational workshops, info-sessions and skills enhancing workshops for local artists and citizens. The development of the project explicitly addresses governmental, societal, ecological and economical issues.

Action taken

When *The Screening Protest*⁹ project brings together political science and media studies perspectives to explore problems through comparing mediations of political dissent across time, space and narrative genre; when the *Non Existence Centre*¹⁰ in Sweden act socially, politically and artistically, posing the question: “What are the potentials of working with an expanded view of art as ongoing social and political processes?; when dancer and choreographer *Rita Macalo*¹¹ who immigrated to Britain from Portugal twenty years ago, spend time in *The Jungle* (refugee camp in Calais) to catch the voices of the refugees; when *Anne Theresa de Keersmæker* invites to *A SLOW WALK*¹² through the streets of Brussels; when *Beka Economopoulos* works with *Not An Alternative*¹³, an arts collective and non-profit organization in Brooklyn with a mission to affect popular understandings of events, symbols, and history; when *Leónidas Martín Saura*¹⁴, artist and professor at Barcelona University develop collective projects in art and activism, when *Elena Agathokleous* at the Mitos center in Cyprus take part in *Songs of My Neighbours*¹⁵, a project that took place in Poland, Italy and Cyprus; when *Galerie*¹⁶ an immaterial art gallery dealing exclusively with immaterial artworks to support and promote immaterial object hood; when top artists provide one-to-one support to creative artists who have fled their homelands in *FLAX* – Foreign Local Artistic

⁹ <http://screeningprotest.com>

¹⁰ <http://www.stallbergsgruva.se/english/>

¹¹ <http://www.freedomfestival.co.uk/event/instant-dissidence-presents-dancing-strangers-calais-english/>

¹² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUWZ1_zmrig

¹³ <http://notanalternative.org>

¹⁴ <http://leodecerca.net/tag/leonidas-martin-saura/>

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrwUy6xuYU8>

¹⁶ <http://www.galerie.international/about/>

Xchange¹⁷; when Norwegian artist *Tormod Carlsen* place his project/object *O - The Healing Lump*¹⁸ in various places; when artist *Sara Mara Samsara*, creates the site of Nicosia history of inter-communal strife, violence and war in *Nicosia Metro Map*¹⁹; when performance artist *Erdem Gunduz*²⁰ (Standing man) stood silently for eight hours, facing a portrait of Kemal Ataturk; when *RISK*²¹, an artist collective based in Copenhagen over the last seven years have developed their collective thinking; when *Amanda Steggel*, Motherboard project²², is working with how networked technologies have influenced the way people work, socialize, create and share information; when *Koen Vanmechelen*²³, a Belgian artist investigate bio-cultural diversity through *the Cosmopolitan Chicken Project* and create *The open University of Diversity*; when Shinobu Akimoto and Matthew Evans I Canada creates the virtual institution: *Residency For Artists on Hiatus*²⁴ for artists not making art – **it makes a difference!** The list could go on for ever...

Artists and theorists engaged in art, we meet, we share and we develop. We create forum for collegial exchange and collaborations. In the Dansehallerne projects *Dans din Nabo*²⁵, *Centriphery* and *The Artists Research Lab and Residency Programme*²⁶, in the way we facilitate the work of the artists, the way we curate – this is what we do. Yes, artists challenge the societal processes by engaging in norm critical interventions. But how do we deal with the question on responsibilities? Questioning hierarchies and norms? The given?

The question I bring to you, is about this, it is about the concept of *artist driven* and *artist lead*. To my experience, many artists accept the given, accept and adopt to old fashion bureaucratic system and non functioning infrastructure. Many artists very easy overhand the responsibilities of reference groups and decision making bodies to producers, critics, curators and others. Overhanding the responsibilities for criteria, for defining markets and thereby defending conventional thinking based on the lack of relevant insights in contemporary arts.

¹⁷ <http://flax-culture.com>

¹⁸ <https://www.tormodcarlsen.com/o>

¹⁹ https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1JNtrUKvnmjM8cLX0Dh05YUrXXlw&hl=en_US&ll=35.127131677693995%2C33.35642699999994&z=12

²⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/18/turkey-standing-man>

²¹ <http://risk.nu>

²² <http://www.liveart.org/motherboard/>

²³ <https://www.koenvanmechelen.be>

²⁴ <https://residencyforartistsonhiatus.org>

²⁵ <https://www.dansehallerne.dk/forestilling/dans-din-nabo/>

²⁶ <http://www.dansehallerne.dk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/The-Artists-Research-Lab-and-Residency-Programme.pdf>

With this much said, there are of course also those producers, critics, curators and others with the most brilliant minds and the updated knowing and doing we cannot do without.

Back to my initial remark – We need each other. It is a mutual dependency for a democratic society: art/culture/policy, art and theory, the practice of thinking and doing – together. Together we need to turn some hierarchies upside down and upgrade strategies and activities in relation to today's societal and political needs. I believe we, as artists, must take more responsibility in the process and claim the right to decision making bodies and funding structures. We need to take action and present constructive proposals for change. Culture policies are failing. What can we do?

***I think:** I trust the unspoken, yet talking. I focus my listening on all that beyond words. I live in a society where words are the given, that what legitimize our actions. I simply have to use them. I claim the right to the interpretation of them. The words of politics could as well be ours.*

I say:

Thank you for listening. Now, let us talk - on and from our different experiences, join forces and just do it.