Off the grid

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Valand School of Fine Arts, Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts,
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Abstract

Off the grid is an artistic research thesis which puts a Swedish housing estate in a video interview dialogue with homeowners in the Northeastern US through focusing on three topics: travel, self-definition, and community. Based on the situated, visual and conceptual image the project merges seemingly incompatible experiences: eight residents in Husby, an immigrant community outside Stockholm, and eight households not connected to the utility grid, in upstate areas of New England and New York State – and two artistic researchers at University of Gothenburg. The interviewees are paired together and handed unedited copies of each other's reflections. We asked them for their comments, elucidating the practical and metaphorical consequences of travel, self-definition, and community. Even though backgrounds, stories and current conditions differ, an understanding of common interests and similarities are clearly identified. Among the three questions discussed the right to self-definition stands out as central: it is opposed, delayed in its implementation, violated or threatened – still, all participants individually and/or collectively struggle to uphold it. In thinking with the visual and conceptual image *Off the grid* also offers new perspectives on the significance of artistic research, contributing to its further contextualization.

Keywords: artistic research, visual concepts, situated image, dialogue, ecological and political engagement, off grid living, housing estate suburbia, travel, self-definition, community, institution, isomorphic, lived third space.

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Introduction

Off the grid: practice as travel, self-definition and community

Artistic research is one of the fields in which one can pursue a practice based PhD. In terms of our working methodology, this has meant that it has been important to begin from two starting points: first approaching the live and extreme density of everyday experience, and second, staying with and thinking through a practice that is both *visual and conceptual* since images both are and also produce situated concepts. A situated concept is formed by a particular activity, a predicted context and an interpretative culture (Brown and Collins 1989; Barsalou 2002; Yeh and Barsalou 2006). It is only through spending time with our research subjects, and connecting them together that we have arrived at our discussion and visual work: eight residents in Husby, a Stockholm housing estate suburb, and the residents of eight self-made homes in New England and upstate New York. Our experience is that when two or more geographically different images have been blended together, the resulting combination is a independent *third* image of a *lived third space*, as Henri Lefebvre understood it (Soja 1989:106-144; Lefebvre 1991:38-41). We have been working with images as concepts with the capacity to de-differentiate, and to create a seamless whole, a visual-contextual background. However, when one attempts to bring together different fields of knowledge, similar to the process described above, with the intention *of forming a third space* one has to be prepared to struggle with the inherent demands of academia for separation and analytical distinction in successive steps. We are not trying to reinstate a static dichotomy of image vs. text: it is just that we have found it hard to work with language so that it says what we want to convey. Images are imaginary wholes, that they contain the totality of culture. For example, a negative image of a suburb will also contain its dialectical opposite (another, less negative image of the same place), and the possibilities of a third image. The whole of an image is the de-differentiated – the realization of the static social of the known and existing – oneness of situated differences – the re- and interconnection of a social reality presented as necessarily differentiated by ideological propaganda. Being conscious of how one's practice is situated mean that knowledge is social and material, that its underpinning is spatial (Lavé and Wenger 1991; Lefebvre 1991; Vygotskij 1999). We are not making the claim for the image as intrinsically inexhaustible: that would be shying away from the problem. Situated visual concepts are key to our unpacking of the differentiated everyday that has yet to find its social discourse. For us thinking with images necessarily leads in a wide array of directions. This will, from the perspective of traditional academia, looks conspicuously similar to an untrained layman's idiosyncratic lack of focus. With academically trained professionals, artists included, this approach can also lead to confusion – as well as demands for either more/less image/text. To us the invention and application of a research practice to an art practice meant traveling through different perspectives: we have found no real division between practice (starting from a visual concept), and reflection (starting from a textual concept). It is the tentative forming of a third that necessarily has to be theorized and explored, a dialectical relation and an opening to change which we approach through the question of travel.

We have, on several occasions, argued in sweeping terms against art's predominant occupation with aesthetics and against the circular argument that a work of art only exists within a frame of its own description. Artistic research has been conceptualized as the unraveling of the *aesthetic* conventions of research and knowledge production (Bärtås 2008). This leads back to the postmodern discussion on the incidental character of knowledge recognizing art as a part of a wide field of knowledge, because its emphasis on individual aesthetic experience and framing has been historically central to the discipline since romanticism. Today we hold that the focus on aesthetics smoothes over social and economic realities, which affect society, including art production, through neoliberalism's individualism. We are interested both in following and engaging with the current changes with the intention of finding answers and solutions that will be evaluated based on whether they are right or wrong, regardless of their form. These societal changes are much more interesting than mourning the loss of art's privileged position within bourgeois society as an "other" space, a combination of asylum and pedestal. The effect of looking at artistic research as one practice among other research practices has on the other hand meant that it can function as a usable model when discussing social and economical changes. The starting point is no doubt the love of art, but the key difference between different forms of artistic research, as we understand it, is to be found in the structure of their references. Perhaps one way of evaluating artistic research projects is if they expand possibilities by following issues outside the limits of art's proper discursive field, or whether they stabilize and narrow these disciplinary limits by referencing the unique and exceptional nature of high art. Thierry de Duve (de Duve 1994) describes two conflicting models in art education – "talent"/"Academy" and "creativity"/"Bauhaus". The strong point in the older program of art education was after all the study of nature. We understand nature as belonging to the social sphere; global warming has made the social involvement and limitless responsibility evident – the social definition of nature and sustainability is the limit to all life (McKibben 1989) – artistic research could therefore be understood as a form of studying of nature, through a practice that is both visual and conceptual. Artistic research engages with what Cornelius Castoriadis calls the *magma* of the social: a stratified composition of solid and liquid “without form which is creative of forms, the genetic substrate of all creation” (Morin 1998). The goal of artistic research is not about perpetuating academic disciplinary patterns or looking into the essence of the artistic medium and its inherently separate logic, nor is it about Beuys famous statement “everyone an artist” (Beuys 1975), but ultimately the situated research and engagement in the broad social change of the everyday. If artistic research is under pressure from the changes to the social imaginary and if its legitimacy is questioned both outside and inside institutions, then it surely has to reconsider its community so as not to become an isolated specialization, as it engages with an experience that is so overwhelmingly common. After all, artistic research could serve as our model for social engagement since it is a practice that we know something about.

We interviewed sixteen persons. We asked them three main questions: about how they understood the concepts of travel, self-definition and community. We will leave the definition of these three questions open for now, and for a reason; we see them as dynamic and changeable, they produce their meaning in the dialogue, by the persons in their exchange and by their comments. In the ending text, *Interviews in their background of meaning*, we have summarized the meaning attached to the questions throughout the project. A seventeenth person was interviewed to inform us about the relation between environmentalism and the off-grid movement in the US. Our three questions were used as common denominators in discussing both an immigrant community living in a housing estate outside Stockholm called Husby, and also a group of Americans, mostly living in self-built homes which were not connected to the utility grid, and, to implicate ourselves, our own situation as students in the emergent field of artistic research. Put another way, the three questions were applied to three groups with three key, albeit intertwined, characteristics: in terms of the relationship to technology – having electricity when not connected to the utility grid – in spatial terms – living in Husby, the housing estate neighborhood – and then in relation to academic and artistic conventions – in what ways does artistic research differ from art or from other forms of academic research. However, seen as a whole, *Off the grid* is also *a metaphor addressing otherness and marginality as a product of coercive social structures* such as what Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell have called “institutional isomorphism”, as “a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (DiMaggio and Powell 2007:149). The three questions asked in the interviews then guided us in the process of editing and assembling the visual material. The context of this project, the field of artistic research, which to us meant a connection to a tradition of self-reflexivity, always turning the three questions to ourselves: how is our identity as artistic researchers affected by *travel*, how do we define our collaboration, both with each other and with our interviewees, and what is our community? These aspects of our artistic research are discussed in depth in the parts *Faktura, or at the end of discursive art* and *Cooperation in the shadow of the artistic subject.* By these texts we want to make clear that our practice does engage with academic writing and research, and that the format of academic writing has proven necessary, both to engage with aspects of the visual material and also for us to conceptualize our project in relation to artistic research as a whole. However, the writing process does not fully engage with the specific process of thinking and working through images.

The longest text in this thesis *Interviews in their background of meaning* tries to find its form following the visual technical and conceptual possibilities, drawing on the acceptance that an image produced from the juxtaposition of two or more different images will be received *as a third.* The text is at the same time pieced up and referred to separate fields of knowledge and differentiatedly unified, text standing next to another text, *as* but not *in* the form of an image. This textual juxtaposition looking for the third is historically related to the montage techniques developed in the 1920s by the Soviet filmmakers Eisenstein and Vertov. Similar to this process of working with images, the writing juxtaposes, montage-style, what might seem like disparate themes and issues. In working this way, we are not producing exactly what a conventional academic text is supposed to do – marking out discrete borders, keeping different materials separate, adding sub-headings, stopping to summarize and drawing conclusions, et c. Instead, Form follows visual complexity before textual function. Cornelius Castoriadis makes the claim that "[w]e are all, in the first place, walking complementary fragments of the institution of our society – its 'total parts'" (Castoriadis 1997:6). Images are both visual and conceptual, social and factual: their sensual presence cannot be severed from either the conventions used to, individually and collectively, make sense of images, but also how images transgress these conventions. Images appear as vehicles for democratic discourse and for vested interests alike, but they seem unlimited until spoken for, particularly as we look at how they have functioned in our project, in retrospect. We save practically all visual material, except those images that are blurry or in other ways technically insufficient, because we have learned that an image that seemed odd or out of context could become of utmost value as the research process develops. To allow space for their immediacy and limitlessness means treating concepts as shifters, and traveling between different perspectives on institutional power, such as the racialized/ economic decision-making in suburban public housing and the withering-away of democratic power affecting Husby. Our working process involves examining concepts of institutional justification affecting the participants in our project, in order to point to democratic and sustainable forms of architecture and urban planning, which will allow for “preserving self-respect” (Nearing and Nearing 1989:193p). Conventional academic writing is a machine that is not tailored to fit images. It is a readymade text apparatus ideally contextualizing, guiding and informing the reader at the same time. When looking for another approach the aesthetics and poetics of the literary text or the essay has been suggested to us as the alternative. If our writing follows neither academic nor literary conventions, then it becomes open to criticism from both sides (being seen as neither sufficiently academic nor literary): the reader is, if you like, left alone and can only with difficulty make sense of and communicate his/her reflections. Without connecting to an isomorphic frame and accepting the small differences appearing within a preset genre as a significant difference means that the text will be left with barely any conceptual or literary space to expand on in its own terms, those terms, or rather that orientation, that we hope our artistic research could make its own ground. Our intention is indeed to write a text in dialogue with studies of the presence of a third in the ‘magmatic social’ and therefore also (and this may sound strange) performing similar juxtapositions as we have done with the visual material. Thinking words with images is different from thinking images with words. Images constantly recalibrate imaginary concepts out of processes of dedifferentiation and unification; this cannot take place without having words conceptualize by differentiation and separation, but in returning to an image differentiated by text it will still be able to look the same as an image that did not pass this process. In our experience, juxtaposing two images from the US and from Husby leads to a deeply differentiated but seemingly whole and by us and the interviewees’ readily accepted *third* image producing *a third and livable space*. However, moving in and through a text in this way sets off a chain-reaction of different fields claiming their distinctness from each other. We find it hard to put this in another way: in our visual/textual practice we did not want to belong to either of two camps, artists and academics, but wanted to let both activities cross-pollinate each other. Now we simultaneously find ourselves without either a supportive artistic community or a defined academic belonging. In terms of mapping out a community, the disciplinary positioning of the project is eclipsed by the specific questions related to living in Husby and in the Northeastern US. Because of this, the interest from the art community slumps as it rises within the groups to whom these latter topics are relevant. But we, and this is perhaps a romantic streak, want this thesis to claim the freedom which we see as central to our artistic research project, to make relevant statements about the world, avoiding what seems like the inevitable “lock down effect” of approaching established and institutionalized sources and traditions of knowledge production. *Interviews in their background of meaning* attempts to create a visual discourse of our hearts’ desire.

Artistic PhD research constitutes a new discipline within the Swedish university structure. Its position has been highly controversial and has caused widespread frustration: we have been both envied and dismissed by artists, curators and critics since we are supposedly not doing *real* art anymore. The first artistic research dissertations in September 2006 at Lund University caused critics to call for a shut down of all programs (Paletten 2006). As such, studies in artistic research have a contested identity, one situated in between established traditions, such as art history and sociology of art, and norms within the tradition of fine art identifying art as non-discursive, non-instrumental and non-rational. Up till now our impression is, without having studied all results, that dissertations that have been presented in artistic research are still too disparate and too few to determine what impact the results have had on the opinions on art. To the practicing artist, the present literature thus far has had considerable drawbacks. On the one hand artistic research has been committed to exploring a range of possibilities and definitions within the academic framework rather than dealing with specifically practice-based issues, and on the other hand, most of the discussions have been conducted by those not directly involved in artistic research but interested in making strategic use of the concept to make claims on its definition and limitations. Some of these commentators, many years after the challenges to formalist modernism, are still under the spell of the teleological idea of art as a cultural expression that, through successive steps differentiates itself from any other cultural expression until reaching the unsayable, and thus, in the final analysis, remains untarnished by the everyday (Elkins 2005; Svenungsson 2006). As a consequence, their idea of artistic research is to apply outdated or unaltered research models to formulate and verify/falsify research questions with the goal to further, isolate and “protect” the artistic image from the onslaught of words, given the situation of art educations inside the Academy. Commentators within the art academies canvass easily explainable professional presentations that do not challenge the self-understanding or conventions of either artistic or academic practices, but instead dismiss the central problem and thereby maintain the status quo by means of vague gestures towards an “in-between”. This conservatism is also political, since it – yet again – incarcerates art in a non-instrumental position. The belief that a work of art can have political use value breaches a taboo, which threatens to obliterate “proper art”: art as teleology without end and purposefulness without purpose. Yet, the difference between the unsayable in an essentialist understanding of art and the not-yet sayable in a social and political sense is immense, and remain a strategic resource for those involved in artistic research, given the open-ended, heterogeneous and differing practices of contemporary art – and artistic research.

May we speak freely? We do miss the political perspective in art, and we miss that the spaces for both democratic reasoning and also voicing protest have given way to a smug neoliberal ”professionalization” that seldom is anything more than a bundle of fears and anxieties. Many colleagues who deal with theory and the art market act as institutional representatives who justify the conventional and uncontested idea of ”good art” as something on the scale of a *Death Star.* Discussions seems overshadowed by a prolonged adolescence-like struggle to establish the ”artist subject”. In their tentative attempts to reconcile and or simply abandon problems, rather than embracing them, always seem to be just on the brink of rising up against one of many intertwined “societies of control” (Deleuze 1992) and to start building the full and real “we”. Do we really have to accept such a pragmatic definition of art which means that unless you can justify your research under institutionally isomorphic conditions, you are out? We are therefore reluctant to discuss what we do only in terms of the art discipline, as we understand it as an artistic research project. Our project’s identity develops out of following a practice. Hence, to us it seem necessary to discuss what it *is* that we do in terms of what we do when we do it. This is more important than discussions of belongings and shortcomings in relation to other disciplines and institutionally stable fields – even though we recognize it as necessary for any emergent field to map out these relationships, to avoid false claims to “originality”. Art is a conventional and institutional definition and our relationship to the Swedish art scene and the larger art world must be seen as problematic to this date. However, we cannot say that we have any wish to change our luck unless more fundamental structural changes take place: we have for our part oriented our work as artistic researchers with help of other social and institutional connections.

We are not focusing on the history and historiography of artistic research but it would be inconsequential if we accepted the borders and limitations that have defined art without questioning them, and the effect these limitations have on a democratic “redistribution of the sensible” (Rancière 2004), although we acknowledge that it is a field that does have a history (albeit a short one) and encompasses a range of practices and approaches. Normative definitions of art have implications far beyond the cultural significance of particular works, exhibitions or even museums or collections. To generalize, Western art both belongs to an idealist tradition and also reacts against it. As must be obvious, this tradition has generated several fundamental divisions: body-soul, objectivity-subjectivity, nature-culture, etc. The basic points of reference in relation to art shifted during the second half of the 18th century, at the same historical moment when the bourgeoisie came to power and the nation-state was formed. Initially entrusted to mirror a strange mixture of religion and status quo values, after the bourgeois revolutions art instead made a critical claim to an imaginary and constitutive subjectivity. After this shift, the given role of the artist within liberal society became the incarnation of the sovereign, individual genius. During the following period, art took on the role of the ventriloquist of societies' and nations' cultural identity, essence or soul, it also came to dominate the discourse on autonomy. The autonomy of art, even beyond that of the artist, was incarnated in the dynamic explorations of these specific medias as expressed by the collage and assemblage. Potentially radical claims for societal reform, for instance the claims that where made in the name of *Faktura* – the material and creative interchangeability of people and means of production – as in 1920s Russian Constructivism, became harmless the moment they were framed specifically as art. Beyond its historical limits and claims, liberal art threatens to collapse into the indistinguishable market product.

As an extension of this change in practice, and the university's involvement in the theory and practice of art, it is reasonable to assume that the way that we talk about and experience art will change as a result of institutional support to artistic research. Given the historical relationship between art and the concept of autonomy, this change may also impact on how we imagine individual identity that foregrounds structural and/or technically defined relations: art may point to other ways of situating subjective agency. From a liberal perspective, academic research could be seen as another space for art production, in addition to art market and art institutions. The influence of open source and free software has also affected the way artistic autonomy can be claimed: QuickTime for example is a collectively constructed software, which means that the individual work we could do and claim using it will stand on the shoulders of an unfathomable amount of work hours by software engineers, designers and a virtual community of contributing practitioners. In the post WWII period, the romantic and modern creative genius gradually became the source of artistically meaningful divergences. With the readymade, Duchamp claimed the choice of context before displaying manual skills, and Warhol arts' context was flooded by commercial culture, beyond choice. In a famous statement by the American conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth (Kosuth 1969), art was deemed to come "after philosophy". This pronouncement prefigured artists venturing into systems of knowledge production, which in different ways comes to understand art as bundle of conventions: ethnography, economics, psychology, sociology, geography and philosophy, just to name a few. Artistic research may rise as a *Frankenstein*, a heterogeneous monster pieced together from various motley parts, or as a chameleon shifting its surface identity relative to the discussion in which it participates. Simultaneously, with the arrival of postmodern philosophy, feminism and queer theory, modernist claims to an inner essence of art related to truth, being and utopia were heavily criticized and have not regained their full vital signs since.

At this moment, when the emerging academic discipline of artistic research has yet to find (or perhaps to avoid) its – institutional – form, artistic practice has been allotted a traditionally liberal and somewhat unreflective role inside academia. Its role becomes (predictably) that of a kind of trickster or hacker which transgresses differences between faculties and fields, and since artistic research has a weak structural position, this can be done by way of playful subjectivity, without any claims to structural change. When art is integrated into the university structure, its potential to cross disciplinary boundaries has been held as a positive example for knowledge production, nourishing a hope for new ways of energizing the discussion on society at large through new ways of communicating with the public. Our faculty at Göteborg University approaches art as an "agent of change and source of understanding about real life, the world and society", and it holds art to be a "catalyst" for "social change" (The Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts 2007). Artistic research must be socially critical not to find its context in, with Zygmunt Bauman, a "liquid modernity" (Bauman 2000). The discrepancy between the discussions within our PhD student cluster and the polarized description from the outside could not possibly be wider. The specific qualities nurtured by artistic research such as the idea that images produce situated concepts, that social cultural production far exceeds objects, images and theoretical concepts, has yet to reach outside the academic context. As we see it, artistic research opens up the possibilities for transgressive formal and discursive change, and beyond that holds the possibility to open up the field of cultural production in itself.

Based on our artistic research project we will discuss transversal similarities and parallels between the state of artistic research within academia, its role in relation to institutionalized knowledge-handling, and the travel of individuals. Travel influences how ideas are formed and the ways people travel both reflect the social nature of groups and simultaneously spreads them over an economical and socio-spatial map. We argue that either without a deeper understanding of the concept of travel in a globalized world or without the right to self-definition, or the identification of the power in one's own community, everyone without exception is sentenced to a future as slaves to what a dominant culture deems "proper" and to be caught in the spatial and discursive margin. In the *Method* section we discuss artistic research by the application of qualitative and dialectical (see "Dialectics without teleology", Bode and Schmidt 2006) and quantitative method, with ethnography serving as our primary discursive context. In this regard, studies of the consequences of globalization by the ethnographers James Clifford, George Marcus and others, and their reflexive questioning of ethnographic method, become particularly relevant to our argument.

Our interviewees in Husby are all people whose journeys have been of utmost importance to them. They are familiar with the workings of various political and economic systems, including that of Sweden and of their countries of origin. Their discussions of their own situation and of current world affairs are developed through their global networks. The majority of the immigrants in Husby were forced to flee their homelands, some from privilege, others from poverty. In Sweden, they have found both themselves, and their experience to be marginalized. In the US, the majority of our interviewees had transplanted themselves in search of a different lifestyle, moving from the city and desk jobs to the countryside and various degrees of self-reliance, and thus, in many cases they can be said to have marginalized themselves. It is evident that both within each group and between the two groups, the backgrounds, current living conditions, and individual stories differ widely. However, when listening more closely to their stories, it became clear that it was actually possible to compare the specific causes of their individual itineraries, even though at first they appear to come from very different situations. What surfaced in the discussions with both groups was that the right to define oneself had led them into situations of conflict expressed by *social and/or symbolic violence* (Bourdieu 1990), leading to a point of rupture. But there was again an obvious difference between the two groups when it came to the details of both how they defined and also how they interacted with their communities. Differences and similarities accumulated around our interview questions.

Seen from a Swedish perspective, there is a persistent difference in attitude towards people that travel to start afresh in Sweden or the US. To generalize, Americans seem to be more entitled to their choices of a place to live than an immigrant to Sweden, although the off griders should obviously not be taken as representative of all Americans or an essentialized “Americanness”. Looking more closely at the experience of the off griders, we noticed that on several occasions they commented on the difficulties they have had being accepted into a settled community as newcomers. The neoliberal ideological agenda undoes community, isolate people from each other and offers only splendid, economically privileged, isolation as a refuge to its own workings. In an American context, self-definition has been mistaken for individualism. Looking more closely at the experience of the off griders they commented on several occasions, on the difficulties they have had finding a community before going off grid “we tended to live in for instance, Phoenix, which is a rapidly growing area where you basically had to drive everywhere and there was really no sense of community, there was a lot of transient people, people would probably not stay there a long time with jobs” (Ed and Karen Curtis 20070927), or being accepted into a settled community as newcomers. While our US interviewees did not have to deal with the challenges of changing country and citizenship, they had migrated within their own country, which led to them feeling as though they did not fit in: “I feel my piece of property is more like a fish bowl, like the neighbors can tell when I’ve been out on the road with my tractor” (Daniel Robertshaw 20070916). The immigrants in Husby found the choices made by the American interviewees attractive, but they still maintained a critical distance when it came to their decision to live off-grid. This distance was motivated more than anything else by the lack of general health insurance in the US, and questions concerning their spatial isolation. While we do not wish to dwell too much on how the immigrants’ responses did not fit racist stereotypes (to do so would be to deny them complexity as subjects) we should point out that their analysis of the American situation was relevant and informed by the Americans, counteracting xenophobic and racist perceptions of their being uninformed, backwards and lacking initiative. Conversely, when asking the off-griders about their ideas of the lives led by the immigrants in Husby, we seldom came anywhere beyond general ideas about the difference between the US and Europe.

Late in the project, at a point when we could not afford to return to the US, the public housing company *Svenska Bostäder* (Swedish Housing) presented plans for a “reference block” in Husby as a part of a major change to the housing estates surrounding Järva, a protected natural area. This plan was called *Järvalyftet* (the Järva uplift). The first plans from winter 2007 showed that about 60% of the tenements, including more than one thousand apartments where to be pulled down and replaced by single family row-houses (Gustafsson and Berglund 2008). Husby’s neighbor suburb Kista is understood as one of Stockholm’s growth engines; its potential for expansion stands out in long term regional plans: “Kista is an important ICT-cluster of national and international importance” (Stockholm City Hall 2007). Given Stockholm’s infrastructural difficulties, Husby, in ten minutes walking distance from Kista mall, is looking more attractive by the day for tens of thousands of commuting white-collar workers. Husby is drawn into these expansion plans, though the current population is not seen as attractive to the information and communication technology industry and is never directly mentioned. Rather they are subject to social and symbolic violence and are likely to become dispersed again. The interviewees in Husby are directly or indirectly affected by these plans. Husby was a result of a 1960s Fordist politics of centralization built to house a displaced Swedish rural population, then the Swedish population moved on to more upscale housing. The immigrants and refugees moved in, but, as one of our interviewees, Yohannes Abraham says “When we came here in 1987 there were a lot of Swedish people here. Akalla, Husby. It was eighty percent Swedish, but today it is only one percent Swedish. But they want to come back” (Yohannes Abraham 20071201). Travel is obviously involved, but travel valued from the dominant interests. Community as the collective right to the city is not respected:

> people just can’t pay the ten thousand, maybe they are thinking about the ”market”, with Kista close by and expanding, everyone wants to live here, close to Kista. Maybe they are saying that the poor should move out and then the rich will come here to live, the middle class is going to live here. And they will finally sell them, that’s obvious, co-operative apartments, that’s what will happen. (Abdullahi Mohammed 20071215)

There are many possible futures for Husby and its population; some are directed by institutional isomorphism, others – those we believe in – starts from the triad travel, self-definition and community. A discussion of the *Järva uplift* plan plays a major part in *Interviews in their background of meaning.*

Another aspect of our own travel is related to the use of English and/or Swedish as a dominant language connected to both privilege and constraint, constantly making us aware of positional changes related to mastering language and hierarchically ordered cultural codes. In our community the sanction of artistic research has given the us a particular role, one that allows us to easily summon prevailing popular ideas of marginality and otherness discussed earlier–the “asylum and pedestal” which places the artist closer to truth and gives him/her a certain authority. If the concepts defining both differences and also common ground between the artist and the researcher are currently in flux, moving between coded identities as well as languages and fields of knowledge, then the conventional disciplinary limits defining art are in fact being exceeded. We argue that this is a consequence of travel, both literally and figuratively. We argue that one’s sense of belonging or estrangement develops through one’s access to cultural norms, as well as the naturalized “proper” use of space, language, and concepts. The interviews elucidate forms of agency in asserting one’s difference from these norms. They also explore how the right to self-definition plays out in terms of different social expectations. Applying this analysis to the art field has helped us to understand the expectations on a work of art, particularly what a “proper” art context might be, so to speak. We understand *proper* in Michel de Certeau’s sense: as a “triumph of place over time” (Certeau 2002:36), or, the triumph of institution over individual and/or collective self-definition. Our artistic practice relates our own travel experience in Sweden and the US but also to traveling between institutions, such as the art institutions. In particular, we address reactions from our interviewees, our peers and from the art institutions to our framing of the project as artistic research: why does both the movement between identities, fields of interest and points of origin, and our refusal of traditional roles so often provoke disbelief?

Here we need to briefly discuss how we work with the QuickTime film, specifically its temporal and composite character, as well as the selection of the screen format. The strategic and technical components will be dealt with later in *Faktura, or at the end of discursive art*. In earlier works we used multi-screen video with material running in different looped cycles. Their interrelation was "given" through their spatial relationship; furthermore this interrelation was immediately understood as "critical" simply because the exhibiting institution – (both through its "branding" and its cultural authority) – provided us with the contextualization of "critique" and/or "importance". We accepted what loosely could be described as a white cube minimalist aesthetics and the subsequent division of labor between artist and curator. However, we ventured in successive steps to indicate this rather than directly pointing it out. We did so through wall texts and catalogue reflections that in retrospect were neither helpful to an art audience nor a non-art audience. The effect was that we either concealed our conclusions, unless anyone asked, or passively handed over that communicative responsibility to the institution. We see this as an example of how we assimilated the professional code. There were several reasons for this. First, aesthetics has been conventionally associated with an "in-between openness" and institutionalized in this. This came together with a disinterest in developing a forthright relation to material which did not have obvious aesthetic sources, beyond the frame of an exhibition cycle. Even though we developed a practice that was, as we then named it, "discursive", there was not enough institutional support, conceptual creativity or long-term commitment – to stay with research as long as with art, so to speak – on the part of the organizations where we presented our work. On our part, we feel we did not have enough self-understanding and self-assurance to establish our practice as artistic research. In bringing visual material and thoughts together within the frame of a single source we sought to research the collisions of two or more different materials and/or perspectives, and to chisel out their thematic and visual interrelations in detail.

During the process of completing a work commissioned by the Nobel Museum in Stockholm we arrived at a screen format that was wide enough to simultaneously harbor three partly overlapping but still distinctly separate 16:9 widescreen formatted images. As an effect of this joining of images, the projected surface appeared as a strip. The commissioned work, with its restricted time limit, helped us realize that we had no other option than to stay with the interview and contextual material as long as needed to allow people to, as a Swedish saying goes, "speak to full stop". The length of the film had no preset format, which is not unusual in documentary and artistic filmmaking: from Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963) and *Empire* (1964) to Ulrike Ottinger's *South East Passage* (2002). Because of the default setting of high-definition cameras, we chose a widescreen DV-camera as secondary unit. We did not want the screen to become wider and more flattened because then the projection could not be appreciated as one coherent image. But the format is a construction put together using QuickTime; it began with our experiences and our need to claim responsibility beyond the aesthetic appearance of the work. After the Nobel project, we came to conceive of the screen as an open space onto which any collage of visual, audio, temporal, spatial and textual material could come together. Still images as well as film material are sometimes edited and cropped, resulting in a zooming-in effect that fills the entire screen. One way of emphasizing the oneness of the screen format was through the application of subtitles that cross over the full width of the projection area. Sometimes the subtitles from one scene would literally cancel out another, but more importantly, it would level them out, providing the scenes with equal importance, influence and visual presence.

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Method

Method is the conscious application of a filter. Usually our everyday idiosyncratic choices and preferences do not lend themselves to self-reflection; unless challenged, we do not experience the need for external discursive justification. A conscious way of deciding what is important to an artwork is not to be confused with an idealist approach, where ‘method’ means projecting an epistemic value on a material, or a market based decision-making process where a target group study sets the limits on what can be realized. Our artistic research project has traveled between the fields of art and science, within the timeframe of a PhD program. Because of this, we have conceptualized and developed our method in two ways: both in chunks, as a result of reading course literature, and also bit by bit, as a result of process and practice which comes out of our specific learning context and engagement. Method is a part of the process of understanding the practice we are engaged in but does not necessarily delimit it. But, practice is not enough: method only becomes meaningful within a community. Academic research is multipolar and in flux and artistic research is, as a discipline without clearly defined disciplinary and disciplining borders, in need of institutional support. Academic research produces its own explanation and justification, formulating knowledge, as any other discipline, from the floating and unpredictable streaks of traditional, contextual, constructed, visualized and situated meaning. Starting inside the universities, artistic research could be seen as a maverick making way for a new “discursive formation” (Foucault 1972; Hall 1997:44pp).

