

# Throw the Stones Really Hard at Your Target

or

## Rest in Peace

On the Artist's Struggle to Gain Access to Research in Her Art

1. **(I am an Artist) The Domain of the Impossible *and* the Mounds of Stones.**
2. **(I am a Professor) Inquisitive and Curiosity-Driven Research *and* Endless Expanses.**
3. **(I am a Vice-Chancellor) The Long Arm of Politics *and* the High Mountain Walls**

### 1. (I am an Artist) The Domain of the Impossible *and* the Mounds of Stones

Something exists that can entice the mind and body to go beyond the ordinary: a something that cannot be defined and which not even timidity can deter us from. It is nonetheless real and lends itself readily to idealisation or, in certain cases, can only be approached through torment and anguish. Mind and body are preoccupied by this something and will, understanding and memory are required in order to approach it. You have to make an effort. But without this ineffable “something”, existence becomes one-dimensional. And yet it is hard to make your way across untrodden ground between wind-fallen trees and mounds of stones.

There are many forms of life in a mound of stones. These cairns are easily built since they are made up of many smaller parts. The mounds easily fall apart. When I feel threatened by the passivity of others, I pick up a stone and throw it as hard as I can at specific targets. With luck this allows me to make cracks in facades that are far too composed; cracks and gaps that can expose what was meant but no one meant to say. In this way our linguistic senses can be activated in various realms of consciousness. Reality expands, thought and feeling become involved. Then I want to stake out the place for words in language. I want a long-term lease (a life-long one!) and the rent has to be low so that I can devote myself to developing this language and not just use it. But who would sign such an agreement? I am an artist in what many people maintain is the domain of the impossible.

My success is stifled by productivity. Having to produce more, more quickly and more cheaply *while* keeping the work good. It has to be of high quality but no one is prepared to say what that is. My works are supposed to be popular and to attract a wide audience no matter what format they are produced in. I am expected to continue to be creative, surprising, revolutionary and constantly achieve the impossible *but* no one asks how, what or why. I keep on throwing stones, stamping on the gravel and looking for gaps. I want to throw the kind of stones that reach the sea and that can get the water to rise, to make waves surge up and rinse the world. I know why *but* not how it will turn out or what it will be.

Dance begins in stillness. That is how it always is. Dance is there, when nothing else is left. Movement takes the body over, providing the initiative. As part of a continual search for meaning, it is the body which carries movement towards a physical and intellectual context (towards a linguistic dimension). Through dance the body regains its contours and we become both aware of time and space and stakeholders within them. To achieve this desire, understanding and memory are required. Movement requires energy and it takes it. A permanent imbalance has to be corrected and adapted to a new form. Where or what am I?

When am I what I want to be? Why? In communication with others I remain, or am within, I have gone past or am here....

Judge, criticise, hit, hate, divert yourself and enjoy! *Then* you can think. *Then* you can question. *Then* you can act and try to imagine how many “thens” there are. That thing coming up – I’m just going to...*then* I act. The diversions of life? I want to become what I experience and so I force my way into my body, even using that mind of mine that frequently keeps outside it. I want to know that you have noticed me, that you have experienced my body as unforgettable. Is it you or me who is mad? Who says it is possible? All our memories defend themselves against oblivion. I pray. Bits of gravel in my mouth.

I want my art to affect others. I want my art to affect other artists as well and entice them into dialogue. I want to share my conceptual world, my questions, my working process and to gain insight into those of other people in order to have myself – what I think I know and am capable of – tested. I want to conduct conversations at an advanced level into art and artistic practice with other artists who have been working for a long time and have formulated questions that call for a great deal of attention, time, reflection and an evolved working process. I want to be able to do research and to be paid to do it. I want to be able to afford to take the time to think, act, write and speak. I want to expand my place in language. I want to see the movements of bodies and objects as creative of meaning, as forcing the pace. To allow events to be idealised, brutalised or to encompass doubts of all kinds. I want to take charge of the sphere usually assigned to words and to make visible what they are not designed to reveal. What I want is what can take me forward and which cannot be developed under the conditions imposed by the market.

## **2. (I am a Professor) Inquisitive and Curiosity-Driven Research *and* Endless Expanses.**

Why do I need to do research? Why does the higher education arts institution need the artist as researcher? Why research and not the “ordinary” artistic process?