A point of conflict in artistic research is whether or not there exists a specific art-knowledge that is in certain situations compromised by research and in other cases excluded by it. Is there a paradoxically identifiable *and* non-discursive, non-instrumental and non-rational art-knowledge? Is it possible to keep other forms of understanding separate from art-knowledge in a discursive, situated and practice research-based form? We do not believe that there are other ways than those formed in the social to understand the world. However, this does not mean that there is a specific and identifiable art-knowledge. The knowledge art produces is conventional because the aesthetics of presentational form and the method involved; the guiding values are impossible to abstract and separate without tearing its communicational possibilities apart. The conventionalist idea of knowledge involves intuition, intuition in the sense of an indication of a multidimensional and dynamic research situation which art is capable of pointing towards, but not transcend. If there is a distinct, constant and epistemic knowledge about the world that non-discursive art is able to provide, then would there still be a reason to locate, isolate and denigrate any language-based attempt and to do nothing but to gesture towards the unsayable? If we stay with an epistemic mindset that both projects ideals and also retrospectively justifies them, grappling with texts will lead nowhere; no final destination will ever be reached since it cannot be named. All we can do is sit back, enjoy the ride and wait for the next artwork to appear. This understanding of art resides in art institutions as an entrenched conservative position and anti-constructivist silence, the result of unquestioned and naturalized ideologies. It instantly develops hostility towards reflecting art through research perspectives and to art as a social and political struggle the moment the preconceived episteme threatens to decompose. This understanding of art is also intrinsically connected to the liberal idea of the sovereign subject, and to the art object as the necessary figure of the current social order, although it often denies this claim. We believe that there is knowledge in fine art but that it is at once subjective and constructed, and as such in a permanent flux. Within the context of our artistic research, situated visual conceptualization makes our investigation similar to those undertaken in the humanities and social sciences, but it is not the same. New practices, presentational contexts and subject matter are likely to sprout from one another given the presence of a community which places limits on self-definition. This is also why a certain didactic clarity in both the visual and the written material is only *possible* given a community.

Artistic research has neither an established theory, nor method of its own. Beginning in Britain and Finland in the early 2000s, Michael Biggs, Mika Hannula, Tuomas Nevanlinna, James Elkins and others have argued the case. As a new discipline, artistic research needs to qualify its claims to the status of legitimate academic research; it is often compared to the fields of art history and art theory, but also to traditional definitions of art and art practice. Within the academic research community, artistic research has a weak identity: its agenda is strongly associated with a frontier mentality. Its borders and operators are not under strict supervision, as with stable and long-established fields of knowledge such as medicine and law (although there are other academic fields which lack this stability to a certain degree). Artistic research does not offer the safety of a neutral and objective science or a stable work place; even a discrete discursive field to dwell in is missing. This is fortunate, since it could potentially act as a decoy or door-opener for research that would perhaps not be possible in more established disciplines. Though it appears within academia it could be seen as, following Raymond Williams, *an emergent culture* (Williams 1991). The whole affair is a construction, a mise en scène in broad daylight.

It is quite easy to summarize the arguments for and against artistic research. Those against it would imply that “a scientification of art education” will take place ”at the expense of the ’essence’ of art” (Nevanlinna 2003). Nevanlinna’s ironic, negative and defeatist position reflects the argument that art studies will become ”more important and high-class the more akin they become to ’science’” (Ibid), which would indicate that art – identified as non-discursive, non-instrumental and non-rational – in one way or another will be corrupted by fraternizing with an alien body represented by the image of the monolithic university. Still, Nevanlinna touches on class antagonism through associating the artist with the people, and the university trained curator then appearing as a representative of the higher classes. This is an interesting discussion, but hard to follow since it is not developed any further. Another distancing measure is taken by James Elkins, who in “The Three Configurations of Practice Based PhDs” builds his argument on the assumption that there is an *incommensurable difference*, that “might obscure the very deeply rooted differences” (Elkins 2005:15) between on one hand “studio art”, “artwork” or “visual art practice”, and on the other hand academic knowledge practices and expertise.

Elkins identifies three main “shapes that the new degrees might take” and their subcategories: 1, “research that informs the art practice”, 2, “dissertation is equal to the artwork” and 3, “dissertation is the artwork, and vice versa”. The assumed difference between research and art is exemplified by “the ubiquitous artist’s statement” (Elkins 2005:10), as well as the marked difference between the PhD student and “her viewers, critics, and (eventually) her historians. Often artists’ theories turn out to be irrelevant to what comes to be taken as the most important about the work”, “the philosophy of theory or art serve as a smokescreen, hiding what is actually of interest in the work” (Ibid), implying that there is a separation between the artwork and the theorizing. We find this distinction unwarranted because the image, if situated through critical analysis, is indeed a concept. The second difference plays out as “an idiosyncratic collection of disciplines, with art just one equal among others” (Elkins 2005:14), a situation that make Elkins uneasy because art plays the weaker role in this equation, suffering from “the very deeply rooted differences between studio art and other university departments and faculties” (Elkins 2005:15). He then goes on to promote a PhD attempting a separation of research and art practice that would

> circumvent the common assumption that self-reflectivity is an unexceptionable good. It would make fascinating use of the resources of the university, by finding new configurations of fields without proposing that they have underlying similarities and convergence. (Elkins 2005:16)

Elkins never suggests a bridging environment to overcome the gap he is so keen to identify, because to bridge that gap would mean the loss of identity for the art discipline. Art and artistic research seem like two incapacitated cargo ships set on collision course. This is an argument for professionalization to validate a tradition of separation which naturalizes the status quo by warning whenever one approaches the borders between subjects and fields. The argument for equality between art and academic research that the Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts at the University of Gothenburg have employed is countered by Elkins through a converse interpretation: the demands on a creative-art PhD "is inherently unfair because it requires a student to complete doctoral level work in an academic field and also create doctorate-level visual art" (Elkins 2005:17). Since this separation between practices is taken for granted, he runs into problems when discussing their assumed hierarchical interrelation and struggle for dominance. This "struggle for position" is seen as taking place in an equally undynamic context. Using a very traditional definition of academic research (certainly one untouched by poststructuralism), he then goes on to assert that

> the candidates forays into different disciplines is to mine them in order to further her artwork. Hence normal, scholarly criteria of truth, the production of new knowledge, thoroughness, clarity and scholarly protocol just does not apply. (Elkins 2005:17)

Elkins makes it clear that it is only by academic disciplines and audiences giving up their claims for reproduction and objective truth, "[stepping] out of normal interpretive habits" (Elkins 2005:18), that artistic research will be appreciated in full. Here he is striking a very positive note, suggesting an egalitarian state between practices, albeit in an embryonic state. What is puzzling is that he is not ready to demand the same responsibilities from art, and forgoing the question of reciprocity between practices, leaving us with the status quo.

We find it more productive to allow artists the same rights and status as researchers within other disciplines within the university. Art education has long since been assimilated into the university system up until the MA level, but in Sweden, it has been only very recently that artists could both pursue a PhD program and pass a PhD examination, unless they ventured into another field (and then would sometimes struggle to have their past experience recognized). Another argument is perhaps more pragmatic: artistic research needs the authority of academia, in order to find a place and viable future other than the art market, and even in art-world institutions. Artistic research fluctuates in between established institutions and faculties. Since a canon does not yet exist, the burden of contextualizing and defining the limits of artistic research rests on each artistic researcher. It is likely that the position of artistic research within the art world and the academy will be eventually normalized, through what Althusser and Butler, call the process of *interpellation*, which places the individual in a role of ”citing” or “performing” the status quo, community or thought-collective (Althusser 1969; Butler 1993). If we turn the concept of interpellation around to become productive (so it does not only reproduce conformity), it opens up to an understanding of the social that fits with our experience: since it is social, there are no limits to the forms that knowledge can take, and these forms can also change, as long as there are adherents ready to practice and “reiterate” it. Artistic research will have to negotiate its position within the academy, facing general negative attitudes towards lateral and practice-based research (Mark 2005). As we make use of both visual and textual tools and also use images as situated concepts, as artistic researchers we must avoid alienating the visual art context, and simultaneously respect the transgressive character of creativity by not bringing one under the rule of the other.

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The default position of the visitor to an art gallery is actually not very different from the researcher who follows the hypothetic-deductive and qualitative methods, as these processes are based on observation, although these methods may seem unfamiliar to the art discipline. It is just as unfamiliar to think about the process of looking at art as finding evidence to support or refute a hypothesis – any idea of what art is and says for example – by studying research material. Applying scientific methods in the art context seems all the more awkward because they chip away at the ideology of individual sovereignty. The one-to-one encounter between the individual and the art object cherished by the art institution has long since become a reproductive process, affirming the ideological substratum of the liberal individual. The art hypothesis could for example be governed by the idea that art is both a divine and divinatory outpouring from the romantic genius, or conversely, the product of the artist-constructor who is part of a community and its ongoing discourse. There might be points of formal comparison, and those differences could be dealt with by another method that seem to be even stranger to art: the inductive and quantitative method.

If we as artistic researchers make use of hypothetic-deductive/qualitative and inductive/quantitative methods, will we wind up in an alien and hostile place co-opted by the social and natural sciences as heterogeneous and overpowering forces? Once again there seems to be a conflict of conventions and training. Depending on the time-aspect ratio under which a situated image is viewed, our method must involve both the actual interpretation and that which has not yet produced its discourse. To what end would our artistic research need a dependable method? Because we have set a goal of being reflexive: always questioning the reason for taking interest in visuality and making use of it, to defend visuality as a form of situated knowledge about the world, without retreating behind the walls of aesthetics. Since everything knowable is social, both the visual and textual methods will produce their own contexts: a set of dynamic but stable, and over time law-like relations. These contexts, as we examine our work retrospectively and also interrogate it critically, will present a reason to why a particular image has drawn our attention. Both quantitative, and qualitative methods are of course adapted to the material studied; however, there are different opinions about the reach of any particular method, and the various ideologies attached to these opinions. We must caution the reader that when we are referring to method we are appropriating or borrowing parts of it from social and ethnographic research in order to cast some light over our material. Our hope is also that it would, ideally, make sense in more than one context (for example, both in art and in social research). Many artists have been working with interviews (a qualitative methodology), and when it comes to quantitative method intersecting with political activism, two famous examples from the 1970s could be interpreted as dealing with political dissent by the use of an "objective" method: Hans Haakes *MoMa Poll* (1979) and *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971), and more to the point, Douglas Heubler's simultaneously mimicking and dissolving fine art formalism by way of an quantitative nature study approach in the Duration series, for instance *Duration Piece #11, Bradford, Massachusetts* (1969).

We began with collecting voices and conducting interviews. In working with this material, we consider a qualitative method to be most appropriate. However, our slow and patient work situation could also be described in quantitative terms, although we do not make use of statistics, strictly speaking. We pay close attention to visual concepts and compare them. Watching and listening to hours of recordings, even the smallest changes in visual patterns are helpful in trying to recover what might have been screened out by our dialogue-focused attention. In the beginning of our artistic research process it is important to (try to) embrace *everything*, without excluding any observations and material. This *embracing* necessarily includes the questions and prejudices we bring with us from our personal histories. One way of challenging our first impressions is through our use of a "time-space distanciation" (Giddens 1991) through the uniformity of qualitative method: we begin by performing a kind of *vivisection* of the material along with our own preconceptions and assumptions: by trying to understand how a person or a phenomenon, such as a neighborhood, has arrived to its current situation, after spending time in the field. In dealing with hundreds and hundreds of photographs and hours and hours of filmed material, a quantitative approach becomes useful: to enable a reflection on a repeated motif, to detect singular images that would be chosen on formal grounds and discharge them by a stream of images, and to choose images using the criteria of how frequently they occur. This editing process requires a method to sieve through the statistic-like amassment of interview scenes that look similar to one another. Within the art context, the comparative process choosing between images that are similar but not identical could be referred to aesthetic decision-making. The meaning of these decisions becomes relative to the flow of images and to the media, but within our artistic research process, it could be considered in terms of a visual and conceptual thinking that connects and transplants qualitative and quantitative methods.

Science can be used ”in an old sense of ’a demonstrative proof in an argument’, or in the developed sense of ‘methodological rigour’ – yet then where are the experiments, and is this not merely (*subjective, literary, speculative*) *experience*?” (Williams 1988:280). The question is of course rhetorical, but nevertheless central: when research defines its own disciplinary limit, it is at risk of isolation, because as experimental knowledge it needs to be disseminated, i.e. made social, before it can be appreciated. This is different from an avant-garde perspective where the relation between experimental and conventional knowledge is left in a permanent state of flux, and everybody is happy with that, without any need to reflexively interrogate the relationship. What our artistic research may contribute to the scientific method could be likened with a re-connection of science to its meaning in English when it first appeared in the 14th century as ”a term for knowledge as such” (Williams 1988:277). It could then be seen as one of several experimental and self-reflexive scientific approaches, such as, for instance, auto-ethnography. An early distinction was made between ”conscience”, defined as knowing with ”conviction and commitment”, and science as knowing things in theory, a distinction that could be seen as a distancing from religious knowing, where nothing more than *sola fide* (only [the conviction of] faith) is required. Williams then points to scientific knowledge as interchangeable with a certain *know-how,* inseparable from knowledge as upholding a practice:

> But science became more generally used, often interchangeably with art, to describe a particular body of knowledge or skill. (Williams 1988:277)

When we refer to inductive logic and quantitative method we are working out of a perspective that understands them as equivalent – science is a changeable practice just as art is a changeable practice. It is also important to stress the flat or non-teleological dialectical relation between the first step of our artistic research – *embracing and vivisection* – and the motivation to select images in the following stages of our work. We also find context, and the subsequent interest taken in the construction of a context, as a key aspect of meaning production, both where images are conventionally produced and interpreted (such as the art or advertising worlds) and also outside this conventional framework.

One way of thinking about our use of quantitative method passes through two expositions in Raymond Williams' *Keywords* (1988): ”science” and ”image”. It is instructive to follow the social history of these terms and their etymological transformations, and consider them in relation to central concepts in our artistic research. Our artistic research practice is saturated with images that we understand as situated, and we treat them as concepts. By transplanting inductive and quantitative method from social research into art, it becomes possible to deal with the immanent – not yet conceptualized – emotional and sensual force of the image by restraining their individual monumentality. If a still image were to exist as a flash animation, it would no longer possess the quality of singularity, but is still not a narrative image in the way a filmed sequence would be. A similar change of quality, from narration to facticity appears in film sequences of motionless motives captured by a fixed camera. In what way are we making use of scientific method? Well, no, we are not, not in a conventional sense, anyway. But, then again, how else to describe the engagement needed in the process of fieldwork? We feel it is necessary to question the default social positioning of art and the discussion of images. This is certainly the reason for our interest in the concept and effects of *faktura*. As we are adding a visual and conceptual practice to methods from which we appropriate parts and pieces we are aware of that this could look conspicuously similar to conceptual tourism. This would then draw the criticism that either you are in or you're out – *tertium non datur.* But, then, and again this will perhaps sound strange; the way that inductive logic connects to the visual material from Husby and the Northeastern US is as close as it gets to quantitative method throughout a reoccurring stage of the practice. By way of a quantitative approach, we can appreciate the striking importance of the appearance and disappearance in the smallest of details in a particular image, in addition to its narrative meaning. So, we basically claim the liberty of appropriating and “travel” methods to suit our interests and needs. This is also why it is important to cite from Williams: that it is possible to follow the historical use of the term science and see that it is indeed conventional, doxological, synthetic and changeable bricolage, rather than a set of epistemic, analytically rigid and highly specialized methods and techniques.

The reciprocity of photography is fascinating. The semiotic, sociological and ideological discussion on photography is vast and rich, from the technical possibilities of a non-human gaze in the 1920s to the discussions on media and representation that started in the 1970s, to the postmodern play of Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. Barthes's text creates a play between political and historical objectivity and a painful presence which transcends subject/object relations. Barthes defines these two interpretations of photography as *studium*, a "kind of education (civility, politeness) that allows discovery of the operator" (Barthes 1993:28) and *punctum* that "annihilates itself as medium to be no longer a sign but the thing itself" (Barthes 1993:42). Postmodernism deliberately detached images from both social processes and also the materiality of documentaries; a conflict appeared between different perspectives on the image: first, a structuralist analysis of images as signs within an all-encompassing ideological discourse, second, a poststructuralist understanding of images as individualized, contextual/non-discursive and third, a point of view in which individual agency is disenabled by the context (understood as status quo). Both structuralist and poststructuralist approaches make use of a mutually exclusive dialectics: one may apply either an ideological or an aesthetic perspective, but not both. These positions lead to an unproductive policing of the intersections where images and ideology cross over. In other words, if an image is ideological then it can have no aesthetic value and vice versa – or: if someone says that our images are political, we had better shut up. This is also the point where the "idea" of ideology – image as truth – intersects with the "imago" of image – image as fetish idolatry: image as document, and image as possessing intrinsic aesthetic value. The important problem that needs to be addressed is then the creation of hierarchies between perspectives. This brings us back to Williams' exposition of *image*. If we, by referring to monumentality and image quality, *justify* the still image as arrested visuality – by making it function as a "communicator" between Husby *and* the US and as a carrier of our three questions that developed from our experience of hanging out in Husby, traveling through the Northeastern US and reflecting on our own position – then the images will be subjected to a organizational mode, but they will continue to establish a surplus of knowability which escapes our attempts to organize and classify it, continuing to "talk back". This slippage is an unavoidable discovery for all those concerned with communication. The image is uncontrollable both because of what it is and also because of what it is not – which is beyond reach. Jacques Lacan tells a story about a visit to Brittany in the 1920s that has something to say about the unlimited visual-conceptual reciprocity:

> Petit-Jean pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can. It floated there in the sun, a witness to the canning industry, which we, in fact, were supposed to supply. It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me – You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you! (Lacan 1991:95)

The story continues with Lacan's reflection, that if this what Petit-Jean said

> had any meaning, it was because in a sense, it was looking at me all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated. (Lacan 1991:95)

Returning to Williams, he shed his etymological light on Image, with its Latin root *imago* ¬by showing that it could be understood as something formed or carved, something *produced through human effort*, such as an idol – which in its turn possesses or summons phantasmagoric forces "not plainly invisible" (Williams 1988:158). Already in its first appearance, 'image' is related to painstaking reproduction, and at the same instant "vision and idea" – the formation of theory. Within the concept of 'image', "there is a deep tension between ideas of 'copying' and ideas of imagination and the imaginary" (Ibid). Williams notes that due to "the growing importance of visual media" (Ibid) the use of the concept of image has been "overtaken" by

> the commercial and manipulative processes of image as 'perceived' reputation or character. It is interesting that the implications of imagination and especially imaginary are kept well away from the mC20 use of image in advertising and politics. (Williams 1988:158p)

There are several cultural forms that seek to both deny and deplete the subversive potential of the image. To declare images to be non-discursive is to intentionally place them at the top of a hierarchy where a representational-conceptual image would be found at the bottom. This would be the position of formalist modernism, and, to generalize, also that of the dominant culture of institutionalized postmodernism. Declarations of this kind have a limited influence outside the institutional frame, but their *social* consequences in the art world are crucial. Another way of dealing with the image is to deny its transcendent character altogether, and to argue that the non-discursive qualities of images really mean seduction and emotional manipulation, which needs to be countered by language and rational analysis, safely relegated to a less prominent position on the fringes of knowledge, reflecting the marginalization of the art discipline within other academic discourses. This position – once again generally speaking – is paradoxically accepted by any number of artists, institutions and art historians – who readily dismiss images as spectacular or ideological but do not implicate themselves or their own practices. We hold that both cases involve a mistake regarding the image, though the non-discursive approach seems the most self-contradictory. The argument for the exceptional status of the image as a conclusive proof for art's specific institutional freedom, combines idealism with power relations leading to an unsavory and unproductive mix of delimitations. We use images as material in a dialectic movement that simultaneously informs the reflective process and is also directed by it.

Does this mix of methods not come to look suspiciously similar to sociology or ethnography – or other fields where the artistic component becomes merely ornamental? Through visual art's inheritance of a romantic subjectivity, artistic research has an inevitable link to personal experience. This is a common, and deeply questioned and contested relation that is a resource to the advertisement industry and a source of critical analysis in visual sociology, for instance in Goffman's *Gender advertisements* (1975). Since our artistic research is directly linked to art practice, this means coming to terms with a host of traditions and expectations for interpreting the visual. This appears in the reciprocal, non-teleological and dialectic gap between image making and image conceptualization. It is also important to find a relation between a subjective, reflexive discourse that examines the conditions for our artistic research, and a more systematic reflection that takes on the institutionalized discourses delimiting the art field. As we identify with artistic research, as well as the university's growing role in fostering art, the knowledge we produce will be relative to our practice and the situated image: to be of value it must be partial.

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In *Off the grid* we began with an approach close to the inductive method and gradually moved towards a deductive way of working. We have also shifted from a position similar to grounded theory – of finding our theory through being immersed in a situation – to a more question-oriented approach. Method follows practice, *method is itself practice*, but once formulated into discourse it becomes a filter of experience and information. If we think about *Off the grid* as an academic research project rather than an artwork, it moves between three main questions, where it is more conventional in academia to begin with a single starting hypothesis. Our project was, to a large extent, the result of conversations around a sense of unease with the deliberate misrepresentations of contemporary Swedish society. We came to Husby as a result of a series of accidental meetings. We started with a brief contact with an organization working against "honor" related domestic violence, which was then followed by a seminar at BAU, an architectural firm in Stockholm, over 1960s suburban planned space and the usefulness of Henri Lefebvre's writings. Both these experiences helped us narrow down our area of interest: the suburb of Husby in the southwest of Stockholm inhabited by a majority of immigrants. We spent well over half a year *embracing* Husby: walking around, taking photos, following discussions and reading articles on immigration and suburbia, having coffee and talking to people of all ages.

Before we decided to do anything with the vast amount of material we collected, we followed the path of our previous projects, inspired by Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau in which we would start from a place, and gradually "vivisect" its economical, historical, social and psychological layers (Lefebvre 1991; de Certeau 2002). Because its inhabitants had no opportunity to represent themselves in the media, let alone create their own narrative of the place, Husby seemed *out of focus*. We struggled to formulate the questions around that particular space and our own relation to it. Beyond this, we struggled to find a good reason to stay in Husby and to develop our relationship to the place. How could we stay away from the predictable *representative* role of talking on the inhabitants' behalf and acting as "we-know-better-than-the-media" do-gooders? By visual and textual means we first tried to challenge and deconstruct the negative media image of Husby, to which we were permanently exposed – school kids asked us if we were plainclothes police, or perhaps substitute teachers – then after that to question the self-fulfilling agenda of critical art which does no more than reflecting institutional dogmas. We came to the conclusion that it was not our place to present counter-narratives, because this would leave the problems of "speaking for others" unaddressed. But then how to stay in Husby and circumvent the media stereotypes and power relationships at the same time?

By another series of accidental meetings, we were invited to teach at the MECA College of Art in Portland, Maine and came in contact with a predominantly US-based movement known as living "off the grid", based in discussions on ecological sustainability and overuse of energy, and historically related to libertarian traditions of political freedom and independence (Ryker 2005). While the off griders seem completely entitled to building their individual houses and lives with little outside interference, immigrants in Husby are perceived through the racialized filter of the collective housing estate and has to struggle to gain social respect (Ericsson & Molina 2005; de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005). The possibility of establishing a link between our discussions in Husby and with the off griders did not occur to us before returning from our first US research trip in 2006. Intuitively we thought that the *artistic* solution was to put the two materials side by side and let the relation between them remain indeterminate. Startled by the sheer difference between the materials we took recourse in the idea that someone else – an institution, a curator – would take responsibility for the *rapport sans rapport*, the relationless relation, appearing between the projects. As we looked more closely at the material, we saw little difference in the desire of our interviewees for self-definition and their attempts to establish it in practice. Our working hypothesis was that focusing on the question of self-definition would allow us to create a relationship between off griders and Husby. We then began to ask the same questions to the interviewees in Husby as we did in the American Northeast, playing down the geographic differences in our material. We began with the material we had already collected.

From this point on, we were convinced that the link between Husby and Northeastern US was to be found in the reciprocal connections that our interviewees would make between each other. This changed the project, our role included, through a kaleidoscopic twist. Given this new approach we came to reexamine our first round of questions on freedom, independence and liberty, conventionally and even stereotypically associated with the US. We also reconsidered the questions we had raised in Husby: around marginalization, travel and de Certeau's concept of *proper*: where the imagined housing estate space subdues individual or collective practices. At this point we also found that we needed to acknowledge our own situation of doing artistic research and our involvement in contemporary art, and also make this part of the project. We went through the questions, the material and our own positions, until we reached a common ground: the right to self-definition and travel. Still something was missing. As we listened to the interviews from the American Northeast, we started to think of the ideas of independence and self-sufficiency raised by the interviewees as a voluntary act of marginalization which led them to leave the comforts of their middle class life-style behind. This act of leaving ones' familiar surroundings appeared in stark contrast to the Husby residents' search for safety and political, social and economic freedom under the pains of marginalization which immigrants in Sweden regularly suffer. We recognized that travel is a metaphor, sometimes even a *noa-word* (used instead of a tabooed word), for all kinds of changes, and is also embedded in everyday situations, due to more persistent social, political, cultural and economical structures. There were clearly examples of social violence, and social rejection in both the US and the Husby material, albeit in different circumstances. We came to add the concept of community to our research questions as a delimitation of individual self-definition by a social context, through the interpretations and comments made by some of the Husby interviewees on the American situation. This meant that we had arrived at our finalized project questions: *travel, the right to self-definition and community.*

One complication is that we have not been able to spend as much time in the American Northeast as in Husby. The dialogue setup and the adoption of an intermediary role have, as we see it, has been in conflict with the conventional demands of ethnographic research to spend prolonged periods with the people you study. Our research trips to the US have been limited to six weeks in total and we have been moving between eight locations there, with the exception of our first week in Maine. The main reason for this is of course the costs involved, and the lack of resources within the university connected to artistic research, and the appearance of artistic research as a stranger to the principal Swedish art funds. The one application we succeeded in getting funded was written in the language and framework of a regular art project. Later applications that have used "scientific" language in a more straightforward sense and positioned the project in terms of artistic research have all been rejected. Today we understand this effect in terms of our own professional situation (if we apply our questions to ourselves, acknowledging that we are neither changing country or trying to drastically change the way we live): our *travel* from the art field to artistic research, the self-definition from practicing artistic research and the orientation to an emergent community we hope to serve. The lack of resources has been more than compensated by the generosity of both the interviewees and also our friends in allowing us to stay throughout the whole period without spending one single night in a hotel room. This welcoming attitude also made it possible to make the return trip without additional funding.

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Off the grid is interview-based. We arrive at the interviews with our cultural stereotypes, presuppositions, interests and questions. However, through the interview process, we move away from the safety and closure of predetermined questions to an open-ended dialogical struggle to understand the exchanges. The whole structure of a dialogue could easily slip away if we are too occupied with reaching a “proper” answer. When the interviewees expound on their views, it had an unforeseeable effect on our next set of questions and the course of the project. But in reviewing the gathered material we needed a perspective that was different from our own: through allowing the off griders and their paired Husby citizens to question each other, we believe we have achieved that.

Ethnographical discourse on theory and method, particularly critical ethnography, shares many of the same or similar problems as our artistic research: because of ethnography’s reliance on methods such as participant observation and interviews. When George Marcus and Michael Fischer brand their own discipline “creatively parasitic” (Marcus & Fischer 1999:19) it matches our understanding of artistic research within the academic framework. That the ethnographer is “writing from a largely unique research experience to which only he or she has practical access in the academic community” (Marcus & Fischer 1999:21) seems also to describe our situation as artistic researchers. In our understanding, what our artistic research project shares with ethnographic work, is that we make use of thoughts, reflections, images and ideas to filter the all-embracing experience of persons and situations. Another critical ethnographer, James Clifford, notes that he is “working with a notion of comparative knowledge produced through an *itinerary*, always marked by a ‘way in’, a history of locations and a location of histories: ‘partial and composite traveling theories’” (Clifford 1997:31). Clifford’s writing was essential to us when we were formulating the first stage of our project, in which concepts that must be understood as both vectorial and material, such as travel and marginalization, contributed to the project.

Conclusion

The method we used in the *Off the grid* project is based on interviews and comments on the interviews from locations in Vermont, New York State, Maine, and Husby. We have reached the core set of questions concerning travel, the right to self-definition and community through a practice that is both *visual and conceptual* since images are situated concepts and also produce them. We have applied versions of both the hypothetic-deductive/qualitative and the inductive/quantitative method to understand our own working process. In acknowledging the role of our subjectivities in the interviews we have added our own reflections related to the travel, self-definition and the communities involved in our artistic research.

Ten months ahead of our disputation, we had collected all the material to complete the dialogue between the American Northeast and Husby. Our role as both interpreters and intermediaries came to be accepted by the interviewees: the dialogues helped the participants to overcome some of the abstraction that was attached to our artistic research project in the beginning. While we all occupy different situations of power and privilege, there is ultimately no principal difference in the right to self-definition between the off griders, the immigrants in Husby and us: the same set of questions apply regardless of geography, resources and community context, and we have not experienced any problem discussing the questions in between us. We have understood this as an effect of globalization. The real question is now appearing – why is the right to self-definition distributed so unevenly between us?

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Cooperation in the shadow of the artistic subject

> *Thus production appears as the point of departure, consumption as the conclusion, distribution and exchange as the middle, which is however itself twofold, since distribution is determined by society and exchange by individuals. The person objectifies himself in production, the thing subjectifies itself in the person; in distribution, society mediates between production and consumption in the form of general, dominant determinants; in exchange the two are mediated by the chance characteristics of the individual.*
> Marx, Grundriße

> *Production, then, is also immediately consumption, consumption is also immediately production. Each is immediately its opposite. But at the same time a mediating movement takes place between the two. Production mediates consumption; it creates the latter's material; without it, consumption would lack an object. But consumption also mediates production, in that it alone creates for the products the subject for whom they are products. The product only obtains its 'last finish' in consumption.*
> Marx, Grundriße

> *Thirdly, the moral individualism of liberalism is itself a solvent of participatory community. For liberalism is in practice as well as in much of its theory promotes a vision of the social world as an arena in which each individual, in pursuit of the achievement of whatever she or he takes to be her good, needs to be protected from other such individuals by the enforcement of individual rights. Moral argument within liberalism cannot therefore begin from some conception of a genuinely common good that is more and other than the sum of the preferences of individuals. But argument to, from, and about such a conception of the common good it integral to the practice of participatory community.*
> Macintyre, Ethics and Politics

The radio was left on for everyone to hear the artist's failed attempts to sing a gendered heart out. How is it that popular music can function as a vehicle for travel between the banal and conventional and the most valued and renowned? Does the fact that I have a skin and a sensory apparatus, which allows me to feel pain and appreciate pleasure, mean that there is a legal relation between me as a physical being and me as a social being? Does it mean that the step into the trivial language of authenticity is about expressing an also trivial difference, and following that, collecting cultural benefits in the name of individual rights? It is easy enough to find songs that are about the *failed* individual, where the break down of a boarded-up subject is wailed over or extolled – either you call it love or loss. It is harder to talk about what existed before individualism, before the modern disciplinary narratives became impeccably naturalized and systematized from schoolyard to graveyard, since this will inevitably and predictably lead to an idealized image of a pre mass-society past, or the free unencumbered individual. Within the context of politics, the liberal mindset has made it hard if not impossible to conceptualize a collective social formation as anything other than an infringement on the rights of the individual, or perhaps disturbances in a hugely profitable process of making collectivity indistinguishable from corporate structures: "collective aspiration is redeployed as a dehumanised abstraction, as a machine of exploitation and oppression. The ultimate expression of this recasting of the collective form is the bestowing of legal rights previously reserved for individual citizens to powerful, multinational corporations" (Stimson and Sholette 2004:577).

Working together as a collaboration while dealing with each other as liberal subjects means looking for trouble. When we begin to discuss the subject, the sheer mass of epistemic nuances and complications immediately inform us that we are "out of our league": following any threads leads us to a *Gordian knot*. There are suggestive one-click solutions for salvation and bliss: dissolving identity in the name of submission to art as a higher purpose, pouring one's subjective ambitions into the mould of a digital age, and then there is the even less authentic, but obstructive and repellent suggestion that we should free ourselves by excavating the historical stratigraphy of artist-subject misconceptions. Our point of orientation has been our hesitation and growing resistance to the demands to deliver our artistic research within the terms of an identifiable relation between subject and object. In other words, a relation that is reflexive, transitive and symmetric, quite different from the instructions to a thesis opponent from our faculty: "[i]f there are several authors" it informs the opponent "the opposition should primarily concentrate on the part/s the respondent is responsible for" (Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts, University of Gothenburg 2007). What we shared as a practice could be seen as an infringement of our freedom as individuals, from the perspective of the liberal subject. Because practice is a process, the work relation was constantly shifting over time, so an answer to the nature of the work relation even depended on *when* someone was asking! As individuals, entering into cooperation such as ours, which was an artistic research interview based process meant that all parts present in this thesis have their own history of hopes, changes and disjointments. To run a chisel through and splinter up a finished work in the name of clarification on who did what is of course possible, but we wish to understand the necessity of clarifying the division of labor. Why is a singular individual perspective adaptable to the academic system of evaluation, while a collaboration between two people, or more creates confusion? From our perspective, it must be made clear that the work relation is at risk of being lost if treated in an overtly formalist or reductionist way.

In *Off the grid* we approach the discourse on the subject in terms of travel, self-definition and community, with self-definition being central. Self-definition as a sense of identity and belonging may be produced, defined and disseminated by the media and the political economy, but it also develops between individuals without normative social structures or cultural forms. Both groups – off griders and Husby residents – are critical about the readymade identity offered by consumerism as a panacea for the social deficits of the liberal individual. Some off griders opted out of the consumer lifestyle because they felt personally unfulfilled, even though they had been doing well according to the individualist criteria of corporate America. Some off griders and most Husby citizens opted out because they could not find a job or did not want to be a part of consumer society. Staying outside the dominant political economy and defining your identity through this outsider position, which is an integral part of a modernist-liberal artistic identity, leads to the search for a community, because one no longer belongs to, or identifies with the dominant narrative. Stimson and Sholette argue that in the narrative of dominant interests “[t]here is only room for one collective enterprise now and that is state-sanctioned marketplace fetishism as imagined community” (Stimson and Sholette 2004:581). The off grid community is more likely than the Husby residents to appear in the interview discussions as a *virtual* community; related to literary or Internet islands of common interest and individual expressions of DIY dissent that do not take form as “practice-based forms of local participatory community” (Macintyre 2006:158).

It is in practice, more than anything else, that the training we have received (including attending art schools and attending university including the culture of the different fields), markedly led our interests in different directions. It is more interesting to understand the effects of these backgrounds on our work as the ways of belonging to thought-collectives rather than as expressions of individuality, talent, sensibility, etc. Ludwik Fleck made, as early as in the 1930s, the mechanism beyond institutionally formed identities clear: “Every thought-collective considers that the people who do not belong to it are incompetent” (Fleck 1986:81p). For instance, for us: the distance from text to image proved to be much shorter and less cumbersome than from image to text. The university academic training of artists in 1980s seemed to have had little to spare for any explicit written or verbal attempts to expand the artists’ role and practice beyond art production in a narrowly defined sense. This understanding of the role of art was contrasted by being formed by theoretically oriented academic university institutions with proud traditions of separation between writing on art and making art. In practice this meant that the conceptual plans, planning process, as well as the organization and editing work of the images both became the result of handling texts. These abstracts, project descriptions and texts were crafted and lambasted by Staffan on one hand, with intermittent comments arriving from Mike. Mike took the still images. The filmed material was the work of both Mike and Staffan. Both of us did the editing, all the visual material was sifted through and chosen in relation to the order of the project. Through the years of working together these underlying differences between our backgrounds and approaches complemented each other. As long as there was a sense of common purpose, the educational, structural and cultural differences functioned as an “engine” for the work. These differences also that expanded the possibilities from our respective fields. The concept of the “situated image” as a “visual concept” was developed from the need of a third, in-between preset positions and loyal to the project at hand. Just because we have reached the end of our joint project coming out as two separate individuals, there is no reason to discard this model and the idea of joining different structurally formed subjectivities in the field of fine art, but it must be said that a time-consuming working together must be based on an unwavering solidarity related to a common artistic research project.

When talking to both off griders and Husby citizens, they, as well as we, tend to refer to community as a *distant, non-voluntary* and *abstract* concept that has some connection to daily life but which is hard if not impossible to influence. A thoroughly positive community could be *nurturing*, as is the *Common Ground Country Fair*, a yearly September weekend event organized by the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardens Association (MOFGA). After a tough start, the fair celebrated its 30-year anniversary in 2006 as an established family outing on land owned by the MOFGA, where several of the Maine off griders we met went to visit, talk to people and pick up ideas. The fair is both a collective display for a practice-based community, and a site for its coming together; it is one instance when a virtual or imaginary community materializes. In Husby, the artists’ studios at *Husby Gård* – the manifest result of a political struggle among the local artists for recognition by the municipality – is another example of a practice-based community, within a different context. Defining oneself as an artist in Husby means associating marginality with an identity – an immigrant in a public housing suburb – which is not from the outside defined negatively. Control over a space is the one most important factor in defining a community of practitioners as artists, and forming a program for Husby Kunsthalle becomes their community interface. The undertaking to form a community taken on by the Swedish-born and immigrant artists in Husby Gård involved a collective goal, whence the basic challenges faced by the off griders are dealt with within their individual living spaces. In both cases self-definition becomes manifest in spatial terms, although we do not want to stereotypically associate the Husby residents with collectivity and the off griders with individualism, in their relationship to space. We will not be able to look more closely to the role of space and self-definition in this text; however, if we were to do such an analysis it would include the conceptual triad *perceived, conceived and lived space* in Henri Lefebvre's seminal work *The production of space* (1991), along with the analysis of planned and individually practiced and physically remembered space in Michel de Certeau's *The practice of everyday life* (1984), as well as Anthony Giddens´ discussion of how society is engaged in *stretching* time and space in *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (1981).

Consumer society devours identity: it is the utmost means of production and object of desire. Since art is firmly associated with the individual, serving to prove the relationship between an object and its maker, it is possible to describe openness to the world in all forms, including the learning process of reading and looking at art, as an act of anthropophagy/cannibalism, or/and eroticism: the assimilation of an object by a "non-identical identity"(Cavalcante-Schuback & Habib Enquist 2005 Our translation). The idea of anthropophagy developed in Brazil during the 1920s as a way to talk about Brazilian cultural identity as "built upon the consumption of its fellow cultures" (Hopper 2007). The critique of cultural imperialism could also "aggravate the cloning of those movements carried out by neoliberalism" (Rolnik 2006:6), but more interestingly help "problematize the disgraceful confusion between the two politics of flexible subjectivity and to separate the wheat from the chaff, essentially on the basis of the place or non-place that is attributed to the other" (Rolnik 2006:7). As a concept, anthropophagy is itself prey to continuous re-reading, although we acknowledge that we are using it differently from its original assertion of hybrid cultural identity and anti-colonialism. Our interest in anthropophagy is related to the fact that we as artistic researchers receive our nourishment from other traditions and identities, including our own idiosyncrasies. In other words, our identities as individuals are always embedded in a shifting collective identity. We believe there is enough conceptual slack to be able to say that subjectivity is indeed shared when practiced in common. We also feel there is a collective aspect of the manifold "object" of our artistic research: as a mutual and successive assimilation, nourishment and learning. Seen in terms of production, we were not divided into two self-regulated units, we rather shared a border with the work we were undertaking, tuning the communication of our personal perspectives relative to the envisioned outcome. What we brought with us is not a stream flowing from the work to the individual, or individual subjectivities being "reflected" in the work in a biographical sense. We feel this perspective assumes a dichotomy between active subject and passive object, as though the work were no more than "inert" matter. Emphasizing individual biography and subjectivity creates an artificial separation between us as collaborators. We appear through the work of art and in conversation with it. When the work develops in a new direction as part of a *codependent collective* *working process,* responding throughout its whole to a minute change, it was not relevant to specify what either one of us in every micro-instant have contributed since it unleashed an unconditional gratitude – a drifting bubble of joy!

The expectations raised in the name of the liberal subject-object relation are different depending on context. How these questions are raised reveals what the expectations are and who is targeted. Historically, the university has protected the concept of the modern singular and autonomous subject investigating an equally singular object of inquiry, which will produce a "unique contribution" to knowledge. But in a situation with a high concentration of human and material capital, such as a laboratory, the limited access to the equipment produces the scientific convention of pursuing research in a niche into which the individual PhD student are led by his/her professor, the demands of a funding agency or corporation for that matter, the research results are published jointly. According to a more idealized view of the scientific field, the object of study takes precedence, although the claims to intellectual property and the exploitation of immaterial rights to fend off competitors tell another story. The Constitution of the United States says in article 1:8 that "Congress shall have power to… Promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by Securing for Limited Times, to Authors and Inventors, the exclusive Rights to their Writings and Discoveries" (cited after Farell and Shapiro 2004). In the humanities, the qualities traditionally associated with the explorer of undiscovered territories distinctly points to the individual quest for knowledge. In this context the subject is both the focus and the productive force. We will have to wait forever for *Luther Blissett* or *The Bernadette Corporation* to win the Nobel Prize in literature.

The question of the artistic subject is not unrelated to questions of intellectual property, ownership and monopoly. Most of the recent discussions of intellectual property focus on the software industry and piracy. To a varying degree, they are concerned whether or not information should be owned, copyrighted or sold – or whether information should be open source (see for instance *The Oil of the 21st Century*: http://oil21.org/?events). The *Internet guide for journalists and reporters* notes on its site that

> The purpose of copyright is both economical and moral. One should be able to make money from the things that one produces, and one should have the right to be recognised as the author of one's works. Even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights speaks of this. (http://www.usus.org/techniques/copyright.htm)

The technical nature of some of these discussions tends to obscure those areas of immaterial rights which have practical and, more importantly, financial applications. For instance, the definition of patent, which differs between countries, has not been discussed within the frame of artistic research so far. The moral discussions on the other hand dominate the discussions. Since we have some experience with the Norwegian University of Technology and Science we may use it as an example: in order to be patentable, a device must meet the following criteria, according to the *Interest organization for doctoral candidates at NTNU*: “newness, invention, technical nature and possibility to utilize industrially” (www.dion.ntnu.no, 20071028). If we were to apply this criteria to art, we could argue that art is about newness, lacking neither in inventiveness or – particularly obvious with software based work – technical nature. In fact they go together, and in a knowledge and information based economy art claims to be on the cutting edge, a perception based on the avant-garde tradition. To conclude, it does make sense to see the role of the artist and the institutional support systems of the art world as similar to monopoly capitalism. But in identifying this as a hidden agenda in discussing the relation between artistic research, academia and the market, it does not follow that this judicial idea of the relation between subject and object is appropriate. If the call for an authentic relation between a singular subject-creator, a unique object and the rights stemming from this relation is adhered to by institutional structures, capitalist claims to creativity will overshadow those who in practice strive to challenge this model.

> Under the banner of the “Information Society”, a cartel of corporate knowledge distributors struggle to maintain their exclusive right to the exploitation and commodification of the informational resources of the world. With their campaign for “Digital Rights Management”, the copyright industries attempt to simultaneously outlaw the Universal Computer, revoke the Internet and suspend the fundamental laws of information. Under the pretext of the “Creative Commons”, an emerging middle class of Intellectual Proprietors fights an uphill battle against the new and increasingly popular forms of networked production that threaten the regimes of individual authorship and legal control. (http://oil21.org/?about)

As we are moving between off griders who have marginalized themselves, and Husby immigrants who are marginalized from the outside, and our own sense of marginality in the artworld, it could be either the subject – the artist – or the object – the work of art – that summons attraction, or both. We argue that it is the object – understood as the expansion of images as situated concepts – that retrospectively defined both our artistic identity and our collaborative process. If we were defined as separate individual artists, there would be no active role for the work as *faktura*. On a trivial level we are both individuals, we have each a set of sensory organs, different personal histories, and different approaches to a given situation, materials, et c. Surely this had an impact on the way that we worked, how we imagined our destination, and the strategy we took to go there. We therefore hold that we can only engage in a useful discussion if we consider the active role played by the art work, not only its authors. Such a discussion must address both subjectivity and individuation and also how both relate to the object. We made use of the same technology as a majority of artists today do, including digital cameras, computer hardware and software. Most of our internal work related communication consisted of daily showers of email. We also drew on the work of other artists and theorists in our practice. This placed us on the shoulders of the collective work of others, and, as we have discussed in *Faktura, or at the end of discursive art*, our intensive use of *QuickTime* software meant that our expression is bound to its means of production, with its pre-existing parameters and possibilities.

The idea of the independent artist has been scrutinized by institutional theory within the fields of sociology and philosophy. Within philosophy, it was that inspired by Wittgenstein's analysis of culture in terms of language game and language performance oriented philosophers such as J.L. Austin and John Searle. The study of institutions and the collective nature of human experiences is a central concern for the field of sociology. The individual artist is, as Howard Becker argues, a part of a "collective action":

> Whatever the artist, so defined, does not do himself must be done by someone else. The artist thus works in the center of a large network of cooperating people, all of whose work is essential to the final outcome. Wherever he depends on others, a cooperative link exists. (Becker 1974:769)

Becker, writing in the seventies and eighties, starts from the assumption that the artist is assumed to be a singular professional male. For example, while he writes on the art/craft division, he does not discuss the role played by class and gender in this division. He also does not discuss the social network around art production. The production of the work might require "support personnel", and its distribution and reception require various sets of mediation; however, the social network needed for the work of art to be produced is conceptualized as *external* and of lesser consequence. When there is cooperation between individuals with the same artistic intent, when it becomes a professional activity "a division of labor" begins to develop (Becker 1974:769). Becker argues that outside of contexts that define cultural production in terms of individual artists, creativity is expressed through "simple communally shared art forms like the square dance"

(Ibid). Institutional theory stresses the collective, but, at least in its early forms as developed by George Dickie and Paul DiMaggio among others, focuses on the structures and networks for education, distribution and evaluation. Because of this, institutional theory could be useful for analyzing the development of a set of strategical relations between the university and aspects of the art community that are of both practical, economic and long-term structural importance beyond the immediate interests of artists. Becker never cites Ludwik Fleck; nor does he use the concept of *thought collective*, but he is nonetheless clear on that "Interdependent systems of conventions and structures of cooperative links appear very stable and difficult to change" (Becker 1974:773). As we have been opting out of the traditional art system ever since we started to work together in 1999, the art field had no objections to us working together albeit there was little if any interest in the reasons for doing so. In this process the university, which is built on the individual pursuit of knowledge, perhaps paradoxically given our university structured differences, became our refuge from the de facto artworld. It is not an uncontested hope. On the one hand the university appears to us as a zone of intellectual engagement, if not rescue, that sustains the intra artistic search for a common ground between the artist producer and the artist in the reflective discourse. On the other hand the university is also a hierarchical system of classification, abstraction and exclusion: the pompous patriarchal parade of the chosen few, particularly as seen from the inside. But on a practical level, the university provided support and stability for our project, and our hope is still that through bridging the art and academic disciplines, artistic research may produce a thought collective that will indeed form a practice-based community.

In the Western philosophical tradition it is possible – contrary to, for instance, other traditions such as Buddhism – to conceive of a subject, isolated from everything: the subject is essentially soul and substance. Aristotle proposed a different understanding of individuality. Rather than the subject being essentially isolated and autonomous, Aristotle, with whom we are more inclined to identify, sees the subject as saturated in social (in other words, political community) relations, family responsibilities and object relations. If we focus more closely on the subject, it becomes obvious that it has a historically specific genealogy, and definitions of the subject differ widely according to different theoretical traditions. The formidable challenges from the 19th century – Hegel's and Marx's dialectics, Darwin's contestation of Creationism, Nietzsche's critique of the concept of truth and Freud's scandalous disclosure that we don't know what we want and cannot control what we say – undermined the authority of the individual subject. However, the individual subject still survives in the diminished and shrunken form of the consumer, who we refer to as the *liberal* subject. The liberal subject still retains dominant in terms of the object and the social, but also in the intimacy of the small gestures and limited contexts.

We wish to further explain the consequences of a cooperative, collaborative way of working within the art field. This requires further examination of how the liberal individual subject has been formed within the dominant liberal tradition. Within the liberal tradition, the role of the artist-subject has been to produce values through objects *ex nihil*, "out of nothing" – out of pure ingenuity and talent. These properties are not contextualized or defined, other than that they are unique properties of an individuals natural gifts that can neither be learned nor taught. The *unique* object is a symbolic representation of the individual, which, after the bourgeois revolutions and counterrevolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries. It had a value that could only be upheld if – after invoking God (revealing persistent or displaced religious sentiments) – one referred to inviolable individual rights. The current definition of the work of art was the amalgam of two traditions which both depend on the liberal subject: the passive reception of the divine gifts of the artist *and* universal legal and property rights. The reaction to how easily the art object enters into the commercial circuit has its roots in both the Christian concept of the eternal soul and the liberal idea of inviolable property. These two traditions have led to the development of the enchanted art object which possesses both tangible physical properties, and also the volatile, invisible powers summoned by the object as image or sign. The art object is an example of both Marx's commodity fetish, and also Guy Debord's *spectacle*: "The spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image" (Debord 1967 § 34). Modern individuation as a privileged subject-object nexus has its historical roots in the Renaissance. Michel Foucault's historical genealogies reveal the second half of the 18th century to be a decisive moment, particularly for high culture. This had its expression in new forms of spatial reorganization, exemplified by the installation of private seats in the stalls. Through the organization and design of space, the factory, hospital and school became an integral aspect of the classification, separation and control of the population "collective outbursts were to be replaced by individual inner experiences" (Hunt 2004:43)

Pre-revolutionary, 18th century society was structured around social traditions. Power was disseminated by the church through preaching "patriarchal order, corporatism, uniformity and traditionalism" (Nordbäck 2004:399 Our translation) wrapped in visions of punishment and divine wrath for those who left the flock. In the early 18th century this system of belief was facing *pietism* and its "polarizing tendencies, strong emotionalism, its reformist attitude towards church and social life, its egalitarianism and religious individualism" throughout Europe (Nordbäck 2004 abstract). Pietism found an ally in the concept of Natural Law which emphasized individual subjectivity, secular reason and divine sanction, bringing it into conflict with social orthodoxy. The reforms brought on by pietism focused on awakening of the conscience of the individual subject, a subject whose formation paralleled that of the artistic subject. The “pious subject”, by definition, was split between reason and an orientation towards “another world”, similar in some ways to conventional definition of the artistic subject. The artist individual that reveres art to create a work becomes related to the divine justification of natural rights, and to ideas connecting art to divine creation. This association is still causing conflicts over art as an expression of naturally given and art as socially constructed.

The downfall of the aristocracy and the rise of the bourgeoisie redirected the metaphysics of belief and awe. Prior to these developments, art both commissioned by and dedicated to the church or the king, served to express faith in authority. After the bourgeois revolution, the role of art changed so that it now mirrored society and expressed individual experience. The historian Lynne Hunt points to the surge in the production of portraits that “made up some 40 percent of the paintings shown in the Salons” (Hunt 2004:43) under the French Revolution and the Napoleonic reign. These social changes also affected the hierarchy of rhetorical and allegorical art. Prior to the revolution, portraiture had exclusively depicted the nobility; afterwards, members of other social classes began to appear in portraits. Individual rights and values existed in relation to the increasing prevalence of capitalist competition, which established a fundamental political-economic relation between consumerism and body. In other words, everyone is entitled to their individual rights, but not everyone deserves his/her flattering Salon portrait.

The very order of desire became modernized. This new emphasis on private sensual experience (including that associated with the art experience) functioned as part of the justification for individual legal rights. These rights, which included the inviolable right to own property, were based on a definition of the human body as an inviolable entity. The desiring body had to be normalized, hence the right “to be secure in their persons, houses, papers and effects” in the fourth amendment of the US constitution, and the prohibition against “cruel and unusual punishment” in the eighth amendment (1789/1791). The judicial definition of torture was one of the most debated issues of the time: inspired by the enlightenment, the reformist modernists discredited the idea of a given community’s or society’s right to find truth through pain as “Oriental despotism” (Hunt 2004:51), not up to “the standard of reason” (a comment in the colonial vein attributed to Voltaire, cited in Hunt 2004:47). There was a rise in the use of human and rational *biopower* techniques that were more effective than pain because of how they managed subjectivities and emotions, with the goal of “achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (Foucault 1977:140).

If we examine the art of that time period, we can see how developments in painting reflected these wider social shifts. For example, paintings such as Goya's *Los Desastres de la Guerra* ("The Disasters of War", 1810-1815), and Géricault's *Le Radeau de la Méduse* ("The Raft of the Medusa", 1819) followed by Géricault's portraits of ten patients at a psychiatric clinic from the early 1820s, draw up qualities of the stereotypical Romantic artist: extreme suffering and unfulfilled individual desires. David's *La Mort de Marat* ("The Death of Marat", 1793) could be read as synecdoche for the aborted revolution and the failed rights of the individual subject. In this sense, early modern art claimed a non-utilitarian role in society – including the separation of high and applied art – and chose affirmation and myth over social change. The shift in the understanding of the physical integrity of the human body also "may have facilitated a Foucauldian-style 'normalization' process, but [it] had also given a whole new meaning to 'normal'" (Hunt 2004:52). Romanticism proposed that one could reach the truth through both voluntary marginalization (the rejection of social convention) and also character-building suffering. It was through this aspect of Romanticism that the artist as the protagonist of individuality was both secured and "normalized". The limit to "natural" and "normal" claims is also the limit to both the knowable and also to the liberal definition of the individual: "the principle of inclusion operates at the same time as a limit, a means of exclusion. Everything that we know can be systematically accounted for; that which cannot be made systematic cannot be known" (Watkins 1976:934). What we have tried to encircle is the idea of a limit which of course is central to the liberal tradition of individual rights. *That* a discussion must come to an end, or that some issues will never be discussed is banal. What is more interesting to us is the *reason* why certain issues are never discussed in the context of art, the consequences for discourse and the *repercussions* on the discourse because of this exclusion.

The modern claim to rationality operated according to a "principle of inclusion". Modernism's dogged anti-rationality, summed up by the Kantian *and* dialectical thinker Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970/1997), deepened this separation between reason and passion, stressing the importance of the *nonrational*, *noncommunication* and the *sensuous* in defining human existence, before the "violence of naming and categorizing" (Rajaram 2002 unpaged). Having made this assertion (which could seem to be critical of the relation between Modernism and colonialism) Adorno then marshals a very Eurocentric selection of artists to support his definition of art as "compromising" the "processuality of aesthetic understanding" (Ibid); art as becoming "qualitatively other" to rationality and reason (Adorno 1997:2). Adorno thereby connects art, Eurocentrism, male domination and the nonrational. Adorno sees the potential of art in terms of its ability to connect with a compromised, failing and suffering world. This troubled world functions as the negative counterpart to the utopian space of art: art "is defined by its relation to what it is not" (Adorno 1997:3). We are dealing with a subject that cannot know what it wants, but for whom art still represents metamorphosis and spirit: “Only as spirit is art the opposite of empirical reality, which becomes the determinate negation of the existing world order”, and further on: “artworks are crystallizations of the process between the spirit and its other” (Adorno 1997:344).

Our position is that it would prove hard to establish Adorno’s modernist aesthetic discourse as a way of completing the rationale of modernity’s discourse and thus establish itself as something more than a figurative speech or a metaphoric “legitimate interpreter”. By Adorno’s definition, art cannot create social change in any kind of direct sense without being reduced to “moralizing” as he argued in the 1962 essay *Commitment*. Modernity is a catastrophic and cataclysmic event on one hand, and on the other hand modernist aesthetics, is the unique expression of the liberal subject and the sole remedy for the “damaged life”, when “[w]hat the philosophers once knew as life has become the sphere of private existence and now of mere consumption” (Adorno 2006:15). In the present moment, modernity’s technological and political gains is haunted by the specter of ecological disaster, but the spirit of modernism still survives in the position of the critic-slave, chained to the chariot of modernity, whispering dead end truths. It is not the truths that are painful, it is rather the unquestioning acceptance of the artist as first person singular. If we apply Adorno’s aesthetics to the interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of much contemporary practice, his view of art as the antithesis of the dominant principles of the enlightenment seems hopelessly out of touch and, in the hands of Frankfurt school followers, it runs amok. One particular problematic is how Adorno’s aesthetic theory and its more contemporary examples reproduce a conflict within the “speech community”: on one hand, the specific linguistic communication inside the art community, that “offers only a one-dimensional description of the world in conjunction with a demand for interpretative dominance” (Linn and Gur-Ze’ev, undated, unpaged), and any view on art that does not follow its internal set of laws:

> There is no dialogue between the two communities because there is no *legitimate interpreter*, only a struggle for hegemony. This type of discourse leaves little room for reflection, and focuses on naming and categorizing the experience of the other (Linn and Gur-Ze’ev, undated, unpaged. Our italics).

We cannot discuss art and at the same time accept the concept of a metaphysical rift through which creation appears in the form of the genius individual. And we cannot discuss art based on the claims that it is the

> Sign which will give meaning to all others – the ‘transcendental signifier’ – and for the anchoring, unquestionable meaning to which all our signs can be seen to point (the ‘transcendental signified’). (Eagleton 1983:131)

Raymond Williams has an interesting take on the separation of “creation and response”, or interpretation. Drawing on the familiar binary opposition of country and city, where the country represents wilderness-nature-creativity and city order-cultivation-response, Williams finds that the voice of the writer comes into existence “in the act of realizing itself as one voice among many. Each work and each critical response are thus forms of interior community in and through the very action by which they come into being” (Williams 1975; Watkins 1976:942; Williams 1989). Williams’s idea of individuation seems to come close to the inconclusive process that Gilbert Simondon (Simondon 1958) has theorized, as a “continual *creation and inclusion* of individual differences rather than a totality defined as the absence of existing differences and distinctions”. We were two individuals working together on one project. We worked out of the necessity shaping material into a finished form, and considering the potential influence it had on both our self-reflection and also the way that others understand what we do. As such, this process does not reflect the necessity to artificially create a single individual, one Robot or Golem, out of two people. The ability to temporarily form a “one” in a project by the bringing together of the various elements of the work of art – elements which can come apart – does indeed change the dominant subject-object relation. However, accepting the influence of technology and materiality does not simultaneously become an argument for subjecting the individual to a singular and “objective” reality. Difference lives on! In a beautiful passage in *The Country and the City* (1975), Williams sees the driving rationale of art through two both inclusive and exclusive concepts: “revolution” and “myth”. Each ”under pressure, offers to convert the other to its own terms. But they are better seen as alternative responses, for in a thousand cities, if in confused forms, they are in sharp, direct, and necessary conflict” (Williams 1975:247). The joint or collective work of art entails a potential critique of the liberal subject, only so far as it breaks with the normalized definition of individualism. If the work of art is the myth and the subject is that which undergoes revolution, or if it is the other way around, we cannot tell.

Historically, the dominant art discourse identifies an art object, understood to be specific and spatially discrete. There are two major 19th century traditions that dealt with the privileged relation between subject and object: Marxism and Psychoanalysis. The former developed a discourse on commodity fetishism on human relations taking on object qualities. The latter developed a discourse which located the subject/object nexus at the point where the subjects split – between enunciation and statement. The Marxist tradition begins with a triad of *subjects*, *objects* and *concepts*. It privileges as unalienated certain relations between subject and object – the yeoman and his plow, the artisan and his crafted object – and rejects and condemns the confusion that occurs when borders between categories are mistaken and blurred: when the worker is no longer producing values for himself by himself that is not in conflict with the worker producing values for a collective in a collective process. This alienation of work from value, leads to a situation where human rights and relations become substituted by the cult of the object: or in other words, commodity fetishism. Both the tendency towards romanticisation and the urge to find practical solutions for the present, by drawing on revisionist understandings of the past is clearly evident when Alisdair Macintyre idealizes "relatively small-scale and local communities", such as the "ancient city", the "medieval commune" or "some kinds of modern cooperative farming and fishing enterprises" (Macintyre 2006:165). Crisis is immanent when life and production are separated, but a "dim awareness of this perverse *quid pro quo* has still not been quite eradicated from life" (Adorno 2006:17). Psychoanalysis twists and turns the triad of subject-object-concept by revealing the control of the liberal subject to be a hoax. Rereading Freud through the Russian semiotic formalist Roman Jakobson, Jacques Lacan finds that "Indeed, the I of the enunciation is not the same as the I of the statement, that is to say, the shifter which, in the statement, designates him" (Lacan 1991:139). Enunciation is the voice of the unconscious, speaking of the presence of the ego – which in itself has to be understood as deeply social – what is enunciated and stated is the socially and collectively intelligible. We find this point very productive, and enlightening, in understanding the characteristics of our cooperative practice.

One has to be extremely insensitive, or indoctrinated into individualist values – to not be aware of the tension introduced by a controversial and/or celebrated work of art to anyone involved in the field. If we follow the Marxist analysis of commodity fetishism, then the individual's need for social recognition is misdirected onto consumer products. The artwork incarnates in a heightened – even explosive – sense the apotheosis of the market forces: mere material elevated to the status of art through its placement in the "white cube", as through an alchemical process (O'Doherty 1976). Beyond this, there is the soaring of the artistic subject above those less talented and the role of artistic "influence" based on art market evaluation. Following Lacan's application of semiotics to psychoanalysis, the work of art is no longer identical to the "I" in its liberal judicial sense: in other words, the entity that may claim its rights. Rather, the artwork is produced by a collective of anonymous subjective perspectives. This collective at times claims rights; for example, an important collection "demands" new premises, etc. The socially accepted mode of artistic recognition proves not only to be misleading, but also illusive and false. When the artwork becomes a statement, following the moment of its enunciation, the identity of the producer is decided through a collective process. The "I" appears as a result of an ever-unfinished process of individuation, i.e. a negotiation with both a "we" and also the unconscious – a negotiation that is given the false appearance of individualism through both the market and through definitions of the liberal subject.