What is the artist looking for in his or her working process? What are the issues that drive the work? Many prominent artists possess a unique form of knowledge which is communicated through the finished work. When the path they take to reach their goal is documented and the questions arising as a result are made available to others so that they can follow the process, examine it critically and learn from it, more people can acquire greater knowledge and gain inspiration and stimulus in their own work. This is how knowledge develops in the arts. A body of knowledge which, driven by curiosity, contributes to the development of forms of artistic expression and which is shared with the wider world through both the working process itself and the resulting work of art. Many artists apply an exploratory perspective as part of their process, *but* only a few are interested in research. Many artists have an ability to look beyond all the conceivable hindrances and limitations to see the benefit of a more extensive perspective that opens up those endless expanses *but* only a very few are also interested in formulating it in the documentation and the process of reflection around their own (solitary) or shared (team) work which serves as part of the foundation on which the legitimacy of research is based

You cannot sing with gravel in your month. You can dance with gravel in your mouth, spitting out the odd little stone every now and then, liberating the process from minor

obstructions. Moving mountains is harder. Insights into how we can advance our knowledge, develop our skills and our capacity to communicate what is to be portrayed are important and desirable. The process requires time, space, resources and an environment in which research methods and practices can be developed on an artistic basis. Providing a stable foundation for artistic research also forms the groundwork for cooperation with other fields of intellectual endeavour. The new knowledge which may be acquired is essential for the development of artistic practices, educational strategies and methods, as well as issues to do with the labour market. A warm, clean floor is a wonderful thing to be naked on – sweeping away stones, gravel and sand.

Through being forced to put my thoughts into words in relation to the form and content of the work, I learn more about what I do. You have to pay attention. By bringing the work into relation with the theories and practices of others, I also learn more about my own methods, and by applying them and making them comprehensible, others can determine whether they are useful or to be discarded. I want to make good art. I want to be able to articulate what I mean by good and measure my criteria against those of other peoples. I want to do what I have not yet done, known, proved able to do. I want to draw attention to the formation of knowledge that occurs in artistic practice and I want to do it through artistic creations of various kinds.

Artistic research is not one form of research but many. What the institute of higher education offers me as an artist doing research is a space, time, resources and an environment in which the work can be developed, discussed, criticised, stimulated and linked up with what others are doing and have done in the area. What are offered to me are the possibilities unavailable elsewhere for achieving a more advanced process. As an artist, I serve as professor for a limited period of time, having been approved by my peers. I carry out my research, interact with the staff of the university and with students, participate in the development of the field of studies for longer or shorter periods and then leave the college to return reinvigorated to my work as an artist.

There is a widespread notion among many artists that it is only the mediocre, those artists who cannot survive in the marketplace, who seek refuge in the educational sector and in artistic research in Sweden. This may have been the case in certain sectors but with the strategic development of higher education and the foundations of artistic research, opportunities have opened up for the most prominent, advanced and creative artists to develop their methods and research practice on an artistic basis under the aegis of the academy.

In an “ordinary” artistic process, the conditions of the market place with its requirements for productivity, effectiveness and results apply, often under considerable time constraints. The product/performance has to be adapted to the requirements of the market. There is rarely any opportunity for documentation of the work or reflection on it while the freedom to work on developing knowledge in relation to specific issues is extremely limited. As part of the process of artistic research, however, opportunities are provided for asking questions and seeking answers on the basis of the artist’s needs rather than those of the market. The arts education institution has a great responsibility here in relation to the fields of artistic endeavour it represents. Higher education and research provide a way for the artist to develop and to participate in the creation of non-material values while making comprehensible the conditions of creativity. They can help ensure that the questions that are asked can strengthen artistic practice while also contributing to a development of the market, of art and its

interaction with the wider world.

It is vital to draw attention to art as a means of attaining the knowledge and insights we would otherwise not acquire. Demonstrating the ways in which art operates helps to develop our communicative resources and can contribute to the creation of greater awareness about the importance of culture for the development of a society. An awareness that art can in fact be both fun and frightening and that it is absolutely essential that art as art has its place in our everyday lives since in so doing it provides a voice for what would otherwise not be said. The world is vast. The artist doing research represents the kinds of thinking, movement and action which - in their presentation - have ramifications that extend both outward and inward in entirely different directions. Involving body and mind, the physical and the intellectual – art is a key player in the formation of new knowledge.