If we apply both Marxism and psychoanalysis, neither the artistic subject nor the art object actually really serve their conventional liberal function. Works of art may be cherished for completely arbitrary reasons. To theorize both the stability of individual beliefs and dispositions, and also their subsequent changes, Pierre Bourdieu used the concept of *habitus*: a system of "durable, transposable dispositions" that the individual internalizes through the socialization process (Bourdieu 1990:53). Habitus orientates the individual by way of a set of readymade relations that makes it hard to accept the conventional nature of the work of art, because it necessarily also involves the conventions of self-emplacement. The concept of the literal rather than metaphorical or allegorical object, as in the readymade or Minimalism, is about reestablishing the art object "in empirical reality" (Adorno 1992) – which was the reason for Michael Fried to condemn minimalism as "theatrical" and lacking art's essential "presentness". In other words, both the person experiencing the artwork and the artwork itself exists in the same place. This goes against the widely held belief that art-objects should be interpretable, "composed with an internal coherence and therefore are [*sic*] seem autonomous from the surrounding world" in keeping with the Modernist credo (Gibart 2002). Both the readymade and also the minimalist object negates figurative meaning. The modernist distinction between the art object and the object "in empirical reality" does not apply, which was of paramount significance to Adorno, does not apply here.

Adorno claimed that radical change was impossible because using what is already given as a starting point would only reproduce the faults of the present society. Contemporary society is a monstrous monolith and the road to the future ends at a wall that only art, in the hands of the individual genius, can break through. Our society contains of identifiable classes, interests, drives, qualities, etc. Put onto the tracks of teleological dialectics, "society" as we know it is bound for disaster. There is a history of radical change, but it is not possible to reduce radical change to the failures and shortcomings of its history. For example, as Cornelius Castoriadis has argued in several texts – the creation of Athenian democracy cannot be reduced to its history. To do so is to reduce the continuous

> creation of democracy and philosophy, both of which break up the closure of the hitherto prevailing instituted society and open up a space where the activities of thinking and of politics lead to putting again and again into question not only the given forms of the social institution and of the social representation of the world but the possible ground for any such forms. (Castoriadis 1997:17)

The subject is defined through its interconnection in language, as a chain of signifiers with no "real" signified. "Individuals and things are social creations – both in general and in the particular form that they take in any given society" (Castoriadis 1997:6).

Further more “[w]e are all, in the first place, walking complementary fragments of the institution of our society – its ‘total parts’” (Castoriadis 1997:7). It is up to anyone making use of “the subject” to both challenge its received meaning and redefine it.

We have showed that there are several viable ways of understanding subjectivity which indicate that there are other subjectivities to be lived, that may undo the crushingly influential grip of the liberal subject. It is vital to move beyond “criticality” as it is conventionally defined in the art context. Critique, in assuming an outside position is always caught up in the liberal agenda. As the power of critique is defined by its distance from its object, intervening into a given situation with the goal of changing it is to lose “critical distance”. In other words: the “critical” subject appears as yet another version of the ideal liberal subject. To establish forms of cooperation, one must dare to allow dependencies, and also shoulder the responsibilities and obligations of a joint practice throughout contextual and communicational changes. What is still needed is a discussion on the concept of “we”, how “we” could describe both our cooperative practice in general, and also *Off the grid* as a whole, including the contributions of our participants. When we look at three texts by four philosophers on the concept of “we”, by Johan Brännmark, Raimo Tuomela and Kaarlo Miller, and Margaret Gilbert respectively, we immediately encounter differences in perspective. With Tuomela and Miller, the discussion on *we-intention* is more within the analytical tradition and hence neutrally descriptive, whereas Brännmark’s text moves more urgently in the direction of collective rights and Gilbert’s text on *joint commitment* follows a philosophical and ethical trajectory which leads the text to consider all possible contexts and situations. These three texts both stress the importance of practice (of doing things), but they differ in how they specifically value the activity of doing things together. Tuomela and Miller are occupied with the formal relations between group, individual, conditions and goal or a particular activity before there can be what they call the “we-intention”: such as “full-fledged and adequately informed members” that “will (or at least probably will) conditionally do their parts of X”, (Tuomela and Miller 1988:384). If we apply this to our collaborative “we practice”, it could be argued that practice has changed the nature of our individual selves in relation to our project; as a result, we have become ready to imagine and form constellations, “organic unities” or “organic wholes” with other people, because we found a joint and collective practice to be valuable *in itself*

> organic wholes are not just more, in quantitative terms, than the sum of their parts, what distinguishes them is rather that the whole has properties which cannot be understood as an agglomeration of properties that belong to the parts, e.g. a community can have a general will that is something else than the will of the majority. (Brännmark 2004:81)

A central question of Off the grid is whether it is possible to be able to formulate *an overarching, extended we*, that is able to contain the triadic stretch – off griders, Husby and the two of us – linking together, through changes in terms of scale (from the individual to society) and the asking of our three questions to the three participants (including ourselves) beyond differences in geographical context, power and privilege.

> A mutual belief, ideally and in the strongest sense, that everyone (viz. every participant) will do X, consists in everyone's believing that everyone will do X and everyone's believing that everyone believes that everyone will do X, and so on theoretically ad infinitum (even if in actual practice only two or three layers may be needed). (Tuomela and Miller 1988:371)

Obviously there are different perspectives on the "we" between the participants within the project: in the interviews it can sometimes be understood as a situational we that does not go any further than the stretch from first to last question, but it can also signify a we-intention that is more inclusive. When Yohannes (in Husby) comments on David's statements, he immediately began to criticize the lack of social security and health care in the US. Yohannes did in fact make a valid critique, but because of its generalized character that included David in a "we" equating the US to the politics of the second president Bush, that David is clearly critical of, it became somewhat disconnected from David's discussion. Provoked by Yohannes' comments, in the following interview David described the situation for his family, his doubts over the system as a whole, criticizing the corporate approach to health care. Yohannes' response may boil down to computer problems, so that he never had sufficient time to come close to the material we sent. On the other hand when Ishmael and Jerusha commented on each other's statements, it was obvious that they had watched the interviews repeatedly. They both warmed to the situation and talked freely about the impression that the other person had made on them, and there is a growing emotional tie that made them both see their own situation differently through the dialogical "we" the interviews created. In the example of Yohannes and David, the hardware problems, and the use of geographically specific language, and the limits of our abilities to reach out, played against the development of an extended we, but with Ishmael and Jerusha the technological barriers were overcome. Looking at the real but also virtual we constructed in *Off the grid* its success is directly linked to the many different relations it is able to nurture, firstly in regard to the interview exchanges, and *in all respects in general.* Margaret Gilbert's idea of a *joint commitment* is useful here.

> There must be a joint commitment jointly to accept that such and such or, alternatively, to accept that such and such as a body. When there is a joint commitment between two or more parties, there is what I call a 'plural subject' or a (collective) 'we'. (Gilbert 1993:691)

An important aspect of Gilbert's argument is to sort out the relations between the individual and the group. She suggests that the subject does not have to relinquish its responsibility over the group, because a joint commitment must be reciprocal and interdependent before it works, in a simple and beautiful metaphor, like a "string that they hold taut between them" (Gilbert 1993:693):

> As the parties to a joint commitment understand, they are individually committed in the sense that each individually has a commitment. Nonetheless, these commitments are seen to flow from the joint commitment. (Gilbert 1993:693)

When *Off the grid* is established as a joint commitment, then the value of the project is not absolute, regardless of the context it appears in. Nor is the value entirely limited to specific contexts, such as Husby, the Northeastern US or artistic research in Göteborg – its value lies in the reflective practice it has constructed between these different places and situations.

> A joint commitment is "joint" in a strong sense: no individual is committed until all the others are; it is impossible to rescind the commitment for one party without rescinding it for the others; if the commitment is broken, it is broken for all: it does not remain to require any action of anyone. In short, it cannot exist to affect one party unless it also affects the others. (Gilbert 1993:693)

How do we realize that our self-reflection has changed over time? A reoccurring feature in our practice was the constant processing of ideas, comments and information. But there was something more to the process. There was perhaps a worry about the way we perceive ourselves in what we do. What starts off as amazement, or an unanswered question, became constructed into a collection or a *bundle* of interrelations through a gradual, day-to-day working process. We have argued that it was *the objects and issues* of investigation that have changed us, as well as our relations to the interviewees and what they, as contributors, have brought to the project. One way of understanding this change is to acknowledge what we have learned and who we have come in contact with through our practice, but that would not suffice to explain, from the perspective of the project, the sense of pointlessness when someone is asking us who made this and who made that. We see the art object as a wholly synthetic construction: the finished character of the work refracts identities that are different from those that entered into that particular creative process. The practice causes subject(s) and object(s) to lose their binary and oppositional character and their mutually defined discrete borders. It was through the process of producing the work that we learned to know what and who we were in relation to *Off the grid*. At a stage when what we conventionally think of as the spatially and conceptually discrete object has been produced, it would perhaps be apt to refer to the formation of an *intersubjective experience* based on the research process. This would risk neglecting the dynamic and not yet defined nature of the relation between us and the object. Through practice, the object becomes both self and other. Later, in the main text, we will return to the question of intersubjectivity; as Gilbert would describe it, how long the “string” between people could become and still be “hold taut”.

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Faktura, or at the end of discursive art

> *Can we identify the limits and constraints, if not the grounds, of discourse-knowledge in its productivity?*
> Karen Barad 2003

In the introduction to his book *Body Transformations* (2005), the American philosopher Alphonso Lingis connects idealism to a redefined animism and divides the world, with a broad brushstroke, into construction (emanating from the not-yet discursive) and subjection (emanating from discourse). A freedom with legal implications, originating from the order of a discussion is contrasted with a freedom emerging from the horizon of the object:

> Beneath the idealism or animism that exposes things to have no meaning other than that which human intentions, aspirations, and transactions put on them, we find the subsistence of fetishism, where humans are subjects constituted by the action of objects on them. (Lingis 2005)

Lingis' texts are steep and wonderfully suggestive discussions on materiality; however, he risks reinscribing the binaries of idealism/materialism. We have found his writing useful for theorizing our use of the *QuickTime* (QT) software, but we need a third element to make sense of our practice. Lingis, tells associative and even seductive stories – with an immediacy that makes us feel like they were read and thought for the first time. Struggling with our technological means of expression, we came across his writings, driven by the gnawings from inside our socio-political and constructivist approach. We felt a growing ennui over a loss of outside air, frustrated with our continual struggles with the politics of representation. But given art's romantic heritage, how would this predictable impetus tally with our heavy use of digital technology? We have been searching for a language which can offer another way of addressing the interconnections between a not yet determinate visuality and a discursive conviction, as well as between the surviving modernist tradition of non-discursive visuality and any readymade set of overdetermined discursive positions. In this process we have found that the concept of non-discursive is at the same time the most problematic and the most interesting.

The socio-political approach that readily produces its friends and enemies is neither a good listener nor a good advisor in this situation. We needed a language to describe how our tools *act upon us* and make us play with our decision-making process, destabilizing boundaries between acting and thinking. Through the situated image we hope to stall the conceptual treadmill, but this does not mean that we believe naïve arguments that these images immediately constitute an “outside”. The division between animism and fetishism reoccurs through a discursive artistic practice through an array of different conceptual dimensions, and its tensions leave a shadow on the artistic research process overall. This division is as all divisions, prone to advance and *stretch* (in Giddens’ sense[1]) its argumentative force by dualist exclusions. What we need to understand is not only the dynamics of the perspective opened up by Lingis’ primal division, but also the possibility of a *third* category – *faktura*. We find that faktura will allow us to ”embrace” the software as material situation – as real as any other.

As a concept, *faktura* was used in the early 1920s by the Russian Constructivists, but as Christina Kiaer has shown, the term was first circulated by Russian avantgarde artists in the 1910s “referring to the way in which a work of art is made, its constitutive materiality” (Kiaer 2005:49). In the program for the first Constructivist group by Alexander Rodchenko and Varava Stepanova, it appears as an intermediary between *Tectonics* – “tempered and formed” by “the properties of communism” and “the expedient use of industrial material” – and *Construction* – “the organizational function of Constructivism” (Harrison and Wood 1993:317):

> Faktura is the organic state of the worked material or the resulting new state of its organism. Therefore, the group considers that faktura is material consciously worked and expediently used, without hampering the construction or restricting the tectonics. (Harrison and Wood 1993:317)

The Constructivists were trying to reconcile the idealism of artistic freedom and independence with the need for a societal change and the demands from the Communist government. The “dream of a technologically advanced industrial culture in the early Soviet years gave a particular, urgent coloring to the term ‘construction’, removing it from the more conventionally plastic or artistic meaning” (Kiaer 2005:10f). Does this mean that the *faktura* is a non-discursive and apolitical materiality, existing outside of any social context and isolated for the pleasures of formal deliberation? In a text from 1922 Alexei Gan makes some additions to the previous definition: “*Faktura* is the whole process of the working of material. The working of material as a whole and not the working of one side”. Gan tries to stay with the materialist perspective, but out of it emerges the fetish, which is neither Freud's – the fixation on what is last seen before the trauma of the missing phallus – nor Marx's commodity fetish which functions as *ersatz* for the direct rapport between people. What we see instead is the fetish that Lingis is suggesting: objects acting on us. Gan stays with the continuous changes on a material plane: "transformation of this raw material into one form or another continues to remind us of its primary form and conveys to us the next possibility in its transformation" (Harrison and Wood 1993:319). The tectonic "unites the ideological and formal" in "a unity of conception", "the *faktura* is the condition of the material", and construction "discovers the actual process of putting together" (Ibid). Neither of these definitions of *faktura* is particularly clear: they are trampolines from which to jump into an artistic practice. But it is clear that a *material* aspect of the artwork has become more active, since it "*conveys* to us" its possibilities. *Faktura* moves material from one state to the next, acting out the necessities of immanent force, its changes handled by a non-expressive practice – as Gan has it: "nothing from blind taste and aesthetic arbitrariness" (Ibid). Material is body, and body has its own integrity. It must be said that *faktura* can mean all kinds of material in becoming. *Faktura* can well be understood as a constructive effort to change social relations. We will not elaborate this trace here, except for making clear that we believe that technological and social change, as with *faktura,* are intertwined.

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[1] ”The structuration of all social systems occur in time-space, but also ’brackets’ time-space relations; every social system in some way ’stretches’ across time and space. Time-space distanciation refers to the modes in which such ’stretching’ takes place or, to shift the metaphor slightly, how social systems are ’embedded’ in time and space” (Giddens 1981:4-5). ”[E]very society participates in some form of dissolution of the restraints of time and space” (Giddens 1981:91).

The Russian art historian and critic Nikolai Tarabukin also belonged to the Constructivist circle, but he relates faktura to a term with the richest (and most normalizing) provenience in art discourse: form. The work of art contains two "fundamental premises" as Tarabukin explains: "the *material* or medium (colors, sounds, words) and the *construction,* through which the material is organized in a coherent whole, acquiring its artistic logic and its profound meaning" (Tarabukin in Rowell 1987:91). As we are working with QT software, it is hard if not impossible to recognize the difference between "material" and "construction". A software acts as both; it is the medium and a constructive grid at the same instant. Software is neither anima nor fetish, (or perhaps both and): speed and convenience turns it into a transparent simulation of our intentions. Although there is no escaping its synthetic history (as a manufactured product), its readiness to deliver sequences out of fragments turns it into a fetish. Software short-circuits the classical division between matter and form, which we see in the Constructivist interest in *faktura*. A difference emphasized by the largely formal interpretation of *faktura*. Tarabukin also advises the artist "must feel the inherent characteristics of each material which of themselves condition the construction of the object. The *material dictates the forms*, and not the opposite" (Ibid, our italics). Tarabukin links knowledge to feeling when relating material, *faktura*, to construction.

Another way of addressing *faktura* is by pointing to its sensuous character at the moment of usage. We know very well that software is a construct, but we feel it is unproductive to suspect that technology masks reality. How could that possibly happen? Technology supports us by offering a filter through which we can compose the information that we amass, QT becomes an equivalent to sensibility without information, which is relevant to our method. This has nothing to do with romantic rapture, it is more the case that the software intervenes before we develop our intentions and set goals. The third position, *faktura* as sensibility, becomes apparent only through "taking up a stance, in positing ourselves, standing in ourselves, forming an instant of presence" (Lingis 1982:593).

> The sensuous element is not schema but substance; it supports us, sustains us, is sustenance; its content contents us. We can occupy a position, take up a stand, assume a posture because we are sustained by the solidity of the ground (Lingis 1982:593).

Looking at the specifics of our faktura: divisions – completions

With *Off the grid*, we now recognize the QT software to be our *faktura.* The specific ways that *faktura* predetermines our work is of our interest here. The "tectonic" is both our interview material, and also what we draw from theory. Construction is our practice. Several distinctions can be made, and perhaps also have to be made, starting from the QT software as our sensuous ground. Other distinctions that we make are related to the history of social/political associations which have marked the relationship between the tactility and texture of *faktura*, and the claims and presumptions of documentary, or the "factographic", which we understand as an ideological handling of documentary material, the overwriting, or as Lingis would see it, an animistic cover-up.

The first, obvious division runs between metaphor and the metonymy in the material. By this we mean the separation between the metaphorical poetics of contrasts between places and people, and the metonymic continuity which results from following a narrative trace through a delimited and discrete space. A second separation in working with video can be detected between linear and cyclical time. Linearity nurtures a steadfast hope that definitions of art are possible to reconstruct, even in advance of the work. We see linear time as both linked to objectivity, and also based in the belief that there is a moral objectivist "Kingdom of Ends" which in theory would allow us to escape the banality of recurring and seemingly unsolvable problems. To privilege cyclic time is to blur values and identifications, since repetitious time undermines teleological ideas about beginning, progression and end. A third would be drawn between the synchronic and the diachronic. To privilege the synchronic is to enhance the awareness of the here and now, celebrating the structures and values at that moment, but without being able to respond to change or explain it, especially change over time. To privilege the diachronic is to display the radical groundlessness of firm beliefs and justifications over time, but with the risk of disrupting the irreversible fragility of the moment.

At the same time as we were meditating over Lingis' text, we were introduced to the films by the Constructivist filmmaker Dziga Vertov by a professor in cultural studies, Irina Sandomirskaja. As we watched at Vertov's *Man with a movie camera*, 1929, as well as excerpts from his other films, we came across another division, which is between "factographic" as the "fixation and montage of fact" (Osip Brik after Dickerman 2006:134), in literature the factographic application of a "short, nonfictional, journalistic writing" in the service of Socialist Realism (Dickerman 2006:134), and in Vertov's sense to form "a FILM FACTORY OF FACTS. . . . Filming facts. Sorting facts. Disseminating facts. Agitating with facts. Propaganda with facts. Fists made of facts." (Vertov after Dickerman 2006:135) – and faktura. Returning to Osip Brik, he observes that instead of "unity of action, unity of intrigue, we have a succession of separate scenes often barely connected with each other" and further that the artwork is directed by the research-like interest in "individual facts, individual details, which create a necessary unity in their accumulation" (Brik after Dickerman 2006:143). This is an operation that seems close to Roland Barthes' concept of "studium" that is related to language, and to cultural and political agendas. Faktura is related to the body, and to the ways that a material makes us do or act: clearly this is fetishism

Ours is a strong conviction that discourse develops its facts in an artistic way: a situationally specific, lateral and tentative bricolage that may not reach a stable conceptual destination or object-form. The destination of the subject and of the object amounts to the same openness to the context as given and to emancipative constructive possibilities: this means, for instance, that our commentary texts will oscillate between being referring to an object and then being the object of interest, in a reflexive move. Earlier, we tried to map out some of the tensions and oppositions related to software time, but we immediately felt the risk of getting caught up again in the discursive – non-discursive binary opposition, albeit in disguise. To return to this binary opposition risks neglecting the effect of the *faktura*. We are surely not interested in repeating or reinvigorating the modernist touchstone operation. The separations that we make at the start, specific to time-based work, will eventually be canceled out through the use of dialectics. Dialectics will mediate the present tension between the documentary/fictional/narrative, and material without narration, which we have discovered through the process of working with the clips (a process which is often serendipitous). The process of working dialectically, with multimedia software that connects moving images, texts, stills, voices, etc. will create new fissures. The result of these connections or collisions often appears as a constructed memory, with the strange property of being able to recall situations that have not occurred, and possibly will never happen. This is how the software functions as *faktura*, which presents fragments through a time flow that the viewer then willingly accepts as real. To see software as *faktura* becomes a way to relate to readymade excursions into the dominant interests always already given socio-political narratives, and a way to come to terms with that by the *openly* political construction of alternative narrations.

We will now discuss the problems connected to the idea of the discrete art object and the finished work of art. What does a finished, discrete artwork signify, when doing process based artistic research? In relation to what is it finished and discrete? For historical reasons we would expect that an artwork, generally speaking, principally reflects a relation between inert matter and the artist as an active, creative subject. The criteria for perfection is comparable to a scale of *control*. Control is exactly what *faktura* denies the artist-subject, and so the dissolution of free will occurs either in the splendor of the work of art in which nothing may be changed or altered, or by the means of the Constructivist identification of the "tectonic" and *faktura*. Defining the artwork in terms of an essential object is not only impossible, but also misleading and plainly uninteresting. The discrete art object is only worth striving for because of the social and institutional recognition and acclamation that is embedded in the hierarchical separation of work and object. Even many of our peers are reluctant to abandon the fantasies associated with the *complete* artwork. It is a paradoxical situation, since, in principle, *faktura* does not require external representation to exert its effect, whereas non-discursive work of art cannot exist without idealized representations. To be satisfied with a discrete, finished art object would be to deny ourselves the possibilities of lateral movement. The movement of the art object opens the parameters of creation, which connects the subject to an outside. By an animistic approach this connection would be understood as a disfigured dimension of an internal logic. This idea will be developed further on.

It is always a question of where to start, and the scope of ones' ambitions. The Russian revolution opened a Constructivist path for art governed by *faktura* – to follow an internal perceptual logic and an engagement with material – which was gradually supplanted by a utilitarian, documentary and politically correct orientation throughout the 1920s. A new society was to be constructed from *tabula rasa,* on the facts of Marxism-Leninism. We see *faktura* is similar to *texture*, its cognition rising from the materiality of the used material – something similar to the influence of the fetish in Lingis' sense. Fetishism, Lingis writes, "recognizes a spirit of material things. Things emit signals and issue directives on their own" (Lingis 2005:111). *Faktura* is to be sensed through touch, and the material – in our case a multimedia framework – leads the way rather than acting as an interpreter. *Faktura* is the dimension of the creative process that is similar to the work of an engineer or an artisan. "What we see, hear, and touch" Lingis notes, "is what is coded in things. What animates things for us is information" (Lingis 2005:121). What made *faktura* slip through the fingers of censorship in the 1920s for a while was perhaps because it could have been mistaken for *historical* materialism.

Film montage opens up the dimension of *faktura*, and the raw cuts in early Soviet filmmaking came, as David Kadlec notes, to be a source of inspiration beyond the actual use of film as a means of state propaganda:

> [The Russian critic and linguist Viktor] Shklovsky approached the distinction between fiction and nonfiction film by emphasizing methods of construction over the materials used by the filmmakers themselves. Insofar as either Eisenstein or Vertov succeeded as filmmakers (and Shklovsky clearly preferred Eisenstein of the two), they did so not because they inspired or educated but because they discovered and utilized the modern technique of filmic montage (Kadlec 2004:301pp).

Faktura is perhaps to be understood within the territory of a formalist approach, directed by an urge for change. Benjamin Buchloh notes "*faktura* was replaced for the factographic capacity of the photograph, supposedly rendering aspects of reality visible without interference or mediation" (Buchloh in Prunes 2003:254). Dziga Vertov seem to have moved from the undeniable "facticity" of film as material, in particular cuts and reversals, to an objective, frottage-like documentarist approach. Given the Soviet context, a documentary or "factographic" practice is to be understood in terms of representing reality in line with hope for a better future – i.e. propaganda, whereas the "*faktura*" seems to reflect the possibilities of the material at hand.

How could our experience be inserted in this division? Although basic assumptions are constructionist, meaning that everything that we encounter can be doubted on the grounds of its historical construction, there is an empiricist undercurrent in our approach, which asserts that truth belongs to the actual meetings with our interviewees, which cannot be altered in any way. If we stay with the early 20th century avant-garde, the tension occurs between *faktura* as we interpret and make use of it in our work, which means respecting the situated images for what they contain – and the "factographic" use of the material, directed by our political intentions. These discussions inevitably reflect our ideas of what society we would like to live in, and they are therefore overrun with politics.

In an emotional landscape, we have been meandering between, on one hand, the unavoidable orientation towards future and on the other, the contemplation of what is already present. The intense and synthetic (as in nylon) considerations of the possibilities offered by a Constructivist/constructionist approach to artistic language brings about an acute awareness of fragmentation. The politics of the present paints the realities of the future in the color of delirium. In making use of dialectics, we do not relieve tensions at the price of avoiding oppositions and antagonisms. We do not believe in a Hegelian goal that would neatly explain and justify the present situation. The dialectics we need means both commitment to, and investment in, the idea of an open future.

And if we were to ask, where do our own values enter this model, would we suggest that an avantgarde-induced time lapse would produce social change? Or are we willing to accept what we get and stay with it, embedding that what is already always given in a readymade explanatory reason? The allure of the non-discursive is its ability to resist discursive attempts to imprint its image of the future – its discrete meaning – on that what have not yet happened. Discourse has time and time again been summoned to preemptively cancel opposition from the horizon of the moment.

An art to end discourse?

We maintain that our view on art is based on the way that we work and that is the approach we take is both discursive and also Constructivist/constructionist. Bringing the two concepts close to each other signals, as should be clear by now, that our work is not about essentialist art or universalist aesthetics. But more closely scrutinized, it appears that the concepts of discourse and social construction do not readily fit together. They exist in tension/relation to each other in a precarious balance, which might shift towards one concept or the other over time. For the sake of clarity, it will be necessary to discuss the two concepts separately, before bringing them again together.

By a Constructivist/constructionist approach to art we mean that the research we perform is lateral, and, as we discuss in the chapter on method, related to *travel*. Sometimes what we do deserves to be called synthetic art, perhaps even academic art. To us it is constructionist to dissect discussions on art, both our own and that of others as a point of departure. This reflection is performed in the spirit of art (part analysis and part fabulation) with the understanding that both the territory we researched and also the map we produced not under our control. As constructionists we maintain that the definitions of both art and artistic practices are culturally and historically specific: art is a product of action and choice including the decision to maintain the categories of the art object and an art discourse. At this point the constructionist position has much in common with the institutional theory of art, as in George Dickie's work. However, we will leave discussions of the question of authority, legitimacy and justification for later in this thesis, as part of a wider discussion.

Discourse

After Foucault, *discourse* is generally understood to mean "the rules and practices that produced meaningful statements" (Hall 2003:44). Discourse is bound to its particular time and context. A basic structuralist assumption, which underpins aspects of Foucault's work, is that there is nothing outside discourse: in this sense, structuralism comes close to Lingis' definition of idealist animism. Discourse both produces and defines the objects of knowledge, and it "governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about" (Ibid). Meaning, truth and beauty cannot be objectively validated: they are produced at a given time and within a given context, governed by interested parties. The difference between discursive and non-discursive art becomes obvious in how it relates to "art as essence". An informed modernist non-discursive position would hold that art is possible to detect *by its movement*. This perspective would separate that which is "only art" and "something foreign and opposed to it" even *inside* a work of art (Adorno 2002:4). Essentialist modernism would maintain that art has eternal properties and that it is *through intuition* that one can identify and interpret a work of art. The constructionist approach is modern in its anti-determinism. The values appreciated in a work of art are historically specific, the product of earlier value systems and ideologies. However, those who value non-discursive art have faith that the unknown (unknowable) functions as a universal: in other words, that the bounds of the known and the unknown are not culturally specific common ground that makes knowledge possible. In order to undertake this process, that which we already know must be suspended. According to this thought figure and despite the suspension, non-discursive art is able to connect the known and the utopian through unleashing the imagination.

Similar to how we have separated construction from discourse, we feel it is equally important to separate essentialism from the privileging of the non-discursive. It is one thing to dispute over references to the non-discursive, but if we look into the ways that the non-discursive (ironically) enters discourse, this is entirely another matter. The non-discursive – that what is immediately sensed but cannot be talked about – could be understood as the final proof of art's unique, intrinsic identity. But the non-discursive could also be understood as a *mediator* to safeguard the art discourse. In the context of both modernism and also within Marxism it was necessary for art to "turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept, and thus become uncertain of itself right into its innermost fiber" (Adorno 2002:2). The definition of art as fundamentally non-discursive found a staunch defender in the German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno. Art could slip out from the grip of modernity's "total administration" on the condition that it did not engage in politics, in social movements, or in any discourse at all. Adorno defines correct relation between the non-discursive artwork and society as one where art appears as a "social reflection" within the "inner chemistry" of society. A work of art has an effect "that of recollection, which they evoke by their existence"; the "artwork works back on society as the model of a possible praxis in which something on the order of a collective subject is constituted" (Adorno 2002:242). The price Adorno's Aesthetics pays for the artwork's distinctiveness from commodities is that it cannot engage in society: "In artworks, the forces of production are not in-themselves different from social productive forces except by their constitutive absenting from real society" (Adorno 2002:236). Art is related to social production, but Adorno takes an essentialist position insofar that society has to be turned upside down to accommodate for its call, and art alone holds the key for society to renew itself.

Here we would like to discuss the limits of discursive art. First of all: the end of discursive art is not a call for the beginning of the non-discursive art – as if there was only one possible exclusive relation, without any space to maneuver between them. This is similar relationship to that described by the Russian poet Marina Cvetaeva: the distance from where God ends and Devil begins is as short as the letter "d" in-between them. At the point where discursive art becomes fully dependent on pre-existing representations to make sense, a singular and radiant freedom emerges from the *faktura*. Before art can be represented it must be lived – and successively lost – through developing a practical, historically/culturally situated perspective.

We find discursive art to be aligned with a situated and practiced reason. The assumption that discursive art is instantly ethically oriented and political is not without ground – though perhaps for other reasons then expected; however, it is dangerous to assume that all discursive art by nature espouses progressive politics. If rights are based on the representation within discourse of needs and claims, then discursive art cannot be anything but political. Discourse is always mediated, as it takes the form of *representation*: "facts can be recognized as facts by a mind that thinks, that is, formulates representations of the universal and necessary" (Lingis 1982:589). Discourse would be pointless if it did not make universal claims. Lingis contrasts the discourse of representation with a "phenomenology of action" which instead of the intuition of law claims that there is "an intuition of freedom". This intuition "of freedom cannot, to be sure, occur in a representational consciousness that represents the present" (Lingis 1982:588). It only shows itself "in the affectivity, it is an anxiety" (Ibid). So, we cannot look only to discourse for politics and something is missing with the freedom of action: what could form the ground for a third position?