### **3. (I am a Vice-Chancellor) – the Long Arm of Politics *and* High Mountains**

Here are a few lines from Hans Larsson's writing on intuition from the end of the nineteenth century which both inspire me and give me courage: *“how our everyday lives are concealed from us by a mist...in such a way that though the vision of our outer eye is freed, the mind cannot grasp nor comprehend everything, seeing only here and there a fragment of reality. We move through a landscape that our senses perceive without our minds opening to its beauty. And when the mind does open, it conjures it all forth and sees and hears everything, feeling that an obscuring wall has been removed. The mist then has lifted, though not entirely. All that the mind sees and hears is continually slipping away, hiding itself and becoming visible again, and the mind perceives before it a slowly shifting, transparent shroud, a remnant of the everyday mist – the veil of poetry.”*

Contemporary art involves forms of expression anchored in contemporary historiography and uses codes that are comprehensible depending on the cultural affiliations of both the artist and the audience. Art demands our participation and this, in turn, requires the use of our will, our desire. Where there is an unwillingness to experience what is impossible to predict, the ego is distanced from a possible encounter. You feel bored, experience displeasure or simply decline the address made to you by the work in its entirety. You do not wish to see, you do not want to hear. You refuse to test the flavour or “smell” your way to information. No thanks. This does not serve to differentiate the encounter with art from the encounter with another person or the encounter with a new environment. Our will guides our senses. How is it that a refusal is so readily at hand? How can a No be turned into a Yes? What makes us curious?

We invest our desire and our hunger for the intangible in what we call insight and knowledge. Dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs and a sense of its inadequacy is something we all share. All interest arises from a sense of there being something missing. For lack of... I seek. What is on the other side of the mountain? We interact by arrogating to ourselves the right to project our needs onto what is happening between us in forms of cultural expression or in works of art. In this way our integrity and our dignity are strengthened. Art may be seen as a survival strategy in which chance plays a role and as part of which we may be astonished, enraptured, revolted, provoked or tenderly and gently caressed. Art may also be seen as the self-image of a society. This is the way I want it to be. This is a perspective on the arts that the institutions of higher education have to assert in political debate: one which can justify the allocation of resources for the form of curiosity-driven research which can help to

move mountains.

Our contemporary society is organised on the basis of a concept of freedom of choice which makes it possible for people to sift among seemingly interchangeable commodities. This is how we school citizens in a system that is apparently based on logic and rationality. Trust in the intangible, in what cannot be measured, in the apparently meaningless, trickles away in the flood of ideas concerning productivity and profit. As Vice-Chancellor I take responsibility for a system that affirms an advanced form of knowledge formation and a concept of identity in which intuition and awareness embrace an overarching vision of what it means to be a human being and provide a place for that which can entice the mind and body to go beyond the ordinary (that “something” which requires will, understanding and memory in our approach to it.) It is part of my role to speak about cultural policy in the one policy area which should interpenetrate all other areas of policy, i.e. in favour of an education and research policy that is borne from a cultural perspective which champions knowledge as the very bedrock of a democratic society. Prayer is no use here. You have to exert yourself.

Among the subjects the students bring up: Can we speak about our art without “explaining” it or putting it in relation to terms such as “value” or “profit”? Can we present our work while maintaining our dignity and respect for the work itself? What is the importance of form for the “interpretation” of the work? Just how much freedom does the viewer/audience have? What does it mean to “understand” art?

The questions mount up. Conversations with the students provide inspiration and nourishment for all the ideas that mill around fighting for room in my own awareness and that of others. The questions that dominate are those about the progression of the course, about research and the need to make a powerful individual statement. How can we make the most of all this curiosity, this desire for knowledge and more...? How can we interlink our courses with research at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, how can we get out politicians to respect what we achieve? How? Here lie vast blocks of stone that can only be overturned with very, very long levers.

We run creative educational courses of high quality that produce significant artistic results. We educate for excellence even at the undergraduate level so that our graduates can immediately go out and compete for work in a national and international labour market. In order to continue to studies at an advanced level, professional experience and an established artistic identity are essential, while for training in research what is required is a well-founded practice in an international context at a high artistic level.

Artistic research involves study and exploration aimed at gaining knowledge both about and for the needs of our artistic field, an inquisitive and curiosity-driven form of research. The result of the research process places the knowledge gained in a global context. This allows other fields as well as our own to criticise, make use of and manage the documentation and reflection of the work presented and of work to be presented.

We are concerned to ensure that a link to research work is established at the level of the undergraduate course as well and we provide courses in both artistic and scientific methods which are based on current artistic and scientific practice, methodology and research. Our arts lecturers have their own well-founded experience of artistic practice, the arts professors are working artists who play a leading role in their respective fields. Our professors teach at all the educational levels; they develop tutorial forums, serve on inter-collegial committees and

do research in their art. Lecturers and professors in the sciences enjoy equal standing with their arts colleagues and they complement one another's fields of enquiry. This provides a positive foundation for collaboration with other disciplines and fields within the arts and sciences at national and international seats of learning and arts fora and so helps to strengthen the position of the various artistic fields as seen by the wider world.