What the discursive and the non-discursive both share is a disciplining focus on affirming and disseminating the constraints that follow from respective practice, aligning them both with the predomination of the "rules and practices" that produce meaning. If your view of art is that it is fundamentally non-discursive, this will put you in conflict with our perspective on art as discursive and constructionist. We will both try to convince each other, for the sake of argument. But are we ready to accept the lack of any other ground than the material and sensuous *faktura* as a necessary prerequisite for freedom? Only here would we find any possible difference between positions. Adorno's modernist and neo-Kantian non-discursive position is objectivist, and has no need to be informed of any experience outside the intuitions of aesthetic law. For universal law – discursive or non-discursive alike – to maintain its universality it must:

> command its will so as to construct a representation of all nature according to universal and necessary laws. It has to think that it can will to think. It has to believe that it can command its will so as to subject itself to law, to be obedient. (Lingis 1982:590)

This discourse of non-art is based on an idealist "law" of art, which does not recognize its "worldliness", or in other words, its historical specificity and contingency. Another point is that the non-discursive by nature requires for what Stanley Fish called *interpretive communities*, a concept related to Foucault's *episteme* and Ludwik Fleck's *thought-collective*. Discourse has no obvious beginning or end, since it is part of society and inextricable from it. The artistic endeavor thus does not require external justification when relating to sensuous experience – a fragile, open-ended sensibility. *Faktura* is the free and open recognition of an instance that binds sensory input to a common ground, the device that appears before information of the world has been processed. *Faktura* is out of aesthetic control in a way that parallels how Lingis poses Kantianism against phenomenology:

> one cannot do what Kantism took the imperative to require – integrate the perceptible shapes of things, and the means-ends structures of implements of one's own perspective, and oneself, into a representation of universal nature. (Lingis 1982:590)

Coda

We have constructed an exercise in which we will narrow down our use of the discursive and non-discursive. We find the non-discursive approach to art particularly problematic; even though its tradition respects materiality it has hitherto blocked our progression. The discursive approach to art eagerly obeys the rules and practices of reason: in other words, its constructive and social reason pretends to be or to represent universal law. One can perhaps say that discourse has a sadistic relation to its object. The non-discursive art object obeys universal law – it pretends to be the fruiting body of law. One could say that non-discourse has a masochist relation to its object. But we will end by summarizing how the non-discursive has been used in art. To do this time must be considered. Dialectics is a discursive attempt to transcend the time-barrier: it applies law to obliterate the fundamental uncertainty of that which has not yet happened. It produces faith, perhaps hope. Non-discursive art as a form of pre-experiential knowledge is forced to refer to law. We have associated this conviction to aesthetic universalism, but it could as well refer to social or political *necessities*, such as, for example, within a totalitarian system.

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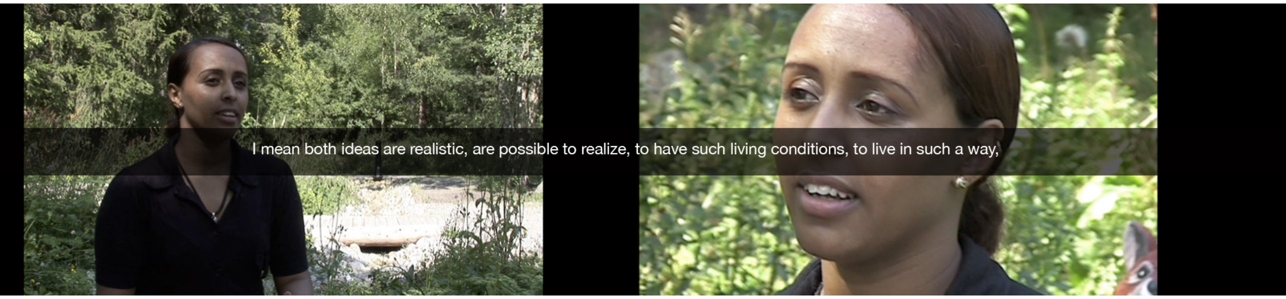
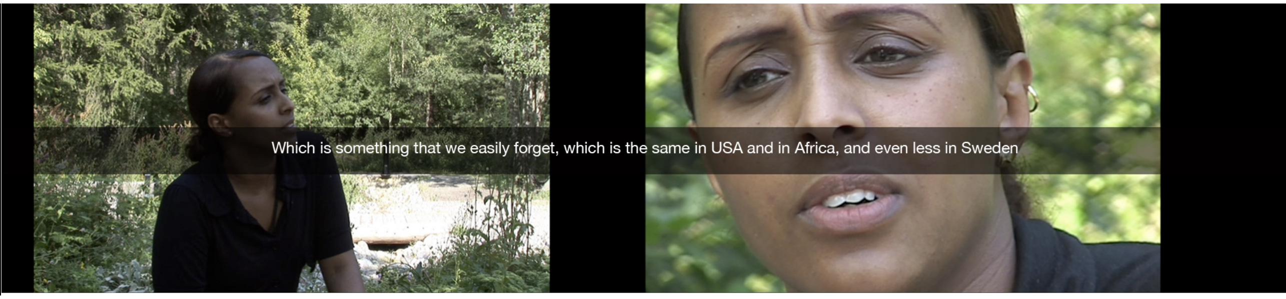
Interviews in their background of meaning

> *that conjuncture is marked by a dedifferentiation of fields, such that economics has come to overlap with culture: that everything, including commodity production and high and speculative finance, has become cultural; and culture has equally become profoundly economic or commodity oriented.*
> Fredric Jameson 1998:73

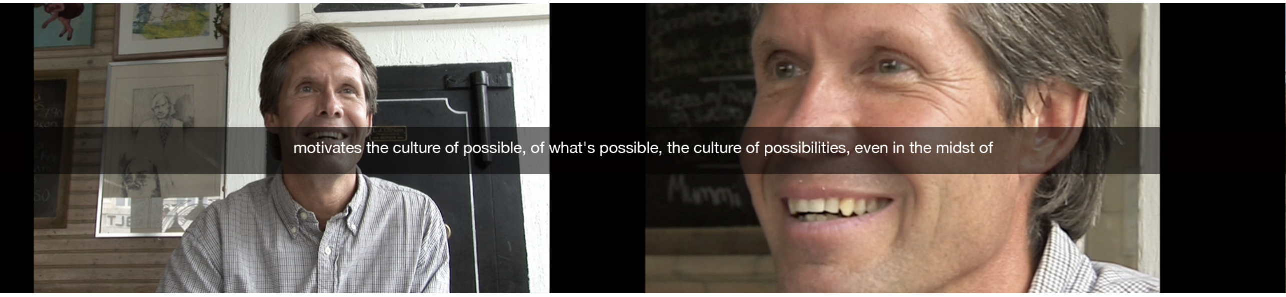
> *We can understand ourselves and our history without imagining ourselves to be the objects of law-giving fate. We can recognize the shaping power of what we ordinary take for granted: the deep structures of institution and belief established in the societies to which we belong. As we recognize the shaping power of such structures, we can, however, cast of the assumption that laws of change govern their history and limit our freedom.*
> Roberto Mangabeira Unger 2004:xvii


I mean both ideas are realistic, are possible to realize, to have such living conditions, to live in such a way,

Both looking at and also thinking with the visual material from our fieldwork, including the interviews, as well as when we read the transcriptions with our three questions in mind – travel, self-definition and community – it becomes clear that there are far more questions, contexts, strata, second thoughts and other categories that are passed by, brought up and dissolved. We see this as a background of meaning which constantly reframes the practice, and which we have not touched upon. In our artistic research, anthropological and ethnographical methods have been a useful as a resource. Autoethnography, for instance, uses self-reflexive approaches that seem parallel to us being our own informants, by referring to subjective thoughts, emotions and impressions. By introducing other practices into our artistic research we have tried to avoid that the "critical focus" becomes condensed into "a single intense visual or literary effect" (Marcus and Fischer 1999:137). We understand and use images as "situated concepts" to think with, at the same time we conceive of our texts as attempts to realize this way of thinking. We see the interrelation between image and what is not yet discursive as both aesthetic and also dialectical without teleology, a flat dialectics that make no prediction. These textual images will in turn both change and shape how we locate the next image, and so on. We see the possibilities of artistic research in terms of its potential to deliver something different from what is usually expected from contemporary art: for example, simply raising unexpected and provoking questions without consequence, and/or restating the intrinsically and essentially limitless nature of the art image (in other words, using beauty to tickle public vanity). We also hope to challenge the middle-class values of thriftiness, minimalist prestige and One Thing at a Time and how they are manifested through expectations for both the artwork and the trajectory of an art practice. By following the images, the conversational and multifocussed plentitude and our three questions that extend the discussions into democracy, institutional conventions, control over space, housing technology, etc., we are hoping to challenge the assumptions surrounding the discrete artwork. If our artistic research does not aspire to be popular in either market or institutional terms, then we feel its strength lies in its usefulness as a practice. We hope that the productive aspects of our practice consist in how it is both *visual and conceptual,* connected to how *images both are situated concepts and also produce them*.


Which is something that we easily forget, which is the same in USA and in Africa, and even less in Sweden

The search for that which is different from our own experience (such as, in the worst sense, the exotic) is easily expressed through the impressionistic use of the camera. Representing culture could play out as Find Five Mistakes: the concept of culture becomes commonsensical and difference does not entail change from the status quo or any acknowledgment of otherness. We conducted the interviews based on our previous experiences of the interview situation. Reading some instructional manuals on interview techniques and talking to colleagues left us with a rough understanding of qualitative research methods. We have no pretensions that working in continually expanding ways that are based on learning-by-doing are any better or more efficient than other approaches; however we gradually became more confident that our three questions – travel, self-definition and community – were in fact producing a common ground with the potential to “opening up rather than closing down conversation” (Ellis 2004:22). We have edited the interviews according to the three themes of the thesis: travel, self-definition and community. This is no doubt a way of simplifying the material and of staking out our territory in other peoples talk. The work is framed by our questions, but using their voices and words. The editing does not strictly focus on one theme at the time, otherwise the results would be too fragmented. The interviews move through themes and follow trains of thought as they cross over, touching on other themes falling outside the paired exchange. It was obvious from the setup that the three questions/topics inevitably blend together. Because of this, the material is edited to foreground each individual’s main interest and spatial situation. The chaos that results from a strict differentiation of themes has to be balanced against another form of chaos which ensues when we leave the material unedited. It is important to understand that the guidelines we applied have come out of the process of working on the material, and did not precede the project We see this less as a process of deduction than as an inductive “embracing”, or even following the morphogenesis of an idea to become part of it – sprung from a single word and adding up to an interpretative tendency through the permeating and successive activation of visually situated references, finally appearing as a concept. A single comment from our interviewees was sometimes enough to set off and orientate a wealth of situated visual and conceptual images. We deliberately avoided delimiting the interpretations of the three interpretative questions too narrowly. However, since they are so closely interrelated, it would


motivates the culture of possible, of what's possible, the culture of possibilities, even in the midst of

be meaningless to think of one question without the other two. We have summed up a list of themes (which is not comprehensive) which we see as related to the three questions in the interviews.

Travel

- Travel stands for change. For instance, it could be forced onto a person because of social violence, or as a wish whose fulfillment would not be possible within an individual's given circumstances, requiring them to change their circumstances. We should point out that we are including both temporary forms of travel and attempts to start a new life in another place (such as immigration).
- Travel could be recognized as moving towards or away from the unfulfilled and/or the unfinished.
- Travel appears on a global scale in geographical and cultural terms as displacement, or as losing faith in ones' present way of life, but it reconnects people through sharing the experience of material and/or imagined uprootedness.

Yes that is true. My mother has just been in Eritrea, and what is good over there is that they live in clay huts,

- Travel includes our own travel: both our own physical travel (to Husby and the northeastern US) and also the travel that a processual work does, the travel also describes the process into which the interviewees are drawn through their counterparts.
- "tipping the balance toward traveling" means that "the 'chronotope' of culture (a setting of scene organizing time and space in representable whole form) comes to resemble as much a site of travel encounters as of residence" (Clifford 1997:25).

Self-definition

- Self-definition is related to travel in the sense that practices that have been changed through travel will make individuals think and act differently.

- Self-definition is, as we see it, most interesting in a political, social and actively practiced form.
- Self-definition is limited by institutional isomorphism, which we have defined earlier. A changed self-definition will necessarily include both travel and a changed sense of community.
- A fundamental change to anyone's self-definition must be linked to fundamental social change.
- Self-definition is the narrative and practiced construction of the relation between an imagined or dominant collective and individual identity.
- Self-definition is linked to individual agency, but it differs from the neoliberal ideology of individualism since it cannot be understood without community.
- Self-definition which simply attempts to correct a misrepresentation (as social movements do) is less interesting to our project since it is initiated passively as self-representation or self-description. In the case that a person is satisfied with his or her representation then there is no need for changing anything.

That is one thing that is in fact what we have been hearing from people, maybe putting it in a different way,

Community

Community develops out of intimacy, on a physical, psychological and intellectual level. For instance, through a specific relation to cultural normalcy, defined as "proper" by use of technology and/or social identity: it is both material and imagined, it both creates and rejects norms.

- Community is, as we see it, has no specific positive or negative effects until it has been practiced.
- Community appearing can take the form of a passive acceptance of conventions, or as a collective political will to change conventions.
- Community can be dissolved and/or renewed through travel and self-definition.

- Community may or may not be in conflict with self-definition, but it necessarily can put concepts such as self as autonomy and collective into processes of motion and change.
- Community means understanding travel and self-definition in terms of collective rights. In this sense it is not much different from the concept of self-determination.

Background: imagine images of a necessary future

The images we work with are situated in specific contexts: they can be conceptualized as to answer to what is depicted in that moment at that place, beyond that we imagine that images are conceptualizations of our entire culture. By this we understand the visual and conceptual image, within the socio-technical terms of *faktura*, as a "*raw"*-format, where all possible images are selectable within one, in which *third space* can appear as chosen and produced. In this way images function as a metaphor, or, in other words, a vehicle to travel towards change. Choosing images involves processes of self-definition, and so the situated image must chose to move beyond the ethics of the documentary and ethnographical to look at what is real as a "false necessity" (Mangabeira Unger 2004), in which "virtual appearances and esthetic forms have taken the place (have taken our place) of an already "'unnecessary' real world" (Casullo 2007) – unnecessary real because of the absurd misuse of resources and the lack of democratic management control. This is, if you like, a romanticism that in the situated image focuses on an imaginary future documentary. This has concrete effects throughout the following text: the imaginary of the image, which, as we have mentioned, we see to be both visual and conceptual, denies external formal demands since they are connected to the unnecessarily real, and since it is a threefold move between travel, self-definition and community *cannot* take the

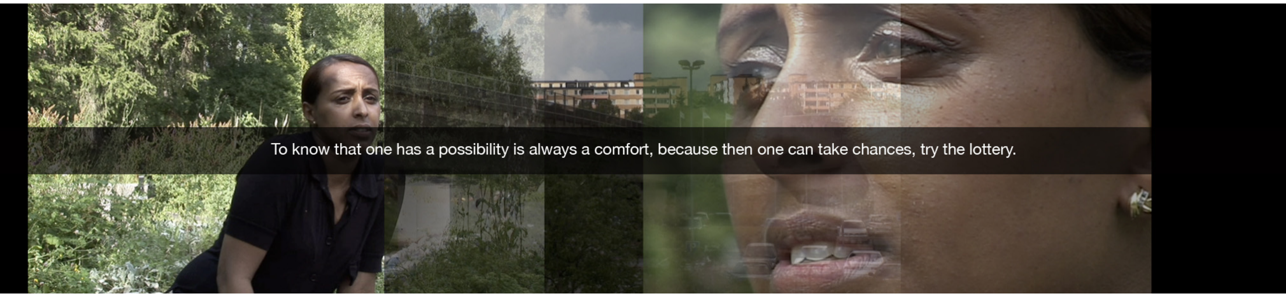
If I talk about my grandmother, well we had a discussion about how one looks after ones body,

necessary step from image as theory to image as prescription until it appear with its necessary social form. This means that thinking with the images leads to a struggle with the unnecessary nonfulfillment (usually labeled as "reality"), because what can be described as real must also be presented as accidental. Effectively this means staying with the idea that practice creates the world. Thinking with the image is then romantic and perhaps even a displaced modernist approach. It has no ideal form because forms must also change: this practice of conceptualization proceeds by interpellation of the imagined social real of the future to the fears and differentiation of the identified and summed up social reality. The image is "not exhausted by, references to 'rational' or 'real' elements and because it is through a *creation* that they are posited" (Castoriadis 1997:8). Thinking with the image means shifting between the overtly detailed and the deeply undecided that has yet to find its social discourse.

I have a electrical supplier who sends me a bill but I haven't compared my bill with anyone else's,

Background: not between real but really third

The conceptualization of *Off the grid* was, to a very high degree, produced by the interviewees themselves. Beginning with the questions and our three overarching themes was helpful, but as much as the interviewees demonstrated their engagement, they were struggling to grasp their position within the frame of artistic research, the dialogue with their counterparts, and the interview situation. Why were we so curious about them? Why were we asking these questions, and not other ones? Who is the person I am paired with, and what is she/he talking about? We, on our hand, were empowered by being the initiators of the discourse and thus *owning* it: our interviewees tacitly approved of us exercising this right, because of the supposition that we brought with us knowledge and credentials from both the university *and* also the artistic field. The respect given to us as "missionaries" from the university also granted us the right to intervene in the interviewees’ speech at our discretion, and at any time. This intervention could include introducing of a particular piece of information as a pedagogical tactic, or bringing in images and thoughts about their counterpart and their situation that could be seen as missing or misleading the interviewee. To keep the interviews as spontaneous as possible, the interviewees were not given any additional material except for our verbal introduction to the research project, the video and the transcripts of those they been paired together with. If they had any questions or it was clear to us that they misunderstood, we would provide further context. Filling in information was more common with the Husby citizens, mostly because they held stronger opinions on the US, and were also more knowledgeable about the American situation, than their American counterparts on Sweden and Europe. We were all struggling to overcome our preconceptions, but specifically for us, we had the feeling that instead of being the representatives of the art and academic worlds, we were being supervised by those within those fields. So, the way that we dealt with this sense of an external demand for a specific orientation and production of specialized knowledge, was to self-reflexively examine the field of artistic research and our role within it, using it to connect the interviews, the situated images and our questions. We talked with our interviewees about artistic research as an emergent field, and the two of us as do-it-yourself patricians; this worked as a unifier.

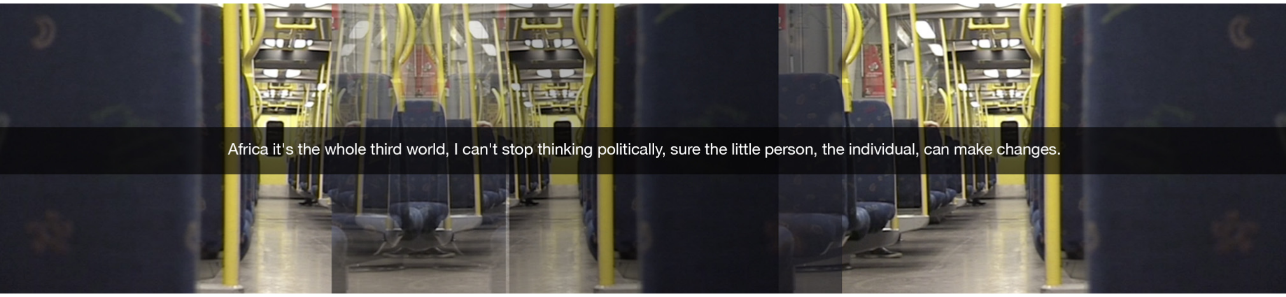

To know that one has a possibility is always a comfort, because then one can take chances, try the lottery.

Early on we understood that the Americans those who are perceived to be “global citizens”– and also who are supposed to be on the *inside*, i.e. occupying positions of economic, military and social dominance, *wanted out* – they wanted to leave behind the negative aspects of that power and privilege. Those who within the same power and spatial understanding could be considered to be on the *outside* (marginalized and excluded) were not particularly interested in getting *in*, within the terms of the dominant culture. This sense of orientation away from the norms of identity coincided with our own professional positioning within our context understood as the art world. This skepticism towards the dominant culture and its institutions could be seen as lack of confidence in representative politics, as well as the experience that the structural mass of each organizational system produces effects that work against the needs and deepest interests of individuals and communities. Here it is important to make the distinction between the nature of government in the US and Sweden. The US, with its very distant state apparatus, overwhelming presence of profit-oriented corporations, such as the health care industry for instance, serves the needs of the population according to shareholder value. This manifested itself in the way people discussed individual and/or community control of resources. Conversely, in Sweden, the presence of a recently become neoliberal but still regulatory and basically popular welfare state has created organizations that carry a sense of authority and legitimacy, even though they lack a democratic mandate. The public housing company in Husby for example, used language invoking the *terms of participation* and *representation*.

which is much more than going camping, the work, socializing after work, but what do we do after work?

Off the grid evolved from our interest and involvement in discussions about Husby, in particular the bias against suburbs and immigrants which contributes to the stereotypes of radicalized suburbs. We have at times thought about doing a feasibility study before pushing ahead, but we feared that taking that direction would immediately simplify the hopes for the project into a seemingly unavoidable us/them binary opposition. Swedish suburbs are generally depicted in the media as a mistake; backwards, hopeless, lawless, insecure in terms of identity, and violent. In political terms, whatever takes place in a suburb is linked to the 1964 parliamentary decision to build a million apartments in ten years, and has to deal with a negative media stereotype. Suburbs are placed on “a hierarchical spatial scale” (Listerborn 2007:2) pitting “global” against “local” from an unexamined Eurocentric perspective: “Status, intelligence, and success are strongly linked to being a global citizen, while poverty, misery, and narrow-mindedness characterize ‘the locals’” (Ibid). To challenge the negative image of Husby and to create space for us to develop our understanding, we needed other perspectives; the decision to activate our own experience from dealing with institutions in terms of the art world was not far-fetched, but it was the unexpected appearance of the off griders that became the device to set Husby free by way of a cross-cultural juxtaposition. Then, as Marcus and Fischer state, to turn *Off the grid* into “a project of criticism involves multiple other-cultural references”:

> These inevitably slip in as the third perspective, as we have called it, in the process of comparison and keep the basic dualistic character of ethnographic cultural criticism from becoming overpowered by simplistic better-worse judgments about two cultural situations being juxtaposed. At minimum, such cultural criticism demands that a sense of the common capacity for communication and of shared membership in a global system inform and legitimately complicate any dualistically constructed project of criticism. (Marcus and Fischer 1999:139)


Africa it's the whole third world, I can't stop thinking politically, sure the little person, the individual, can make changes.

When we listen to the interviews, for instance that of Amona Abobaker (20071215), we run across a difficulty that has been intimately associated with *Off the grid*: how to mediate and connect the different levels in a discussion that is associative in nature, and takes place between such different people? For example, there are ideas around individual frustrations over the ecological crisis and the lack of environmental politics that we need to discuss. These discussions appear in the interviews such as, for instance: how to make sense of the practice of separating one’s trash in the midst of a culture that glorifies the impulse to consume? Amona’s account of her journey stretches from her relatives in East Africa walking all day long to find firewood and by nightfall talking about it in bed under the open sky, to that of her niece and nephew not willing to walk from Husby to the Kista mall five minutes away on foot to buy a pair of jeans. It was how ideas about freedom and independence related to self-elected marginalization that got us interested in off griders; the environmental aspect was coincidental, but the growing *actuality* of the topic is reflected as changes to the content of the interviews. There are economic, technical, ideological and other perspectives that are common to Husby in itself, to the artworld, and those that are shared by the off griders, and then those ideas that link these places together in a third discursive space. By following the material we ended up with a set of perspectives and ideas that could not be seen as external to the research project, neither in terms of artistic research, nor in terms of what was brought up by the interviewees, but also other, contextual concepts that may not have seemed relevant in an obvious sense, but were necessary in drawing a conceptual map. We have been using the three questions and themes in our research – travel, self-definition and community – against a discursive background formed beforehand by socially engaged thinkers. The most important for us were Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, but also Luc Boltanski and Luc Thévenot, and a host of their concepts mediating between materiality and sociality; place and space, strategy and tactics, memory, appropriation and justification. Justification is particularly interesting to us, since the presence of a group, a collective or an activity that is defined from outside its “proper” context, such as immigrant tenants, the value of art and artistic research, does not appear “without saying”.

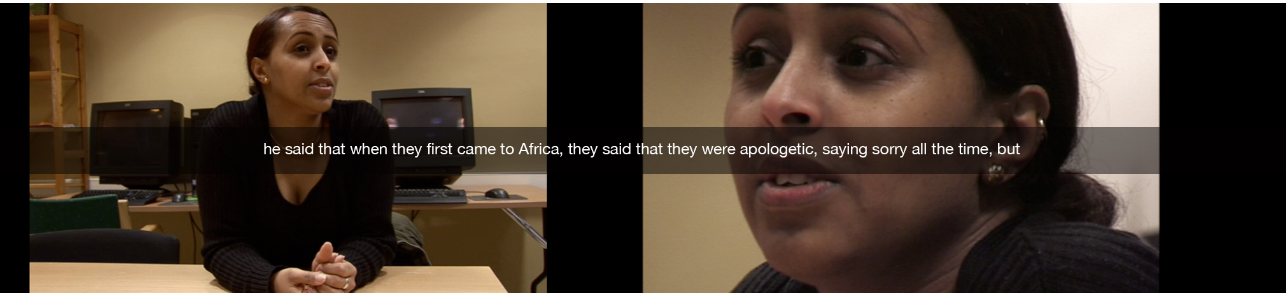
but at the same time you can't, because you always come in contact with the political, a huge part of politics is our lives,

Background: spatial strategy, tactics and the right to the city

Henri Lefebvre analyses space using three dialectically interrelated categories: space that is perceived, conceived and lived (Lefebvre 1991). Perceived space (or spatial practice) is unconsciously and passively experienced, and dominated by the productive forces of capitalism. Conceived space (or representations of space) is the manipulation of space in the interest of the dominant culture in order to make space more efficient from the perspective of governance and control. Lived space (or representational space, or *third* space) is how experience, reflection and the ethical and democratic right to space, particularly in form of the *Right to the city* (Lefebvre 1968; Purcell 2002; Harvey 2003; Mitchell 2003; www.righttothecity.org) come together in the appropriation by the public of dominated space. Lived space is the fluid space of political empowerment; open and communal, directly experienced and practiced, linked to the rhythms and processes of the living. The dominant forces in each culture produce space as its "effigy" for instance the streamlined space of the shopping mall and the privatization of public space. Resistance takes place in form of appropriation: retaining immediacy in the name of a livable everyday. To Lefebvre, appropriation must be more than a temporary; it should produce some kind of lasting impact, but the stabilization should not result in the exclusion of yet other groups and individuals, reproducing forms of domination. An individual cannot alone overcome the tension between dominated and lived space; individual appropriation would be more like Michel de Certeau's concept of tactics, or a Situationist *détournement*, a diversion Lefebvre saw as an easy subversion of spaces that have "become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted" (Lefebvre 1991:167). In the long run the solution must be lasting, democratic social change.

but I preferred being in the countryside, it was so nice, when night falls everyone is lying down in their beds,

Lefebvre emphasizes the city as a built space whereas social space is produced, without any other juridical or foundational rights, except for the congestion of particular interests. The difference between the production of space and social space is perhaps easily overstated, as it is gridlocked by a Marxist analysis of a unified and all-encompassing power. It is important to see the expansion of social space, as Michel de Certeau does, as subjective, non-regulated, heterogenic, filled with possibilities, potentialities, individual memories and personal itineraries rather than the monolithic amassing of power and facts on the ground that in the final analysis leaves no prospect of change. Certeau placed the human being on the street, subverting planned space as a tactician rather than opting for the role of the strategist in front of the drawing board, creating alternative worlds. But when everyone is supposed to be an individualist and the state as planning body is dwindling under the pressure of globalization, what do strategy and tactics mean? Lefebvre and de Certeau lived and worked in France during the height of modernization in the 1950s and 1960s, when the state kept a firm grip on the development. During this time, urban planning based on suburban development and public transportation was implemented – a model which originated in Stockholm and reached its epitome in *Vällingby* planned by the architect Sven Markelius between 1947-1950. The power of the state has changed since then, both through globalization and also the neoliberal redistribution of economic resources from collective use to the individual, to "accumulation through dispossession" (Harvey 2008). This has undermined social planning and pushed cities into a worldwide competition for attention and investors' money. At the same time, politics has adopted a set of goals and language that is indistinguishable from large companies and financial institutions. The central question of *how to organize a society in which everybody is involved* was answered in the 1950s and 1960s through representations of an existing or becoming homogeneous people or nation. In Europe, the vehicle for national identity after 1945 was equated with the small differences in the social security systems. Today it is answered by transnational businesses with stockholder responsibilities and the administrative politics of social cohesion.


he said that when they first came to Africa, they said that they were apologetic, saying sorry all the time, but

The power relations between capital and publicly responsible authorities have changed and the state has largely stepped back from an active to a passive role in the production of space: the productive forces operating in space are less and less in democratic control. In order to *save* public housing, the municipalities have typically transformed their ownership into corporations that remain publicly financed, but act according to market rules and legislation. Under the finance legislation, democratic influence on their decisions is limited to discussions on the profitability of their engagements at the level of the board of directors. This means, as the urban planner Lina Olsson has shown, that in relation to the market, democratic institutions have come closer to a situation when they simply appropriate and occupy space rather than dominating it, in a way that is not qualitatively different from individuals. This new situation calls for a reinterpretation of the concepts of appropriation, tactics and strategy:

> Tactical appropriation applies to spatiality that has a higher degree of stability compared to tactics, which immediately "disappear", but still lack the ability to create a stable foothold in social space. The concept of strategic appropriation indicates constancy to a higher degree in social space. (Olsson 2008:92. Our translation.)

The specificity of the interviews, to see, hear, feel, taste and smell what is talked about, meant applying an individually lived perspective and "scaling from below" (Nielsen and Simonsen 2003). And in the interviews we had to consider that not only has the nature of capitalism changed since the 1960s, but also that we are dealing with two different systems – both in flux – and locational structures. Discussing the choices, barriers and possibilities to live a life that is worthy and dignified was supplied by the interviewees discussions on the relation between space and power, which brought Husby and the American Northeast together "from the perspective of everyday practices, taking the starting point in the scale of the body" (Nielsen and Simonsen 2003:924). As Nielsen and Simonsen research space in a Lefebvrian and Certeauian spirit, body and narration are often forgotten when the analytical perspective takes its "starting point in 'Globalization' and from that facilitating a top-down investigation" (Ibid) of political economy. It is evident that the paired exchanges in *Off the grid* is connected to the consequences of globalization as it has been discussed by David Harvey and other critical geographers, as a

Can we still as Dave does, doubt everything and at the same time claim that everything is possible?

Kan vi fortfarande som Dave gör tvivla på allt och på samma gång hävda att allt är möjligt?

> rapid increase in global economic integration, in the flexibility of production, and in the pace of innovation, along with a precipitous fall of transportation and communications costs – have generated a relative “time-space compression,” which has profound consequences for the cultural context of world capitalism. (Boswell and Hawkins 1999:354)

Beginning with Husby meant starting from the perspectives of everyday, *on the ground* lived experience, which we see as equivalent to Certeau’s walking through the city. It was necessary to begin here before walking through the glass walls of theory, or considering the wider effects of globalization from a political economy. Only by sharing the modern, belief that “Globalisation will produce more universality and so systematic knowledge is still possible” (Giddens 1991:150) could we find the socially unsaid in terms of the situated and the contextually given. The socially unsaid appears in traveling back and forth between the imagined local and the imagined global. For example, when Amona talks about her younger relatives’ attraction to expensive jeans, how a logo is stitched to the cloth, our inclination is to “follow the jeans”: to display their socio-economic world tour and thereby undo their magical power. In reading the transcriptions a pattern appears: we were actively zooming in on details in the interviews, mediating between our curiosity towards the idiosyncratic narrative and more conventional references as well as, on both accounts, our (mis)understandings and those of our interviewees. Conversely, there were times when we zoomed out from the actual situations of the interviewees by choosing our “discursive vehicle” from a “parking lot” of spatial concepts and discourses, following the concept that seemed most useful at that moment. However, there was no way that we could have opened those multiple perspectives without our three questions. The iteration of a place made fail-safe as by referring to the aesthetically visual or the synchronically closed document does not advance the understanding of the multilayered “continuous and nested relations between scaling processes”

IBM.
August 2002

People like me and others in my surroundings just forgot about it, when the lesson had ended we stopped discussing it.

(Nielsen and Simonsen 2003:924) or, as Fredric Jameson puts it, the “cognitive map is not exactly mimetic”:

> the conception of space that has been developed here suggests that a model of political culture appropriate to our own situation will necessarily have to raise spatial issues as its fundamental organising concern. I will therefore provisionally define the aesthetic of this new (and hypothetical) cultural form as an aesthetic of cognitive *mapping*. (Jameson 1991:VI)

Being entitled to appropriate space means being placed according to a single map made up of real-estate prices. Space appropriated through purchase, which is the rule in the American system, perhaps allows for more personalization, but does not change the overall characteristics of dominated space. If Lefebvre states that “dominated space is usually closed, sterilized, emptied out” (Lefebvre 1991:165) then it is easy to overlook that buying a tract of land and building ones’ own house could well be seen as in full compliance with the codes of dominated space, even as an isomorphic replica of dominated space. The étatist system that built Husby and its neighboring suburbs was collectivist in a Fordist sense. Today Husby can be seen as representing the ruins of a social democratic society that recognized collective efforts before individual consumption, the “rectilinear or rectangular form such as a meshwork or chequerwork” (Ibid). From a certain perspective, Husby could be seen as the opposite of Elizabeth and Dan’s short but winding driveway and self-built round houses but both spaces creates sociality and possible futures. Modernity, and in particular modern housing, guided by a singular idea of good life as a collective right, was from the beginning co-opted by large companies favored by the state administration and later, as already mentioned, became seen as an outdated obstruction to the principle of individualization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Adopting a role as the stewards of planned space, and attempting, unsuccessfully, to manage

I don't know, it's so double. I think if you feel good, then it's easier when you are wealthy to be able to think

the tensions caused by their contradictory role, exacerbated by globalization, the social democratic parties in Europe lost confidence in the idea of collective rights and sacrificed the fascinating possibilities offered by an individually appropriated, democratic and collective space such as Husby – unless it is either commodified as by spectacular cultural events, handed over from public to private governance in the name of decentralization, or plainly seen as a commodity for individual investment. As a form of governance individual property and neoliberal property rights have eclipsed collective, practiced and participatory forms of ownership over space exemplified by social housing, but from a ground-level perspective, the situation does not necessarily have to be interpreted in this way. *Husby Unite* and other local tenants organizations are discussing democratic possibilities opening up a space between state/corporate and private ownership, but there are few signs of creativity within established politics. Here we can make use of Lefebvre's distinction between appropriation and property:

There the analogy of the trapeze, I remember reading somewhere, this article, it was talking about job changes,

> It may be said of natural space modified in order to serve the needs and possibilities of a group that it has been appropriated by that group. Property in the sense of possession is at best a necessary precondition, and most often merely an epiphenomenon, of 'appropriative' activity, the highest expression of which is the work of art. An appropriated space *resembles* a work of art. (Lefebvre; 1991:165)

Olsson's use of tactic and strategic appropriation illustrates the diverse spatialized relations of power that may follow appropriation. It is far too easy to create a binary opposition between the US capitalist system and the remnants of an etatist welfare state, or between institutions and power on the one side and citizens and practices to the other. But we must make one point about the right to self-definition absolutely clear: that it differs from liberal individualism in that it must be linked to community – and this is where it differs from liberalism's valorizing of individual self-expression. We are also arguing that the social exclusion, the unequal distribution of resources and the ecological crisis which result from processes of globalization from above, all limit the right to self-definition. Lefebvre's spatial rereading of Marx in the *Right to the city* was called on by the growing surpluses in the consumption society and the following zoning of space, such as the construction of large scale housing suburbia and the rise of private mass motoring. David Harvey's interpretation of Lefebvre occurs in a political climate where neoliberal politics unravels collective rights, the accumulation process creates dispossession. The only solution to this process of individualization and financial position thinking is enacting change as "a collective rather than an individual right since changing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization" (Harvey 2008:1)

> We have, however, yet to see a coherent oppositional movement to all of this in the twenty-first century. There is, of course, a multitude of diverse urban struggles and urban social movements (in the broadest sense of that term to include movements in the rural hinterlands) already in existence. But they have yet to converge on the singular aim of gaining greater control over the uses of the surplus (let alone over the conditions of its production). One step, though by no means final, towards unification of these struggles is to laser in on those moments of creative destruction where the economy of wealth accumulation collides violently with the economy of dispossession and there proclaim on behalf of the dispossessed their right to the city, their right to both change the world and change life. That collective right, as both a working slogan and a political ideal, brings us back to the age-old question as to who it is that commands the inner connection between urbanization and surplus production and use. Perhaps, after all, Lefebvre was right some forty years ago, to insist that the revolution in our times has to be urban - or nothing. (Harvey 2008:14)

We just wanted to do it, we really wanted to do it. I've hear people say that about adopting children, if you are

The appropriation of space from below, by way of social movements, may change the practice of space and bridging over from customs to rules in such a way that it becomes strategically appropriated, which is, as mentioned above, different from a tactical, individual and performance based and ultimately transitive use of space. Appropriation presupposes agency, and as such, agency may clearly either intentionally or as an unintentional consequence of a given situation, create a secondary domination of space. An example in Husby would be the manifestation of *Husby gård*, that will be discussed by Ishmael Fatty.

Background: globalization as vested interest or the return of agency

To Manuel Castells, the fragmentation and “time-space compression” which are the consequences of globalization has led to overwhelming processes of homogenization of space. The experience of homogenous space involves a globetrotting fascination mingled with terror over the “airport architecture” where travelers “are alone, in the middle of the space of flows, they may lose their connection, they are suspended in the emptiness of transition” (Castells 1996:449). This transitive space is “blurring the meaningful relation between architecture and society”. Because the spatial manifestation of the “dominant interests” (Lefebvre 1991:39) takes place around the world, and across cultures, the uprooting of experience, history and specific culture as the background of meaning is leading to the generalization of ahistorical, acultural architecture” (Lefebvre 1991:451), as with the widely applauded concept of a “Bilbao-effect” named after Frank Gehry’s building for the Guggenheim foundation. A close-to-home example is the Science Tower in Kista, Husby’s neighboring suburb; typically referred to as the “tallest office building in Sweden, and a welcome landmark in Kista” it is also seen as a “symbol for the future and exciting architecture” (www.wasakronan.se, 20080131, our translation). The Kista mall boasts a large food court, including

It would be great, if you could do something like that it would be wonderful. And then you would have to use

sixteen restaurants; it promises the sophistication and democratization of globalized low price commercialism with "polysemic food consumption choices" (Srinivas 2007) We cannot help but contrast with the Somali food and sweet tea we were served as a gesture of friendship, at the premises of the Somali association in Husby – by those who, from the perspective of the mainstream media, are not really seen as "global citizens".

On an everyday basis, globalization is lived far from the nodes and hubs of the symbolic economy; as the local is permeated with the global it creates unexpected possibilities. To describe this new social space which is a consequence of economic globalization and the reinterpretation of state power, concepts such as glocalization, macro-localization, micro-globalization and "glocal" have appeared in spatially oriented research. After Habib Khondker, Listerborn proposes five interpretations of "the concept of glocalisation"; diversity; differences; "autonomy of history", culture, society and nations; the removal of fear of globalization as "a tidal wave, erasing all differences", and a "historically grounded" understanding and a "complicated yet pragmatic view of the world" (Khondker 2004:5; Listerborn 2007:4). Manuel Castells has pointed out the major forces of our time: globalization and individualization. They seem to move the world in two different directions; first, preparing the ground for a global political unity, and second, simultaneously promoting a pluralistic individualism – even though this individuality dissolves in globalized consumer patterns and the borderless grey zone of the 24/7 biopolitical and "immaterial" workplace: "labor that creates not only material goods but also relationships and ultimately social life itself" (Hardt and Negri 2005:109). "The term *biopolitical* thus indicates that the traditional distinctions between the economic, the political, the social and the cultural become increasingly blurred" (Ibid). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that the globalization-individualization matrix leads to "singularities that act in common" with "no conceptual or actual contradiction between singularity and communality" (Hardt and Negri 2005:105)

No I don't think so, no, not at all.

that appears in a state of “deterritorialization”, that both sustain and undermines the standing system, because

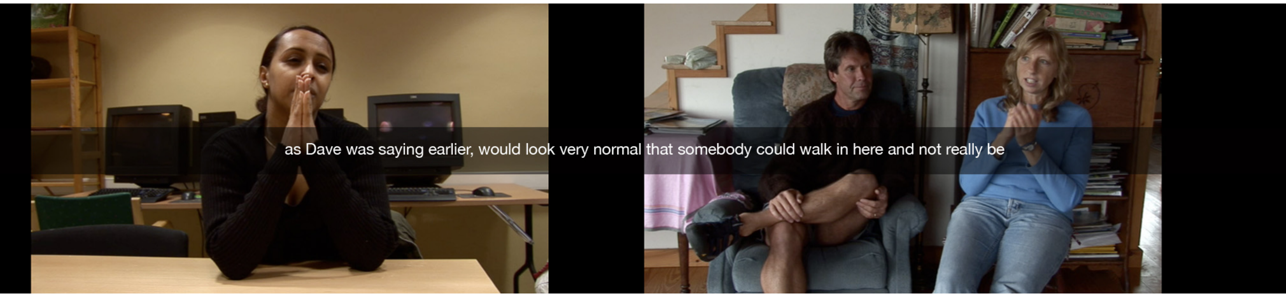
> A multitude is an irreducible multiplicity; the singular social differences that constitute the multitude must always be expressed and can never be flattened into sameness, unity, identity, or indifference. The multitude is not merely a fragmented and dispersed multiplicity. (Hardt and Negri 2005:105)

The concept of multitude makes sense to us as an example of the negative presence of the local and individual permeated by the global and general. For example, everywhere we traveled and anyone we talked to we were not by way of our questions forming, but rather collectively arriving to and being emplaced and defined by an already existing discussion that all the interviewees already were prepared to elaborate on just by staying with their own situation; housing, identity, sustainability, globalization, etc.

think the United States represents 5% of the world population and consumes 30-40% of the Worlds resources,

Background: justifications of art

Following the oscillating and concurrent sense of uprootedness, and the corresponding strong sense of having arrived as equals among our interviewees, the concept of the glocal appeared to us as a way of mediating between conventions which are related to the appropriation of space by dominating forces and situated experienced in terms of familiarity and belonging. As the French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot have observed, having access to different worlds may lead to two kinds of criticism of a situation that requires justification. The first form of criticism is based on a “shift of worth” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999:373) which, de-contextualizes and re-contextualizes a particular object but not the codes and conventions of the framework used to perceive it. One example of this would be Duchamp's famous urinal, which shifts the codes and conventions of the art object but not the artworld as such. The second is more radical, and based on "ambiguous" situations "which contain objects from several worlds" (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999:378). In order to make sense of a conflict there must be a mutual understanding of the specific form of justification – the most commonly used types of justification are based on civic, market, industrial world, ecology, the projective city, reputation, inspiration and domestic domains. Furthermore, another form of justification may be based in the principle of equality: different people and things find a common value (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005; Kemple 2007; Schønning Sørensen 2008). When participants in a given situation recognize a common and thereby conventional value, this means that the individual has to negotiate some of his or her beliefs to conform to this conventional value system. In this case, the mode of justification can be changed according to the individual perspective:


as Dave was saying earlier, would look very normal that somebody could walk in here and not really be

> To make an agreement possible, particular persons must divest themselves of their singularity and converge towards a form of generality transcending persons and the situation in which they interrelate. Persons seeking agreement have therefore to focus on a convention of equivalence external to themselves. (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999:361)

This, of course, raises the question of power relations; do the marginalized subordinate their individual perspectives to the consensus of the powerful? For example, that an ambiguous, potentially conflictual situation can exist between the homeowners in the American Northeast and the residents in the collective housing estate of Husby is all too obvious. The social constructs and conventions revealed by the third space between off griders and Husby is and traceable as changes in travel, self-definition and community, as we see it, the product of globalization. Revealing naturalized systems of justification, as Boltanski and Thévenot have described them, will plot out the smallest of objects and passing comments onto a map of generalized and dialectical relations. Boltanski and Thévenot would argue that a critique, which stands outside these conventions and relies on an already existing alternative world – as an isomorphic and institutionalized aesthetics – is as hard to dismiss, as it is to integrate into a rational, i.e. *horizontal and equal*, order of justification. One could say that it is an effect of the politics of representation that the role of art is to evoke alternative worlds; this critique is expressed as a double bind, using the example of Duchamp's readymade as the relocation of an object to the modernist references to other and coming worlds. This critique from a place or position of modernist alterity has little in common with equality in a democratic sense, and thus it can exist within the art world without ever challenging a social and political reality. If we continue to consider the critical potential of art, the next step has to include the bearings of an "alternative world" *inside* the *significant* or *imaginary concept of art*: i.e. inquiring into the *justification for art's criticality*.

in the United States our culture has been spoiled like, we're spoiled adolescence in terms of developing a culture and,

This means that an artist would always be expected to take responsibility for and promote the views that he or she finds valuable from the position of a socially constructed and positioned equivalence. This is perhaps striking a coarse note, but the focus in liberal society on balanced information, diversity and freedom of speech is usurped by dominating interests, whereby the interests of the powerful come to be universalized as the common good. This has been the case with the *Järva uplift* in Husby (Boykoff and Boykoff 2004). We are humbled by the knowledge that art, as it has been conventionally and historically defined, also carries these liberal virtues of dispersing messages. Art is often consumed by commodity fetishism and the mystifications of transmuting values (virtually going from rags to riches), without any effort at critical epistemology, transcending the conventional self-centeredness of the artist, or asserting responsibility.

As we understand the artworld, systems of justification are linked to structures of thought and behavior. The concept of individual inspiration functions as both motivation and justification for many artistic efforts, and raises them to a worth over their sheer materiality. It would not be worthwhile to question the role and purpose of inspiration, but it is important to discuss how inspiration becomes meaningful or not, since it is not a matter that is to the full extent *internally* produced. Boltanski and Thévenot's idea of the "Inspired World" is neat and tidy concept, verging on parody, but it is not therefore superficial. The sociologists discuss the "general identities", ideals perhaps, that are produced by institutions, towards which anyone opens him or herself. However, these "general identities" also can be reacted against: to "have no hold over the powers that may come to them and raise them up to worth [la Grandeur]" (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006:237) is no doubt in conflict with the right to self-definition. Within the art world, the equivalent of this would be, as Boltanski and Thévenot sees it, to the continual opposition towards what is "stable and fixed", "sacrosanct principles or norms" are seen as "shackles that inhibit creativity" (Ibid):

> Habits and rules inherited from an academic culture are opposed to originality, genuine – that is, inspired – thought, and the enthusiasm that accompanies creation. Academic culture is criticized as traditional. Knowledge that is relevant in the industrial world is constantly denigrated in the inspired world for its stability and objectivity. (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006:238)

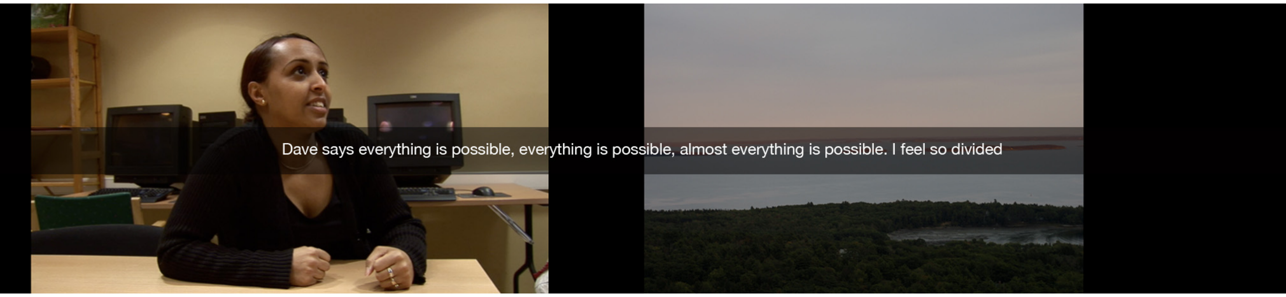
Boltanski and Thévenot points to the institutionalized conflict between on the one hand originality, genuineness and enthusiasm, and on the other a visual/conceptual, issue oriented research. Our position in this clash of opinions is that an image, as a concept and part of a socially intelligible language, is never emptied out. Even under severe pressure from simplified and reductive meaning there will be other interpretations as long as they are connected to existing or imagined social interests. Because of semiotic reasons (the relation between depiction and depicted reality is conventional), reasons of idealized normality (conventionality proper) and reasons of travel (endless change is at the core of conventional meaning production), the meaning of the situated image is not reducible to its intended content. It will seem limitless and undetermined, particularly when seen out of context. This does not mean there is no viewer. Once again: we are not making the claim for the image as intrinsically inexhaustible: that would be shying away from the problem. “Situated visual concepts” has the potential to dedifferentiate the differentiated everyday that has yet to find its social discourse and create its community. This means that thinking with images necessarily leads in a wide array of directions. To make full use of the dialectical possibilities of the situated image means to follow how the discussions change moving between different contexts. Even though the tradition of modern art is paradoxically based on *constant* upheaval, the institutional structures resulting from modern culture that measure change, produce contextual meaning and determine value must be upheld. The ice floes of constancy that artists are jumping between must not melt!

And the families of off grid homes, and they still have that quality, they have that need for independence and frontier kind of spirit.

The artworld makes a great deal about its criticality, but its relation to contemporary society is largely affirmative. Visual art, understood as a non-specific visuality, takes on positions that fulfill widely divergent interests in a liberal sense without pitting them against each other – this is possibly a reason why criticism so frequently chastises art identified as polemical or (overtly) political, but never questions aesthetic beauty. Art in a liberal understanding narrates the individual fighting for his/her sovereignty against an oppressive collectivity, and even though we are all more or less suffering from individualization and 18th century ideology, it has become art’s liberal dogma. Art based in this liberal understanding naively can become a perfect projection screen, a servile spectacle, for any political interest, as in Guy-Ernest Debord’s famed statement: “The spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image” (Debord 1967:1§34). The image in the industry of “knowledge visualization” (Eppler and Burkhardt 2004) is a commodity producing what Lefebvre would call a *conceived* space, a manipulation in the interest of dominant forces, but it can still be perceived as beautiful. When the image-commodity appears on a monumental scale, it is bound to become subject to critique, as with billboards appearing in public space. Theory – or indeed any excerpt from the interviews – may in its turn become image in the limited sense of commodity. We work with images to form a "third space" that allows glocal connections to be formed, but we are working within artistic research is to intertwine the lure of the image and the civility of discourse, and because of this we do not support any one-sided attempt to kidnap art.

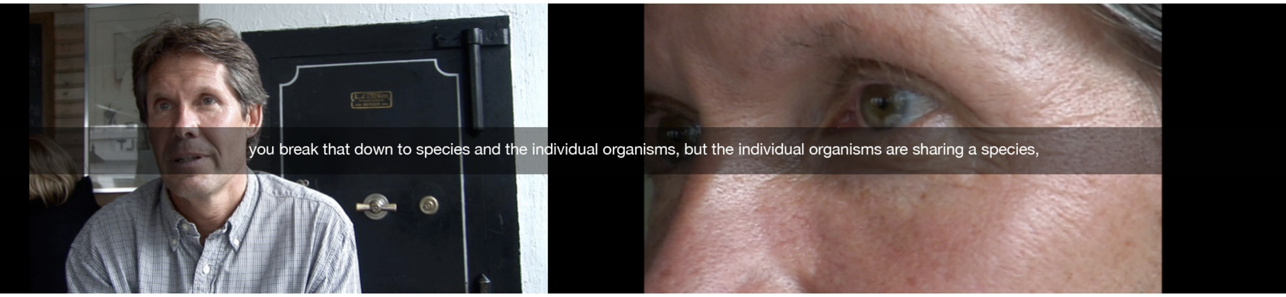
Background: how a point of origin travels

We must now return to where we left the discussion on the cultural effects of globalization. A naively perceived, *natural* connection between place and identity has been disrupted by globalization (Tomlinson 1999). However, this does not exclude a possibility of connectedness to place, though it may no longer necessarily be understood or imagined through essentialist definitions of origins, histories or traditions. One could say that the justification of place has shifted. This means that social relations are "lifted out" of their local context, which leads to a widespread readiness to accept other perspectives than those of the parent generation, or just looking back to the time before the end of the Cold War. The sociologist Roland Robertson constructed a butterfly diagram depicting "the global field" with the four corners marked by nation societies – world system of societies – selves – humankind (left to right, top level first) (Robertson 1992:27). The diagram shows the effect of globalization by criss-crossing the outstretched field between the corners. This process involves the questioning and relativization of selves, societies, citizenship, and societal references, including the relation between dominant interests and individuals/people. Self and society is simultaneously and continually seen from another global vantage point. In *Off*


Dave says everything is possible, everything is possible, almost everything is possible. I feel so divided

the grid the consequences of globalization appear through a cluster of positions and themes, not because we are doing something unique with our project, but because the right to self-definition appealed to people that would have otherwise had no relationship with each other because they were geographically separated. The questioning and relativization of habitual ways through global culture became present as the potential common ground produced in our “third space”.

We are clinging on to a faint hope, which is perhaps overtly “first world” in its framing and idealistic nature, that the “stretching” of time and space Anthony Giddens discusses (which effectively de-contextualizes identities) could in fact lead to the possibility of the development and attachment of rights, narrative itineraries and ethically based communities. The social construction of the world is always infinitely open; you are, if you like, always in time to feel angst and/or the joy of empowerment over the limitless responsibilities that comes with understanding the social world as a construct, a faktura. However, the changes that need to be done are largely related to institutions – in both an external and an internalized sense. The light of freedom appearing in the interviews could be an effect of a “stretching” set off by globalization, since


you break that down to species and the individual organisms, but the individual organisms are sharing a species,

> [t]he structuration of all social systems occur in time-space, but also ’brackets’ time-space relations; every social system in some way ’stretches’ across time and space. Time-space distanciation refers to the modes in which such ’stretching’ takes place or, to shift the metaphor slightly, how social systems are ’embedded’ in time and space. (Giddens 1981:4pp)

The sense of upheaval and continual crisis within societies stretched by the absentee power known as globalization, is further accentuated by the knowledge society, which redefines the “quality of the link between the economy and other social sectors” (Stehr 1994:121). In trying to understand the context of the interviews, we gradually came to embrace the projective and constructive possibilities that they opened up to us in what could easily have become a discussion on loss – the loss of cultural identity which is meant to serve as a point of origin. *Off the grid* is not a dialogue between decontextualized or diasporic identities, framed in terms of their relative distance from a “centre” or “essence”. We are not interested in charting loss, because “Home is not, in any event, a site of immobility” (Clifford 1998:85).

Travel which results from social pressure forms a thin layer of global awareness, with a long history. But the iconic Apollo XI images of the Earthrise seem to represent the stretching on which global economy thrives. Knowledge societies, as we understand them, depend on images. But which knowledge are we talking about? We are hesitant to enter a discussion in super-generalized terms; the concepts used in art and research are significant and embody experience concentrated to the point where every single word used to describe their nature and their contextual effects contains an infinite hypertext, which UNESCO defines as follows: ”Like all written archives, the internet is a device using externalized memory; however, it is not limited to texts and images; it accepts all information capable of being digitized” (UNESCO 2005:52). Knowledge understood as a processual social capacity that can lead or direct other practices, as Stehr proposes, would risk downplaying practice – the body, or ritual, in other words the *doxic nature of knowledge* (Rosengren 2002; 2006) – let alone knowledge as institutional power or individual agency. There is a great difference between considering the image as doxic (involved in social production), or as epistemic (an unchangeable truth). However, if we are no longer discuss knowledge in terms of its final or essential nature, but as something we actively have to construct ourselves, then we feel it holds great emancipatory potential. The modern – and contemporary – examples of institutions and societies based on “truth” outside the reach of human rationality almost immediately shift from a brief moment of

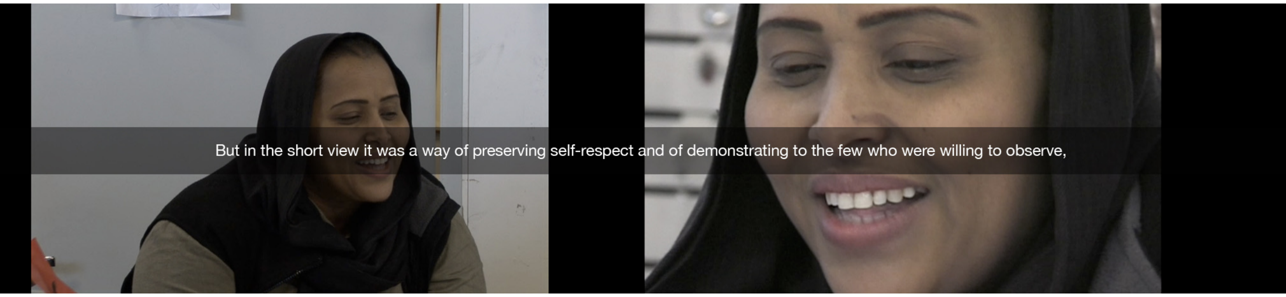
What's the process that we are employing to try and motivate change of thinking, change of thought, that motivates the perspective

exultation into paranoia and destructivity. In Stockholm knowledge as knowledge society to many equals Kista, the neighboring suburb to Husby on the Järva field. In the book *Knowledge Societies* Nico Stehr argues that

> The engine of much of the dynamics of economic activity and the source of much of the growth of added economic value can be attributed to knowledge. Paradoxically perhaps, the self-transformation of the economy diminishes the importance of the economy to individuals and society. (Stehr 1994:121)

And further:

> from the point of view of the individual, for example, the economy of the knowledge societies has the enabling quality of allowing central-life interests to progressively drift away from the purely economic ones or, from a macro-perspective of social conflicts, for instance, a shift toward more generalized struggles not primarily driven by material clashes can be discerned. (Stehr 1994:121)


But in the short view it was a way of preserving self-respect and of demonstrating to the few who were willing to observe,

The seductive idea of an end to social crisis lurks behind the narrative in which a knowledge society moves from “social conflicts” to “generalized struggles”, but as we have seen there is no generalized struggle for self-definition, it indicatively and in practice meant to all our interviewees, and to us as well, to mediate the triad of self-definition, travel and community. The travel stories we recorded often described a path moving in one direction; either moving away from social plight, or moving towards an imagined self-realization. However, they mostly combined simultaneous, multiple directions so that once one arrives at the new location, traces of the former situation still remain. The interviewees described these traces of another place, such as, for example, in Ishmael’s talking about his mother. At other times they referenced other places indirectly, often accompanied with a sigh of relief, such as with Jerusha and Ed and Karen. Travel can also develop into a theme in itself, as with Judith, where the destination marks a passage. Home as a passage also appears in the interviews with Abdullahi and Yohannes, where the idea of their present home and home as a place to which one returns becomes stretched between Africa and Husby. Travel relocates identity, but it does so in a world that is gradually becoming multipolar, transnational and diasporic. The effect of this global dislocation of individual and place creates a new importance for place, not because having specific properties which direct and form individuals, but more becoming a receptacle for memories, ultimately revealing every place as an artificial social construction. This way of thinking, present in the interviews, underlines the continuous process of world making and also eases the drama and turmoil of life-changing travel.

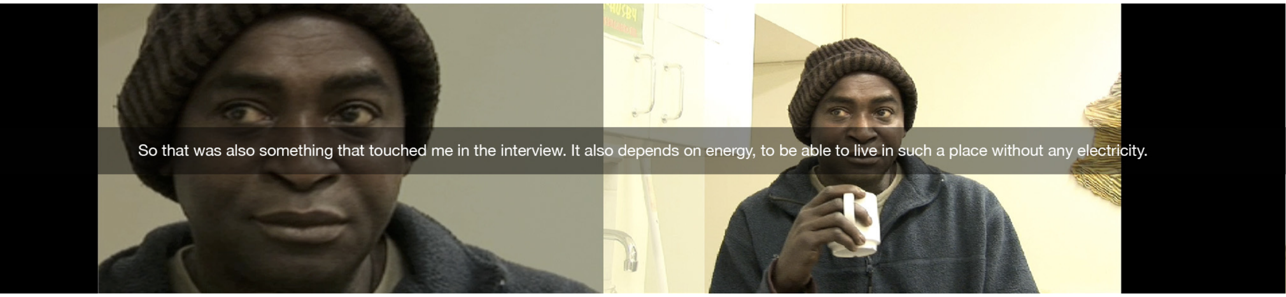
In a discussion on diasporic social movements the Swiss social anthropologist Martin Sökefeld followed people that have attempted life-changing travel as a positive act, constructing an identity in terms of “the imagination of a transnational community and a shared identity as defining characteristics of diaspora” (Sökefeld 2006:265). Massive global travel has changed from the forfeit of one’s original place as a static idea to a situation where the place of destination is changeable and changing according to the practices and interests of the newcomers. Globalization in form of information flows that blends into the local everyday has already made the preparatory work to facilitate the communication between Husby and the countryside of Northeastern US. From the perspective of governance in the name of dominant interests, globalized information means simplified assessment of and accessibility to human resources. However, from our perspective it meant a common starting point for the discussions in-between the interviewees. Once one’s line of thinking has become redirected towards something else than a “general identity”, and this was as obvious with the off griders as with the interviewees in Husby, then where and how one lives becomes less significant:

A few weeks of work furnished our house fuel, another few weeks provided the needed repairs and replacements on buildings, tools and equipment.