In Sweden we are currently working to develop a new National School for Research in the Arts. The Ministry of Education has proposed the setting up of a new degree: Doctor of Art; this examination would be a complement to the PhD exam while a documented artistic project would replace the dissertation of scientific research. This would mean we could carry out training in artistic research on an artistic basis and develop methodologies, theories and forms of practice on the basis of the needs of artists. Arts universities are now discussing how to formulate the criteria for the allocation of resources to artistic research. This is an exciting and demanding endeavour which requires both creativity and new thinking on the part of both the art fields involved and the academic world.

There is no one definition of artistic research but many. Just as is the case in the scientific disciplines, the changes taking place favour pluralism and collaboration which can provide a stimulus for greater creativity and new ideas concerning both methods and operational forms. When we talk about the need for a development of artistic research and of major artistic research environments, it is the researchers (both artists and academics) we are referring to. At issue is the extent to which we can affirm creative, challenging and inquisitive people as key players in the development of education and to what extent we can affirm curiosity-driven research, for example, as opposed to applied research determined by demand.

In addition to requiring knowledge and a through grounding in the field, campaigning for the development of artistic research and research training demands considerable willpower and courage. In political circles much reference is made to the need to develop creative forms of working and the will to experiment. But what do they have to say about curiosity and a willingness to take risks? Just as in the scientific fields, artistic research has to be based on quality education, extensive network structures and clearly defined creative goals.

Evaluating quality is a complicated matter and requires that we question our attitudes to the very concept (or concepts) of quality. These are by definition conservative, as we are forced to make use of what we already know and have proved capable of (what has been) to evaluate what is. With the relevant knowledge, we can nevertheless do this without coming into conflict with what we have not yet seen or been familiar with – the fundamental prerequisite for change. Possessing the relevant knowledge is required of those willing to take up the challenge of formulating the criteria and goals and evaluating the results.

At the University of Dance we use qualitative criteria for assessment in all the educational courses we offer. We are also working to develop international platforms for the quality assurance of artistic research (our counterpart to publication in recognised academic journals.) These platforms are intended to make possible the exchange of experience and the presentation of research results through genre-specific, written or oral presentations. Our aim is to contribute to the establishment of platforms where prominent artists working within the performing arts and other fields of artistic endeavour can come together in order to share, examine critically and reflect on the outcomes/results of artistic research projects and to develop criteria for assessment, working methods, networks and forms of documentation. These meetings would allow for disagreement, for discussion and for the affirmation and

critiquing of one another's work. Critical practice is based on respect for and openness toward the knowledge and competence of others and on a desire to come together, to meet. The operations of the platforms should be targeted at work of quality and contribute both to the development of knowledge and of the culture that makes possible a favourable climate for cooperation, to the evolution of the way art is seen and to good ethical practice.

Both research and undergraduate courses need to be funded by a system of allocations based on work of quality. Special quality indicators need to be developed for the artistic field. These quality indicators ought to be developed jointly by the universities and higher education institutions that offer educational courses in the arts and which carry out artistic research. The quality criteria should be so designed that they will also be respected by professional artists. A vital element in the development of arguments for, and discussion of, the role and significance played by art in society is the combination of knowledge/experience, research together with a questioning attitude to these very concepts. We have to be bold. How are we to find a balance between the old and the new? We are presumably all agreed that risk-taking is vital. In which case, which risks are we ready to take. Måns Lönnroth (the former CEO of Mistra and a former under-secretary of state) once said, "By the time we know for certain – it is too late." It is vital not to simplify what is complex and to permit certain aspects of our shared cultural life to remain as complicated, straightforward, problematic or simply as pleasurable as they can be. Risk-taking is also an attitude. Who dares to say that they know what people want? What people need? How high is a mountain?

Does going round a mountain have to be a diversion? Perhaps we can climb it or blow it apart into smaller more manageable blocks of stone, into rocks or gravel? What is it that makes space for that movement in body and mind which can reformulate reality and activate and extend our linguistic senses and perceptions? What we have to do is invest in what we believe and judge to be vital on the basis of our various areas of skill, expertise and knowledge. A society's investment in artistic research is a long-term investment which can provide insights into what makes us what we are and who we want to be. An investment for the long-term which can move high mountain walls and reveal entirely new perspectives.

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