> the off the grid community, maybe the broader community, is the alternative energy community, the renewable community, many of whom are on grid, the sustainability, they are living on the grid because they are connect to it, there are more those, than people living off grid (Dave and Sue Oakes 20060922)

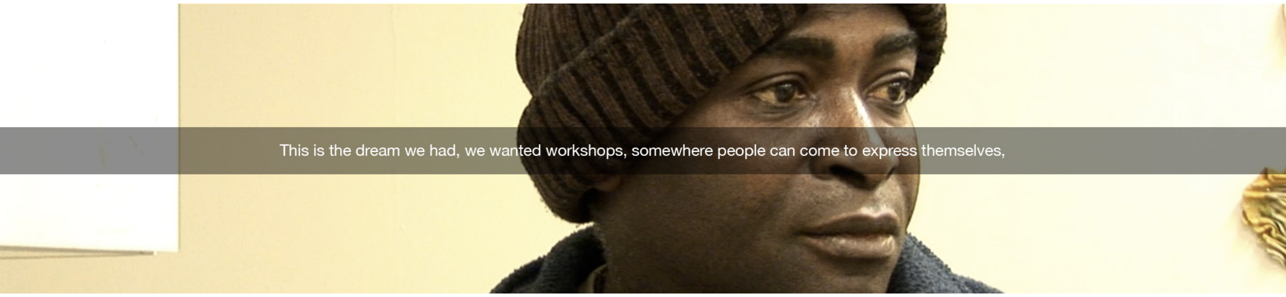
On a global scale, social upheaval (ranging from social violence to the unfulfilled promises of knowledge society) creates a widespread potential for understanding difference, since your own worldview and self-understanding is already traveled (but also for revanchism and reactionary tendencies). When arriving at a new place you do not necessarily need to have your presence framed in terms of distant or absent relationships (with Africa, with office work, with the history of art):

> Framing ideas of specific diasporas are dependent on master frames that endorse the belonging to a larger community. The idea of identity is an indispensable master frame of diasporas that may take the more specific form of national identity. (Sökefeld 2006:270p)


So that was also something that touched me in the interview. It also depends on energy, to be able to live in such a place without any electricity.

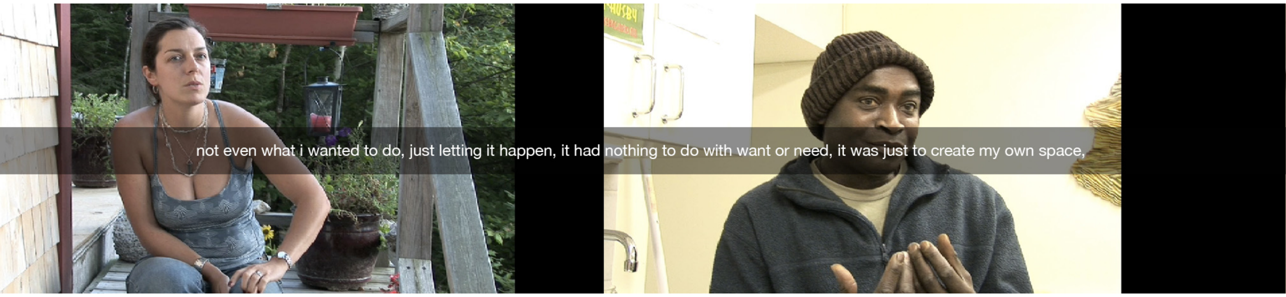
Background: cultural shifters

While our work has also involved traveling to other places (Husby and the Northeastern US) we ourselves are not in the position of undertaking the kinds of life-changing physical relocations, experienced by the participants. Because of this, we see our own “travel” not in terms of place, but in terms of professional discipline: leaving behind a conventional art identity. Artistic research has meant making the artist identity “travel”, by referring back to places that confirmed or denied it. Travel erodes sedimented identities, but if travelers refer back to institutions that remain unchanged, then diaspora-like identities will of course continue to emerge, also within an emergent research field. For example, throughout our research we appropriate concepts and approaches from other fields. Since our intention is to move beyond the obvious differences between places and people, we feel that a necessary step is to use significant concepts (art, economy, knowledge, technology, family, home, nation) *as cultural shifters* whose meaning has been developed elsewhere but which remain undetermined until they used within a specific context, such as a dialogue in-between the subjective positions of the interviewees in our material. As a grammatical form the shifter is described by Roman Jakobson as ”distinguished by its containing a reference to the specific speech-act in which the form appears” (Jakobson; 1980:26), and further ”If addressors and addressees of a dialogue change, then the material meanings of the forms ’I’ and ’you’ *shift*” (Ibid). A cultural shifter makes it possible to move beyond the naturalized meaning of a particular subject, “to ascribe to one subject various predicates and to relate each predicated to various subjects” (Ibid). Beyond functional needs and drives, global cultural shifters thrive on the imaginary. They loosen bonds to external references, and the “destructuring and destructured aspect of the imaginary is what ultimately undermines closure and makes total identity impossible, makes a culture capable of questioning itself” (Arnason after Michelsen 2007:63). Cultural shifts in perception are ubiquitous, as technology changes the image of connectedness. One example would be *Google Earth*’s zooming function, from the distant and general down to neighborhoods and individual houses. Most of the conventional, and institutionally determined paths set out for the artist lead to a specific parking lot. Why? Because of the sedimented use of cultural shifters, treating them as an ahistorical given. We are using critical analysis in the context of an image and interview based practice, and since we are trying to move beyond the obvious differences between people that would not otherwise have the chance to connect, those problems and references must appear *from elsewhere* and outgrow what we, from inside the institutional praxis, conveniently identified as our *contextually specific* problematic.


This is the dream we had, we wanted workshops, somewhere people can come to express themselves,

> the word “invention” can take on an entirely different sense – one that has nothing to do with the “out-moded concept of creativity,” or of the equally out-moded concept of the voluntaristic hero-artist who invents our political reality in the manner of a high Modernist “genius” creating an innovative painting or poem. It is this more recent view of “invention” – as it implies a nominalist aesthetics of historical effects rather than an anthropological aesthetics of self-expression. (Trembath 1991)

The significance of those discussions and remembered experiences that we have tried to *shift*, are reflected in the theoretical concepts we use, or rather, appropriate to connect the three main subject-positions in our research. As mentioned previously, these are: Husby, Northeastern off griders and our role as artistic researchers in Sweden, but traveling to the Northeastern US. We are trying, as Gayatri Spivak put it in her famous essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak*, to face the “sanctioned ignorances” that form the basis of our identities (Spivak 1988).


not even what i wanted to do, just letting it happen, it had nothing to do with want or need, it was just to create my own space,

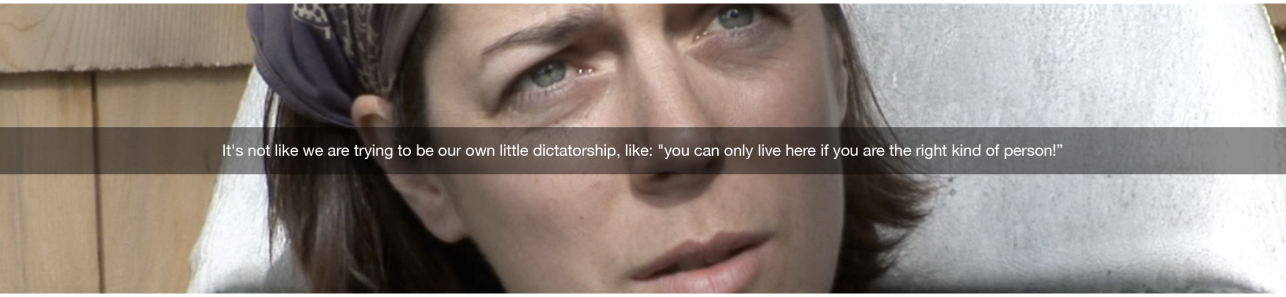
Background: situated means that knowing and being are not separable

Our artistic research “travels” between methodological, historical, institutional and, as a consequence, identity positions. Because travel is understood to have a transgressive character, our research could be seen as romantic. It will not be able to offer a conclusive and generalized “how-to”, of function as a set of instructions or easy explainable concepts. Instead the work becomes involved in a *conceptual activism* that, because of following the interviews in their multi-polar nature, undoes and dissolves external conceptual stability. The global economy’s depreciation of fixed individual and institutional identities needs to be supplemented by a discussion on the right to self-definition. Otherwise, how are we to understand the diversity of encounters and identities that are constructed on the spot and as they and we move along? Research that moves “among sites (and levels of society) lends a character of activism to such an investigation”

(Marcus 1998:98) and makes it comparable to involvement in a social movement, since it brings in another perspective than that of being complacent with things as they stand. “In certain sites, one seems to be working with, and in others one seems to be working against, changing sets of subjects” (Ibid), but it also differs because

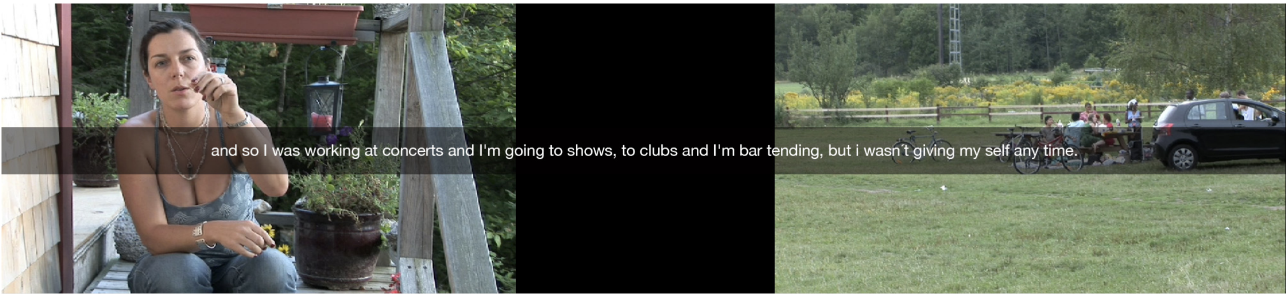
> it is activism quite specific and circumstantial to the conditions of doing multi-sited research itself. It is a playing out in practice of the feminist slogan of the political as personal, but in this case it is the political as synonymous with the professional persona and, within the latter, what used to be discussed in a clinical way as the methodological. (Marcus 1998:98)

As we understand it, the task for our artistic research is the reworking of *significant concepts* – in a situation where aesthetic, stylistic or thematic affiliations are placed on a flat horizon among geographical sites and experiential poles, which have been destabilized by globalization. But then again, these concepts and identities have to define their use in relation to communities that are not curbed by the institution or academia. These concepts are related to learning through practice: bodily activities, practices, rhythms and rites are practiced before they are thought and planned (Suchman 2007), they appear through social coparticipation (Lavé and Wenger 1991), they relate to the function of the social context (Vygotskij 1934/1999) and they are mediated through technology and artifacts. When we “travel” through our research and connect different concepts, this will immediately have a destabilizing effect, since practices, and hence concepts, are changeable. This means that they will appear as conventional or *doxic* at a given point in time. Our artistic research, which starts from the “situated image”, has to develop, change and invent images and concepts to make sense of/in a given situation: in other words, concepts develop out of specific situations, and in many cases could only be understood within those situations! We may be free to pursue


It's not like we are trying to be our own little dictatorship, like: "you can only live here if you are the right kind of person!"

research in a multi-sited way in several contexts, but we are less fortunate when it comes to presenting it: interdisciplinary work is only admitted to the extent that it fits pre-existing disciplines and reputations. Marcus, as an ethnographer, seems to have met the same frustrations, as the "shifting personal positions in relation to one's subjects and other active discourses" leads to the realization of the rigid nature of academia, which in its turn "provides a sense of being an activist for and against positioning" (Marcus 1998:99). Marcus, interestingly, is using this concept within a discussion on the Soviet-Russian constructivism. It means getting close to Faktura and, in particular, Vertov, as "an excellent inspiration for multi-sited ethnography" since

> Multi-sited ethnographies define their objects of study through several different modes or techniques. These techniques might be understood as practices of construction through (preplanned or opportunistic) movement and of tracing within different settings of a complex cultural phenomenon given an initial, baseline conceptual identity that turns out to be contingent and malleable as one traces it. (Marcus 1998:90)


and so I was working at concerts and I'm going to shows, to clubs and I'm bar tending, but i wasn't giving my self any time.

How can we characterize these discussions, which seem simultaneously urgent and immanent, and which continually shift from the zoomed-in closeness of a flowerbed or the choice of tea flavor to global events and beliefs? It is impossible to certify what part of a description emanates from being immersed with people in a place, or the tools of description and what, if anything, could be claimed as static and unchangeable concepts. Can identity "ever be explained by a reference discourse when several discourses are in play" (Marcus 1998:68), as some of these discourses only become intelligible against the background of the modern master-narrative of an unstoppable global homogenization? These connections occur through "transcultural as well as technological, political, and economic" (Marcus 1998:69) synergy and concurrence, or, conversely, postmodern predictions of “an increasing diversity of connections among phenomena once thought disparate and worlds apart” (Marcus 1998:68). The particle physicist and feminist philosopher Karen Barad takes one step further and delivers a radical critique of the difference between Western ontology and epistemology:

> Practices of knowing and being are not isolatable, but rather they are mutually implicated. We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because “we” are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming. (Barad 2005:829)

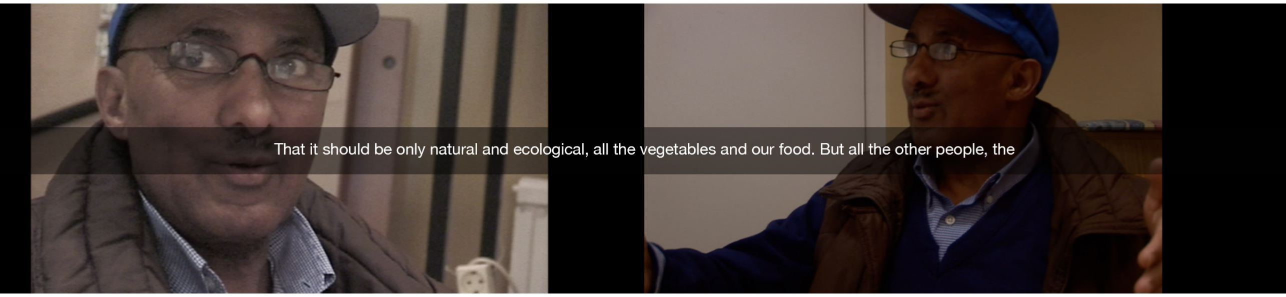
Barad’s reflection supports a doxic understanding of human knowledge production as involved in social production and transgresses a traditionally humanistic and social understanding of the world and goes on to displace dichotomies such as body/mind, human/nonhuman, subject/object and discourse/matter. Barad shows how our understanding of the world is frozen into dichotomies, a hall of mirrors where we see ourselves or opt for transcendence, and “the very existence of finitude that gets defined as matter” (Barad 2005:827).

She´s fighting to not be at ones disposal, something which you can see in the film, it is precisely this *l´aventur ambigue.*

Background: interrelated travel, self-definition and community equal – context is not an answer

In the first of the interviews with Dave and Sue Oakes, Sue reflects on their first encounter with the reality of life in Africa, while stationed there with the US Peace Corps. This to us exemplifies an activism which can only result from the process of critical reflection brought on by travel. In this case, travel to another place destabilizes the universality of the “American lifestyle”, making the traveler realize its culturally relative nature. They did not deliberately set out to come to this realization, nor could they control it:

> our time in Africa was a very life changing thing for us, you see so many people living with so little, and you see the kind of poverty that you never see here, and those things, and that was a big life changer for us, and coming home was a much bigger adjustment for us than going there, and what we came back really feeling like is that we really wanted to do something that reaches out to the developing world, and at the same time reaches out to our own country, and there is so much we can learn from them and then hopefully we can share back, and I think all of that were the beginnings of wanting to start our non-profit, the center for ecological living and learning, and to begin to do some educational things, both on poverty, and you know the environmental issues that relate to poverty, but then also to energy, cause they are all connected, and I think that was part of the evolution. (Dave and Sue Oakes 20061022)

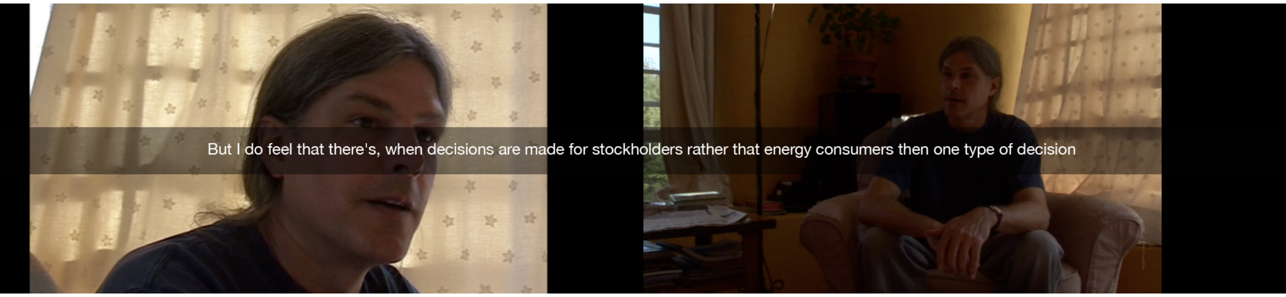

That it should be only natural and ecological, all the vegetables and our food. But all the other people, the

A reciprocal situation, with a similar impact, takes an inverse route through Husby in the interview with Amona Abobaker, who is paired with Dave and Sue Oaks. When asked to elaborate on her earlier discussion on resources, she said:

> But that is the reality, I mean I might say that I want to go and tent for a week and camp out there, but a poor person could never do that, to tent for a week and "be in nature", we have no time and no economy to do it, because all the time we have is used to making a living, however they are doing something which is much more than going camping, the work, socialize after work, but what do we do after work? "We have no time", we look in our calendars, we are stressed out, even though we have all these luxuries, and maybe that is because we priorities a good livelihood before that human existence.

And further:

> For example, if I talk about Africa again, and which they have probably already seen, they have no air conditioning, so they wet the ground so that it feels cooler at night, there are lots of alternatives, if we want to and if we have patience, you can live in a different way to what we do here. And then again if think if you asked people in Africa they would probably want to live like we do here, because you always want the things you don't have, and let's say that in future I got the opportunity to live in that kind of housing, people would think, "She came from this country to that country and she chooses to live so simply!" So by choosing to abstain from certain things, we have to ask, who is going to benefit, is it nature? Then you might choose the way of life that Sue and Dave have chosen, or the way of life in Africa, or the most ultimate way of life. But once again it is a question of money, when you have money you can afford to do this and that, we know that Dave and Sue and I can choose to drop certain things, but in Africa you can't choose to drop anything, that life, and when I think about it I wonder if one should think about it politically? In what way is it considerate and humane for our children and children's children to live a good life? And where do I stand in all of this in my own life? It has a lot to do with this, where am I heading? I don't know. (Amona Abobaker 070525)


But I do feel that there's, when decisions are made for stockholders rather that energy consumers then one type of decision

Dave's answer is perhaps influenced by the short circuit that results from moving from micro-possibilities to macro politics, constantly asking about how to claim responsibility:

> I don't mean to be callous to poverty, that's a real thing, especially people in the west have been sensitive to, caring about, and assisting with, but I wonder if there's something bigger than the economics, we always get lost in

> the economics, using the economic piece as, as a rational, an excuse, a reason why we can’t do something, this maybe working, there’s something more, that can give back thought, give back, that’s... /---/
> I’m just going to say, so when I approach somebody and they said ”this can’t be done” I would just look at them and smile and say; ”I know this can’t be done, but my question is, how, how would we do it?” ”How can it be, how can we work together to make it happen?” and I guess that, that’s all I am wrestling with, in the face of all these conversations, how do we move away from those conversations to the point where we say ”what can we do?” How do you cultivate that, that culture of the possible, of getting beyond the problem, from problem based thinking to a solution based thinking? And I agree with Amona, there are some incredible challenges and incredible obstacles in the path, and one of those primary ones is economics, people who are poor, the lack of opportunity, to find viable jobs, the lack of opportunity to find a house, food, all of those things have to be addressed, obviously those are the precursor to other things. But I just think it’s bigger than that, somehow it’s an idea, ideas, if we put into plan we can solve all the rest. (Dave Oats 200709129)

Why build with straw-bales?

Varför byggde du med halmbalar?

Amona’s answer is that this situation illuminates how capitalist society endorses us to orientate ourselves toward individual solutions:

> But in one way we are coming together, at least by having the same clothes, but at the same time they are putting the price up, its all so complicated. There is so much one wants to do inside, but there is so little one can do, it feels so hopeless. Dave says everything is possible, everything is possible, almost everything is possible. I feel so divided about all of this, is it possible or is it not possible? And this is where politics come into it again. /---/
> to follow what’s on the plate, what we wear, to be able to do that you need to be politically conscious and look at the world, like Dave and Sue who got

> an aha-experience when they were in Africa. There are a lot of immigrants in Husby who have spent time in their countries, and they help their relatives who are still in their home countries, you help your closest first by sending money as soon as you get some, they know what kind of misery there is there. But once again, you can't influence it because there's so much else going on, and you have your own life... I don't know. It's so double. I think if you feel good, then it's easier when you are wealthy to be able to think about what is on your plate, what kind of clothes you wear and so on, but if you have other problems then things can be difficult. (Amona Abobaker 20071215)

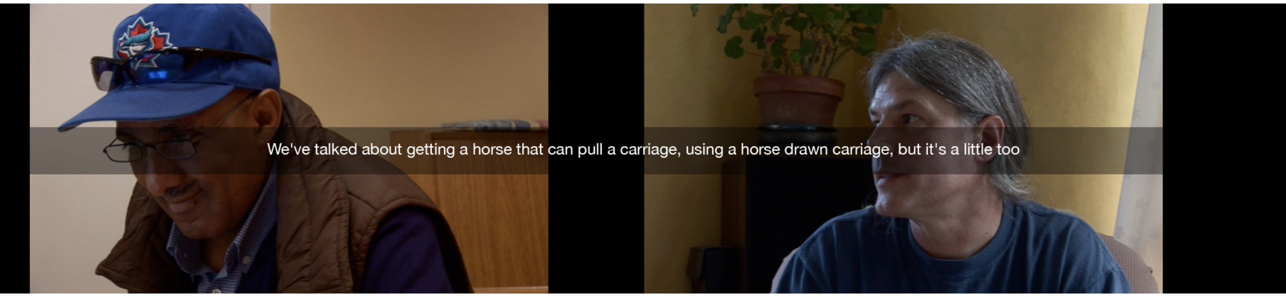
Can we find a model that accepts ways of thinking: including, as Amona say "what do I choose to see" and also acknowledges the material reality? How do we mediate these understandings without setting them on a collision course, or leading to cynicism and defeatism? This exchange between Hope, Maine (in the US) and Husby engages a *third* place, in this case Africa. The discussion immediately becomes a multipolar, multi-sited discourse because each interviewee is speaking from his/her respective home context. The actualities of hierarchies and class are given more prominence in Amona's discussion, possibly because of her upbringing in a country where collectivity is given greater importance. However, they are not missing in Dave and Sue's discussion, but instead function as an awareness which motivates their steps towards personal and eventually societal change:

Well you know it feels extravagant, it feels privileged, you know I had the means to do this, and we still think,

> There's no point in alienating those that are producing the good that we all use, we need to jointly solve the problem, and their resources, their, everybody's got to put their heads together, and think that's what is so frustrating I think for all of us, watching the world, being so polarized in the linear way of thinking that we were talking about earlier, why can't we be like college students and sit in an interdisciplinary classroom and fix it?

The scale, the unit of a home... and kids... but for factories, is it viable?

Absolutely, and you know I think that one of the things that when we look at energy, when we look at the way in which we use energy, we tend to be, as Sue was mentioning earlier about this linear thinking, we are on that track of saying fossil fuels, we have been so dependent upon fossil fuels, this one source of energy, and then when we look at it as the end of oil, the cost of oil, the tipping point in which we will convert over to renewables, then that linear thinking brings us down very often, when listening to the discussion, then what's the alternative? As if the is one alternative. So we start talking about, well wind is not viable to produce out power, well maybe not, solar is not viable to produce our power, geothermal is not viable, hydrogen is not viable, hydro is not viable, ethanol is not viable, but what if there was a combination of all of the above, what if there were energy strategy and policy that was established to be able to tap into... to promote the research to promote… a wide range of alternative use, and craft that as a strategy as opposed to this linear one way approach? (Dave and Sue Oakes 20061022)



We've talked about getting a horse that can pull a carriage, using a horse drawn carriage, but it's a little too

Background: nowhere to move forward if not cycle back to the same space

If we conjoin the spatial (as a discussion on place) and the conceptual (as a discussion on institutionalized understandings) and point to the relationship between them, we are not proposing that either of them has a determining influence on the individual. At certain points, each is directly involved or mixed up with the other, if not in the least because of the nature of language and meaning, as discussed in semiotics: because of the indeterminacy inherent to the relationship between signifier and signified, and also the constructed character of all possible knowledge. Creating a community space has a pivotal importance in overcoming discrepancies between its members. The plans for a chemical mill or a new turnpike building adjacent to a neighborhood or the pulling down of houses in a neighborhood can bring people together in their opposition, even causing protests. But a community can conversely be formed as a physically dispersed but conceptually tight entity over the Internet. These groups could be different in composition – for example, that people live off grid for all kinds of reasons and people in differing types of diaspora, political and social subgroups and subcommunities. It is important for the British urban sociologist Les Back to notice, that “the city can be prized for the isolation and the silent reflection it can afford” and, citing Fran Tonkiss;

> and not always a matter of ‘shared community’ but the reverse. It is for this reason that people are impelled to find a haven free of scrutiny. It is more often than not that people move their minds first, seeking space to breathe and freedoms to think. (Back 2007:152)

and I think that there are people who go off the grid because they want nothing to do with the world.
tempo

To repeat: as space is “produced”, as Lefebvre would put it, it becomes a materialization of interests. It also enters into a time scale of long perspectives, in which we are trying to fulfill our wishes and live our lives. In applying social practices to built space a second, social production of space becomes apparent: making place by appropriating space (Lefebvre 1991:164pp), or, in de Certeau’s sense, opening up the dominated place and its fixations of the proper, to release the trajectories and vectors of possibilities of other narratives (Certeau 1984:117-118).

Significant concepts (which is another way of describing the dominant culture) exert a commanding presence over individuals. They supersede his/her plans and wishes, particularly their imaginary dimension. The presence of rhythmical but still non-linear and unforeseeable life cycles, as when the interviewees talk about the way their children see the world, create another relation to reality that institutions, by way of their explanatory power (*because* of the *knowledge economy*, *art* needs to change), they reel in, cover up, rename and redirect. Lefebvre is there to reminds us that

> Social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space*. Their underpinning is spatial*. In each particular case, the connection between this underpinning and the relations it supports calls for analysis. (Lefebvre 1991:404)

If the basis of social relations is identified in corporeal and spatial terms, because "[t]he passive body (the senses) and the active body (labor) converge in space" the contradictions between what is perceived, conceived and in the end practiced must be conceptualized differently: "The analysis of rhythms must serve the necessary and inevitable restoration of the body" (Lefebvre 1991:405). Lefebvre envisions a "rhythm analysis" and late in life develops a "rhythmology" that eventually displaces psychoanalysis because of its being "closer to a pedagogy of appropriation (the appropriation of body, as of spatial practice)" (Lefebvre 1991:205). Rhythm analysis

but today there are mostly immigrants who live here, and they have all gone away and now there are many different teachers,

> would address itself to the concrete reality of rhythms, and perhaps even to their use (or appropriation). Such an approach would seek to discover those rhythms whose existence is signaled only through mediations, through indirect effects or manifestations. (Lefebvre 1991:205)

There are descriptive languages in which there is nothing but conceptual normality, or a contest between ideal normalities referring to other epistemic normalities etc. However, as our artistic research develops out of the specificity of images and conversations, we will not reduce the “embodied social” to “significant concepts” and thus let our project define itself in the open space “between absence and loss” (LaCapra 1999:714). In this way our artistic research may become conceptually activist – harboring a research process that starts from a default displacement of what can be discussed and appreciated as art, and, because of its transdisciplinary character, disturbing other forms of conceptual, disembodied or epistemic belonging.

Yes, we and the interviewees are all contextualized differently – culturally, socio-historically, economically. The issues that surface are unique to each situation in which they occur. Still this most obvious differences between us, and the two groups of interviewees perhaps only suggests that in different ways, within different situations, we have no option but to make our space in what is already formed or formulated. These differences (of social/economic power and status), understood in relation to the idea of an individual fully explicable by history, could be seen as no more than a common denominator narrative. Surely there is an order by which we can communicate, but it is not to be found on the one hand in epistemological objectivity, or, on the other hand, enclosed within ontological subjectivity: it is social and therefore contested. We have nothing more and nothing less than “the common capacity for communication and of shared membership in a global system” (Marcus and Fischer 1999:139) and, as a consequence, we recognize the equivalence between very different situations, because we want to move in the direction of the creation of a common ground out of those interrelations we found in the layers of interviews and contextual meaning. History as an institutionalized time-space stretch is of course important, but the stretching, or the embedding of a dominating system, is no more than a concept and as such it does not tie our hands or impedes the construction of interchangeable situations and relations *in the present*. In other words, structure does not entirely trump agency.

And even if one doesn't want to move back completely, one can still travel back and forth, to live a little in Sweden and over there as well.

These questions of structure/agency and the possibilities for communication between people in very different situations raise the issue of a corporeal equality and principled equivalence. It may be that “one can rely on a civic principle of equivalence to denounce the personal links of the domestic worlds”:

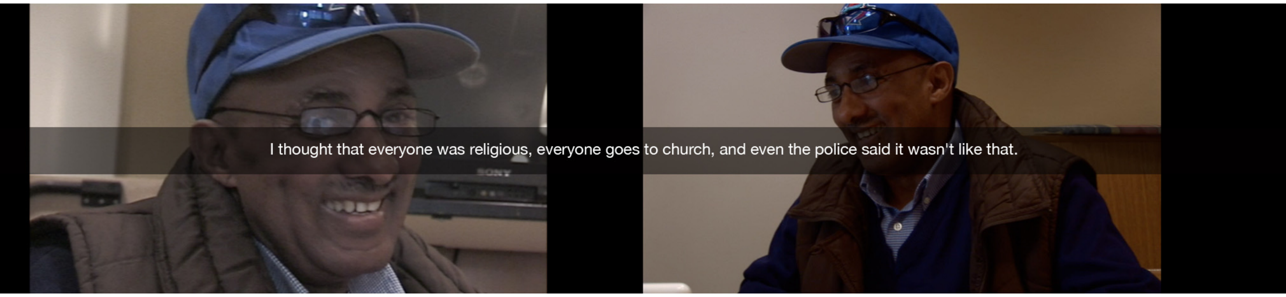
> But one can also, inversely, criticize from the point of view of the domestic world the civic way of linking people and, say, denounce the totalitarian effect of the juridical relationships, which wreck genuine, humane and warm relationships among individuals. (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999:374)

We do not reach closure through trying to dissolve the conflict between the rationality of equivalence and the repetitious order of familiarity. This becomes evident when Daniel talks about his isolation, or when Francina talks about the opulence she finds in the images from Ed and Karen’s house. Any place may become the place of familiarity, which is completely different from saying that the differences between these situations could be brought and reconstituted at a “higher” conceptual level, as in the universalism of the Enlightenment or even the sublime. We do not intend to bargain a compromise between the differing orders of justification for one’s way of life, but the situation does point to another important aspect of the project. As individuals Mike and I might live in our own houses with roses in the garden, but we find the critique of a planned suburb as Husby unjustified if it does not take on the perspective of the inhabitants, who appreciate the place where they live.

I feel that I have made certain choices, but they are small in the big scheme of things in the world.

Background: non-emancipatory and other ways of stabilizing an identity for…

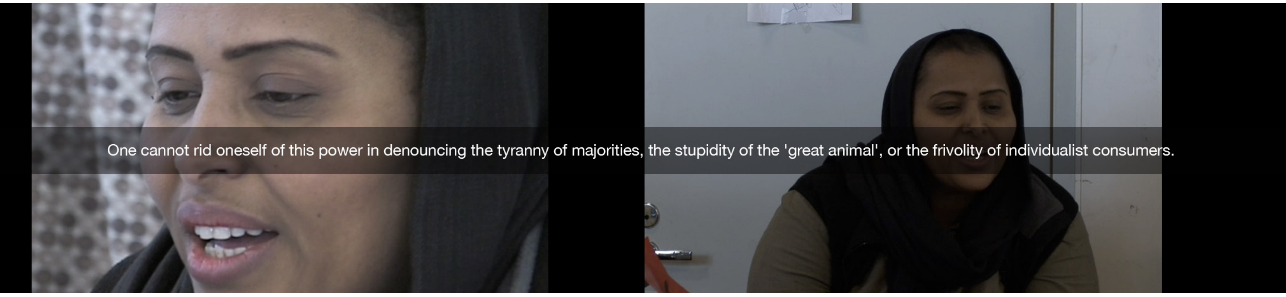
Art and high level international finance have been associated long before the rise of the network society, but the possibilities created by art seem too significant and full of promises to us to be reduced to simply ornamentation for neoliberal wealth, as summarized by James Carville’s, Bill Clintons 1992 campaign strategist, widely spread formulation: *the economy, stupid*. Neil Smith notes the role of art in the gentrification of New York’s Lower East Side as it is “equally bound up with globalization of the city economy” in particular by the expansion of Chinatown “fueled by massive financial flows and immigration from Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. The art market that flourished in the 1980s was not just the progenitor of internationally celebrated styles and artists, but the object of several international exhibitions” (Smith 2002:286). The imaginary of the international art system seems indistinguishable from economic growth, and as the vanguard of a globalized economy it also aspires to political influence. Chin-Tao Wu, a Taiwanese art historian, studies big business interventions in the public art context and corporate sponsorship of the arts. She suggests, in an unusually critical article on Tate Britain in the *New Statesman*, that the benchmark for art institutional success is to become a “strategically placed watering hole” that caters to “important business clients and influential fellow travelers from government circles” (Wu 2004). She does not discuss the art presented at the Tate but focuses on the institution itself. Teeming with the glory of centrifugal globalization, and the competition by cities and institutions to become the *centers* for art, the centripetal force of globalization serves as an immanent context for both our artistic research, and also for many peoples experience of art. The global circuit of short-term, no-strings-attached artist residencies could be seen as the “frosting on the cake” of the just-in-time workplace. Wu coolly describes the biennials of art as an economic and political tool in the hands of dominating interests to settle the identity-political agenda on the global stage. Biennials seem to fulfill “the function of a United Nations of Art” as they are discussed as “international cooperation and the promotion of multi-culturalism”:


I thought that everyone was religious, everyone goes to church, and even the police said it wasn't like that.

> These much-publicized periodic jamborees of globalized art appear to be acquiring the democratizing potential of erasing not only the borders between countries but also the power relationships between them. In actual practice, however, this

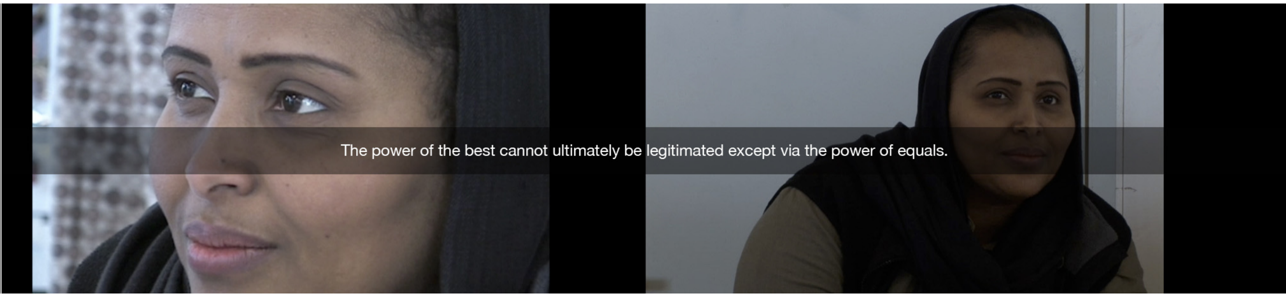
> potential is far from being realized. In the ‘good old days’ of colonialism, occupation meant conquering other territories and making one’s presence felt there. In postcolonial times, however, when military occupation is no longer acceptable or legitimate, it is the absence of force rather than its presence that marks out hegemonic domination, in particular in the sphere of art and culture. What also characterizes mainstream ideology and hegemony is the preoccupation amongst the culturally dominated with assuring and asserting their presence at biennials in an effort to have their identity recognized. (Wu 2007:384p)

Artistic researchers such as we have to be vigilant whenever what is deemed to art and art as a significant concept become naturalized at the same thing, obscuring the process, agents and interests involved. Because of its weak institutional identity, our artistic research process invites us into a backwards and slowly moving progression through the universe of knowledge; conceptualized as “a catalyst in processes for social change” and as “as an agent of change and source of understanding about real life, the world and society, and on the research and development of artistic procedures” (Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts, University of Gothenburg). On an individual level, artistic research may be individually embraced as a process of gaining personal recognition as well as a respite from economic pressures. On an institutional level it may be accepted as a “servant” to established academic fields, a prop to help stabilize their signification as *actual* in relation to the knowledge society. Frailty, translucent borders and an interdisciplinary weakness is a resource to any artistic research process and, as we see it, it allows the artistic researcher to follow the voluptuous richness, historical contingency and limitless production of situated knowledge, still safe from disciplining power because of its emergent nature. The art discipline, bolstered by structures and motivations such as the art market, the promise of stardom and institutional sanctioning, could be seen as an order of systemic feedback in a historic situation when we no longer can perceive it as a *need* on the surviving modernist grounds specified by its contingent expressions


One cannot rid oneself of this power in denouncing the tyranny of majorities, the stupidity of the 'great animal', or the frivolity of individualist consumers.

of a sublime otherness, etc. The idea of societal relevance is not either immediately attractive to art. This is largely the case because there are many social practices that does not receive institutional sanctioning, Societal relevance must also be approved by institutions that reproduce themselves by isomorphic and teleological means of justification. So, yes, institutions and their workings, as examined by institutional theory, are important in making available and preparing the ground for our discussion on the concept of art, and inform the ways we discuss it: “works of art are art as a result of the position they occupy within an institutional framework or context” (Dickie 1974; 2005:47).

But given that humans and not evil spirits or demons form institutions another interpretation of the institutional concept of art is possible, which draws from the difference between art as a significant concept and art as it is currently institutionalized. So, how do institutions work, and what effects do they exert? Institutions can be seen as traditions that justify themselves by a specific “stretching”: they develop their raison d’être is through producing, or condoning, isomorphic results. The German sociologist Max Weber described bureaucratic institutions as an “iron cage”, or “the steel encasement”, that organizes the life of the individual, by means of regulation, technological development, and mass production. However, they do so first and foremost through the implementation of structural and procedural isomorphism. The initial push for efficiency and control of the “the spirit of capitalism” (Weber 1904) has conquered the world, but the homogenization process has not come to an end. Today the

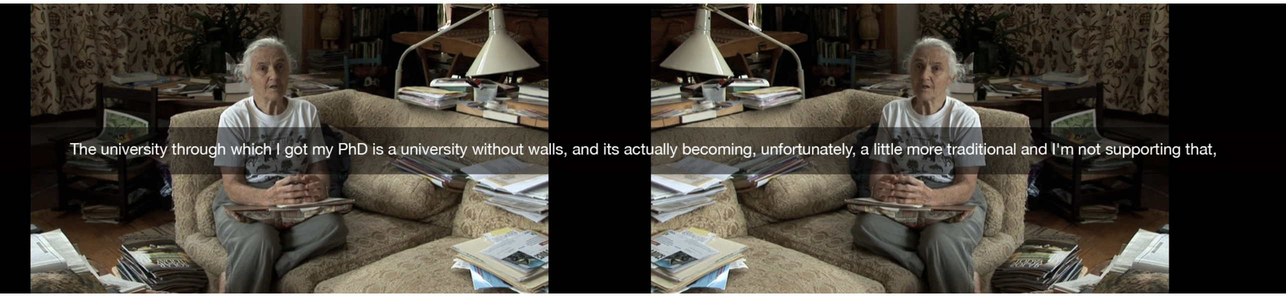

The power of the best cannot ultimately be legitimated except via the power of equals.

> highly structured organizational fields provide a context in which individual efforts to deal rationally with uncertainty and constraints often lead, in the aggregate, to homogeneity in structure, culture and output. (DiMaggio and Powell 2001:265)

Once a “world” (as in the art world or a self regulating “field” in Bourdieu’s sense) is formed and recognized, “an inexorable push for homogenization” (DiMaggio and Powell 2001:266) becomes activated; “key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (Ibid). Once the institution has reached a settled position, changes in perception of the institutionalized subject will only strengthen the institution’s self-justification, without leading to any institutional change. Descriptions like DiMaggio’s and Powell’s trigger a negative reaction among those who have or think they have something to gain for example from the standard celebration of the artist-individual. This raises the risk of clouding important points: institutions are, as we see them, different in scale and specific circumstances, but share a similar form and ways of justification, *which makes their working between conceptual and experiential fields mutually transferable and translatable*. For example, artistic research could only arrive to an end result abstracted from its situated character if it derives from preconceived ideas of what it is. For instance, discussions on anthropology and ethnography within the art field must necessarily pay tribute to Hal Foster and Miwon Kwon, not so much to comment on their writings, but to stabilize a field in institutional terms. *However, we have noted from the feedback we have received that in undertaking lateral travel between individuals, backgrounds, questions and situations, we must negotiate conflicting paradigms: a classicist descriptive art-language that resonates with impartiality and rationality, a firm belief in social equality and, on the level of the material used – visual and conceptual – equivalence, and a romantic, desiring an interpersonal and individualizing spirit.*

organizing the annual national solar tour for this part of Maine for many years and having many people come into my home that day,
Klart 2006

In claiming that concepts and images are transferable, mutually translatable and that they appear on the flat surface of equivalence, it becomes necessary to look at this lateral or de-differentiating move in terms of reach, circumference or strata, in other words: the intersection of the universally translatable and its inevitably situated character. Is it possible to tell how far a concept can travel, *travel* for example, between contexts, shedding and shifting form before we reach the conclusion that it is the movement in itself that provides continuity, and thereby obscuring and abstracting the many different forms of travel, some of which might contradict each other? As if the knitting together of artistic research with another discipline becomes the point of focus, rather than the specific possibilities created by causing a concept to "travel" within particular situations. This puts us at risk of romantic idealism, and a problematic universalism. But to make the distinction between the situated travel of a concept and the romantic transgression is not easy, and this is perhaps another way of saying that the meaning of art is thoroughly social, and a final distinction between discursive and formalist practices would be void without drawing attention to conventions and traditions. However, it is yet another area in which a transdisciplinary move can become possible. If the identity of art, artistic research, immigrants, off griders, etc is formed without a definable essence, the retrospective interpellation, as Althusser originally defined it, loses its dominating status and become, in an affirmative and emancipatorial way, "an act of discourse with the power to create that to which it refers" (Butler 1993:122).


The university through which I got my PhD is a university without walls, and its actually becoming, unfortunately, a little more traditional and I'm not supporting that,

There is a conceptual activism that results from our being "homeless" in relation to academic disciplines, as artistic researchers. Because we are searching for another way of working through issues, our relationship to questions of institution, interest, knowing, and desire must be rephrased, reformulated, and found again. Another aspect of our work has been our support for the Husby residents: we have helped out with school and university home work, we have been summoned by immigrants to witness discussions between them and the authorities, we have helped them to fill out and check bureaucratic forms, we have tried to rally people in academy to support the people in Husby, and we have been involved of writing articles in the newspaper and other public contexts. Our work with images is helpful, as it prepares us for dealing with formal considerations in working with language. A research method is also a functioning form. Simultaneity in artworks – i.e. the intersection between the synchronous and diachronous – also needs reworking, particularly relation between institutions and individual works. Judith Butler proposes an elegant solution by bringing up J. L. Austin's speech act theory in order to develop her theory of performativity. We believe "performativity" could also be applied to art conventions. Butler deals with the construction of gender identity and suggests that identity is not "'expressed' by actions, gestures, or speech". It is the other way around; the performance of identity "retroactively produces the illusion" that there is a core or an essential identity. She uses the example of the utterance of "I do" in the wedding ceremony as a speech-act with legal effects (constructing the couple as married) (Butler 1997:144). Butler's examples and field of research is different from ours, but they can easily be extrapolated and applied to other contexts which involve unstable relations of normality and individual belonging. Butler maintains that ”gender is created as a ritualized repetition of conventions” (Ibid), which in turn is based on a compulsory ”normality”, similar to institutional isomorphism: *exchange the concept of ”gender” for ”art” and the likeness is more than apparent!* While each does not have the same impact on individual experience, the identity of the off grider, the immigrant and the artist are created by comparable mechanisms, driven by a similar thrust towards normalization. Identity, as it is played out on the public scene, reproduces hierarchies and power structures, but this does not add up to a *Todtenschlag* for change. Identity – on an individual, family, community, institutional and societal level – involves a process of interpretation, perhaps as actors interprets scripts. For example, when Abdullahi is asked if he wanted to be in Daniel's position, he interestingly enough, conflates agency, freedom and acting a role:

> What you can do, what you think you want to do, to be free, freedom is actually a big thing, like an actor taking his place, in fact it is a great challenge. (Abdullahi Mohammed 20070114)

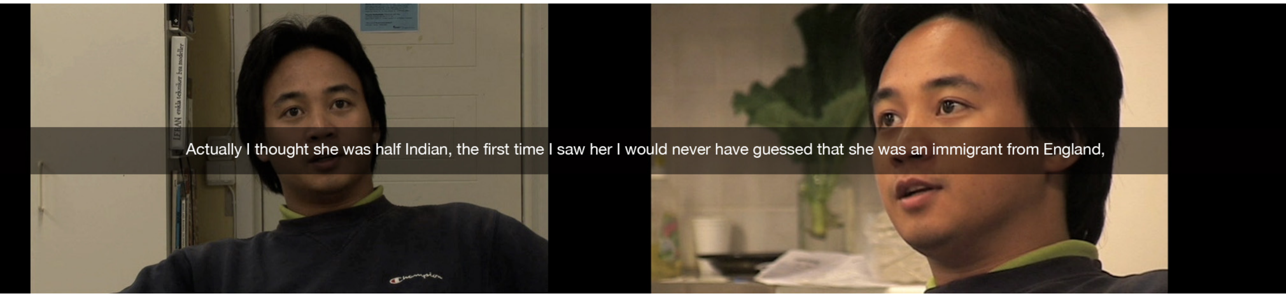
You know she was an immigrant, she came form England and moved to the USA.

Du vet att hon är invandrare, hon flyttade från England till USA.

Yet, when identity simply institutes identity, such description becomes, as Cornelius Castoriadis pointed to, “flat and inappropriate”:

> Each society is a construction, a constitution, a creation of a world, of its own world. Its own identity is nothing but this “system of interpretation,” this world it creates. And that is why (like every individual) it perceives as a mortal threat any attack upon this system of interpretation: it perceives such an attack as an attack upon its identity. (Castoriadis 1997:9)

Identities are both self-reflexive and externalized; to ”exist”, identity must reproduce itself, and must also be recognized by dominant social conventions. The science education scholar Angela Calabrese Barton has studied identity formation in how homeless children are dealt with by the margins of the natural. It is fascinating to follow how identities are formed by interaction with knowledge: she uses “critical and feminist perspectives” to show how “pedagogy involves the production of knowledge, culture, and identities” (Calabrese Barton 1998:379). Calabrese Barton’s interest in science shows how the natural sciences, which we conventionally think of as neutral and “objective”, must pass through disciplinary socialization, inevitable facing questions of representation – what type of science it is – and disciplinary identity – in other words, who we think is qualified to engage in scientific research within the compulsory normality of market or institution:



Actually I thought she was half Indian, the first time I saw her I would never have guessed that she was an immigrant from England,

> I have tried to argue that science education can no longer hide behind the modernist claim to objectivity and universal knowledge. Rather, teaching and learning science like teaching and learning anything, must be defined as a cultural practice that is accountable ethically and politically for the stories it produces and for the images of the past, present, and future it deems legitimate. It must be located within a discourse of human agency that is

> focused on self- and collective empowerment. This is very different from the modernist belief in objective truth, where only one voice, one set of experiences, is given legitimacy. (Calabrese Barton 1998:391)

The question of who is entitled to share knowledge and experience is a contested one, even beyond the point of recognizing every individual contribution to their own specific. For example, what we find in the interviews of course reflects our own prior knowledge and biases, including our knowledge of the interviewees; still there will be conflict in which distinctions between right and wrong are made within what Bourdieu and Rosengren would call a *doxic* reach. Self-definition involves both reflecting, acting on and the production of a situation. Self-definition is an emancipatory right that "cannot and should not be justified on the basis of some kind of 'science' or 'objective' analysis" (Fotopoulos 2000), which would conceal that the self is a creation and not a response to an existing context or situation: "the fundamental fact that human history is creation" (Castoriadis 1991:104). For example; a person in the interviews becomes multifocally refracted by the desire to his or her synchronous and non-discursive image, *and* the desire for the transgression and agency of his or her diachronous and discursive changes. Globalized late capitalism combines image and identity as privileged means of production; it produces a climate where knowledge and identity becomes mediated, transferable and transient. In de Certeau's sense, place seem to be superseded by space. Does this mean that in late capitalism the image is the intended place to contain space? Our paradoxical hope is that this situation could put focus on self-definition.

where I want to go if its not the time when they would normally do it, it changes their schedule or something.

Background: looped institutions and decampments

In his coffee-table-smooth documentary film *Conceptual Paradise* (2006), the artist and art historian Stefan Römer interviews a roster of surviving conceptualists from the 1960s. One is grateful to eavesdrop on Ed Ruscha's attentiveness to infinitely small absurdities, or Vito Acconci's institutional quarrel. However, the film becomes, perhaps inevitably, a name-dropping frenzy; not because it involves such now-canonical figures, but also because it misses a central discussion on the "end of art" that informed conceptualism during the era. This collecting and discussion of a wide range of practices under the "conceptual art"-label, stabilizes of the chaotic nature of art production of that time. It reproducing the conventions and limits of "art" as cultural consumption and canon-making. Fredric Jameson – fully aware of the Enlightenment's heritage of claiming art as a scene for political discourse outside the restrictions of conventional politics – traces the lineage of art's teleology back to Hegel. He finds that the "end of art" is connected to the hopes invested in art as absolute and sublime truth, rather than only as beauty. Art "still has a limit in itself", which is a social construction. This limitation "determines, after all, the position which we are accustomed to assign to art in our contemporary life" (Jameson 1998:82). These limitations must be challenged, if not "ended", by any emancipatory artistic research project. To Jameson, conceptual art is the continuation of a modern aesthetic unrest, which enters a new form with its transgressive use of theory which "emerged from the aesthetic itself, from the culture of the modern", "to extend across a broad range of disciplines, from philosophy to anthropology, from linguistics to sociology, effacing their boundaries in an immense dedifferentiation" (Jameson 1998:85):

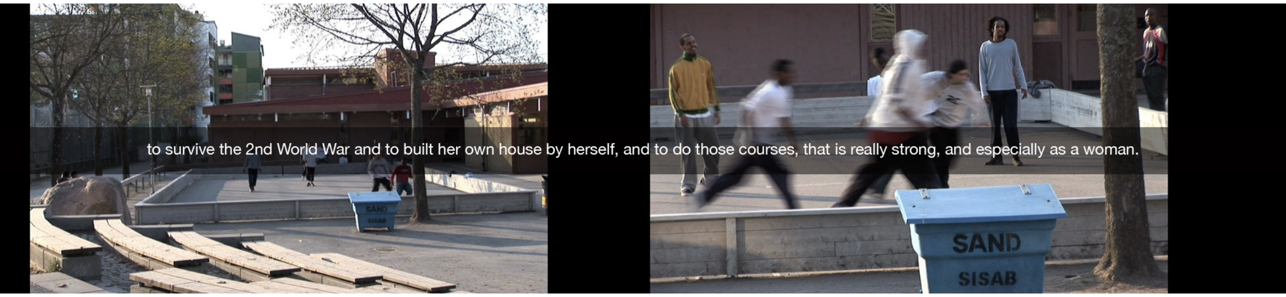
but it was through working with some of the native people, that I, I suddenly found that I was proud to be woman.

> This grand moment of Theory (which some claim now also to have ended) in fact confirmed Hegel's premonitions by taking as its central theme the dynamics of representation itself: one cannot imagine a classical Hegelian supersession of art by philosophy otherwise than by just such a return of consciousness (and self-consciousness) back on the figuration and the figural dynamics that constitute the aesthetic, in order to dissolve those into the broad daylight and transparency of praxis itself. (Jameson 1998:85)

To repeat: At least since Hegel, Art institutions have harbored the tradition of referring to the (spirited) individual, who embodies (unfulfilled) freedom and hence society's desires. This, interestingly enough, in its turn is related to the isomorphic, which finally is proven by the metaphysical progression of the *absolute*, absolute presence, that:

> seeks at that higher level not merely to bring forth itself out of its own notion, but to have its very notion as its shape, so that the notion and the work of art produced may know each other reciprocally as one and the same. (Hegel 1807:711)

The institutionalization of what is seen to bear the significance of art is a complex process. To the individual artist, it seems *necessary* to follow a trajectory, if she/he is lucky, through the gates of institution. However, at that moment of passing through those gates, the status of the work changes to become *isomorphic to the institutional form*. The magical power of this metamorphosis, no doubt bears similarities to both Marx's discussions on the commodity, and more speculatively, bears the brand of the monotheist, Western master-narrative that one should think one thing and only that one thing, is certainly a good illustration of institutional theory. In this case, the reciprocally "explained" work of art will therefore be clearly stated and highly visible within the institution.


to survive the 2nd World War and to built her own house by herself, and to do those courses, that is really strong, and especially as a woman.
SAND
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Within the context of Malmö, we have seen examples of community-based, volunteer-run galleries becoming subsidized by the municipal government or finding support from institutions such as Malmö Art Academy. Narrowly focused on their ambition to professionalize and gain institutional recognition, they seem naively unaware of the "kiss of death" of institutionalization. From the moment of cooperation with a powerful institution they will inevitably become identified as a subsidiary. The art academy was not responsible for the end of the Rooseum, but it was significant that the liaison between a radical exhibiting but in economical terms weak institution and a growingly conservative school backed by a university ended in the demise of the more critical one. A common trait of the professionalization of galleries is the appearance of identity politics through a choice commodification that responds to the market or public funding agencies. The result is that they will lose touch with their peers, becoming vulnerable to external demands for obvious and visible signs of "popularity" and sudden changes of institutional and/or political leadership. The self-definition of a community through practice becomes secondary to institutionalized interests. The discourse rapidly changes from artistic content to generalized, "flat and inappropriate" soap opera descriptions of power struggle. This could be seen in the first reactions in Sweden to artists receiving PhDs. Artistic research had "eaten from the tree of knowledge" and was consequently "expelled from the garden of aesthetics". It is unavoidable to pursue recognition as an aspect of pursuing an artistic career, but even if it is done for tactical reasons, it still fails to be sufficient in the light of the significance of the concept of art.

Wälkommen Till
Husby Gård

But the reason why I want to live here in Sweden also in the future is because I am begin to feel happy here, with language and writing.

Background: a "given" little house on the prairie

In justifying their existence, institutions will stay politely conservative as long as they are not questioned. Institutions tend towards insularity, providing more or less temporary shelter in which practices may develop according to their own inner logic. This combination does not necessarily amount to a conflict of interests. Certain forms of appropriation and transgression can be allowed to exist under the label of art, and its claims to reflexivity. But how does this openness *in theory* tally with the practices of real life institutions, and does the *right* to self-definition impact institutions and practices? A significant and useful figure is that of the *troublemaker* because it is a shifter by nature. The *troublemaker* since it is drawing attention to the normalizing qualities of institutions, even those claiming to be progressive. But a significant or imaginary concept is also a source of individual joy, of the happiness that comes from at the same time defining, representing and constructing meaning. To generalize, institutions tend to defend the *post factum* or the relation between their categories and the particular objects of appreciation which fit within these categories, such as museum's collection. The significant concept of art is imaginary, because

> they do not correspond to, or are not exhausted by, references to "rational" or "real" elements and because it is through a *creation* that they are posited. And I call them social because they are and exist only if they are instituted and shared by an impersonal, anonymous collective. (Castoriadis 1997:8)

Referring to the concept of "doxic knowledge", that Rosengren derives from Protagoras' homo-mensura thesis that "man is for himself the measure of all things", the professor in Corporate Communication & Public Affairs Mark Lawrence McPhail forwards the idea of "rhetorical coherence" found in the Taoist and Zen traditions, both which play down the importance of the individual. He considers how this might "synthesize diverse conceptions of reality" (McPhail 1996:11), in particular with the intention to supplement, and thereby in a deconstructive move erode, referential and essentialist notions of reality. The "interpretation of opposites" is the "basis of social and material existence". However, if we look at the rhetoric of educational institutions, "the privileging of positions" in "argumentative and critical discourse" is superseded by the exploration of "underlying commonalities" and "shared system of beliefs" that "can move us beyond argumentative essentialism". In other words, this is the social convention of arguing on behalf of that which is said to be beyond social conventions, commonplace in the art discourse (McPhail 1996:80p). A discourse emphasizing "persuasion and argumentation" requires the supplemental knowledge and enabling the recognition of "the coherence of symbolic and material realities because it points to the extent to which they each are manifestations of a singular ground of being" (McPhail 1996:80). McPhail believes that this common ground

in Sweden I have focused on Scandinavian plants, particularly perennials and in the winter how they wither and sleep,

will “call into question the hierarchies inherent” in “business and educational institutions” which would

> mean the end of such institutions as we know them, for the praxis of coherence is ultimately the creation of social realities grounded in an equality of discourse that transcends the discourse of inequality. (McPhail 1996:142p)

However, in practice, this conviction does not smooth out the exclusions involved in finding a “singular” or “common” ground (where certain marginalized perspectives are ignored because they “do not fit”). The reason for us to try to unthink art’s institutional isomorphism is to find a transconceptual discourse to supplant its disciplinary essentialism. McPhail’s “coherence or field-related conceptualization” offers an interesting alternative. We would transpose McPhail’s “singular ground of being” onto the conviction that art *in principle* has no contextual limitation. However, this reference to “art” is still essentialist, breaking the bonds of horizontal coherence and underestimating the importance of the creation of social institutions and interpretations that is imbued in rhetorics, at least as long as the limitations to the concept of art is upheld by way of a “discourse of inequality”.

there is plenty of material in Sweden, but we Swedes are careful with our materials, so that they don’t disappear.

In *Answering Rosmary Mayer (How I Can Call It Art When There’s No One There to See It)* (1972), Adrian Piper makes some interesting statements about the nature of art practice, as she moves from her “art activity” towards its theoretical references. She starts off from the “art category” which she sees as open to “any means which I use to make my activity intelligible”, in referring to the art discourse and “the world at large”(Piper 1999:51). This is followed by a classical Kantian positioning: “My activity exists for its own sake rather than for some practical purpose” (Ibid). This is in turn immediately followed by the statement that “My activity changes the world” (Piper 1999:52). She defines this activity as “art”; a label by which

Piper intend her activity to be received and recognized by “a civilized person” (a paradoxical and politically loaded phrase from a young female Afro-American artist in the early 1970s) or “the standards and concepts of an informed and educated art perceiver”, even though the label “doesn’t communicate anything about the specific nature of the work” (Ibid). The art perceiver is in turn a member of the group that validates, or *justifies* art. The limitation of art is then twofold; first it is a general activity in the world that has no outer purpose, not even an “art” purpose; secondly, it differs from other activities because it is understood and perceived by way of its specific history of reception, which eventually gives rise to the possibility to talk about the world at large. But the question is whether this “secondary and limited” definition of producing and communicating through art has to undergo a process of validation “necessarily limited to those who conspire to pass it” (Piper 1999:52); or if art, as we believe, is inseparable and inalienable from a practice that “changes the world” *since it is what creates the world*. To delimit this “activity” to art, as well as the conceptualization of art in general, through the sedimented systems of the art world, would transform it into an effort to claim and stand one’s individual ground, but it amounts no less to a missed opportunity and, as we see it, a strategic mistake.

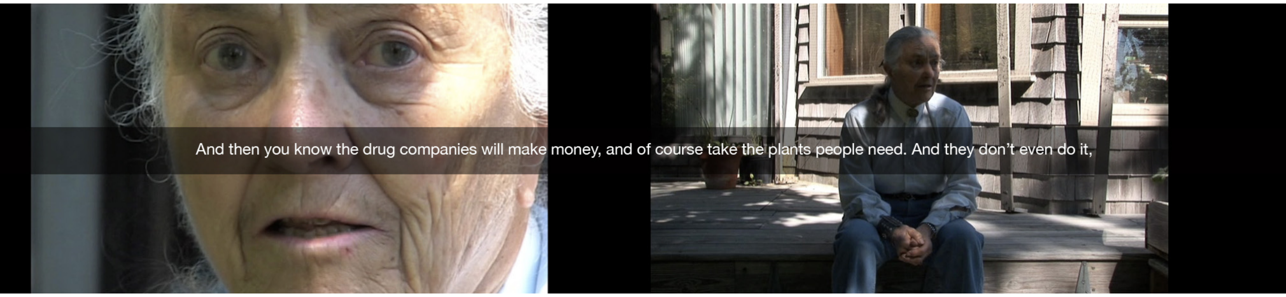
and we could live more from Solar cells. But solar cells cost money. I don’t exactly know how much it costs but I know its expensive.

The pleasure, the joy of that which appears as *created as givenness* (givenness defined by *WordNet* as “the quality of being granted as a supposition, of being acknowledged or assumed” [20080401]) which, and looking into the prehistory of off griders, could be linked to the moment when Thoreau leaves Cambridge to seek happiness in the given and to build the cabin by the pond, within the given limits of the techniques of his time and his limited economy. Givenness here is typified as nature, which has been created so long ago that it would be inconceivable to consider who might be responsible for and mistakes, blunders such as ticks and viruses. Our relation to what we see as “nature” becomes a frozen image, as perfect as a landscape painting. As de Certeau would say: a “proper place” is based on exclusion in such a way that its limitations – which are seen to equal *freedom* – and traces of construction are, quite literarily, naturalized:

> The law of the "proper" rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines. (De Certeau 1984:117)

Background: ecological democracy, crisis, sustainability and change

If we hark back to Sue and Dave Oaks, and how they connected oil dependency and housing alternatives, we can perhaps discover a pattern that identifies the sense of relief and freedom brought on by failure and crisis (to put it bluntly):



And then you know the drug companies will make money, and of course take the plants people need. And they don't even do it,

> we look at it as the end of oil, the cost of oil, the tipping point in which we will convert over to renewables, then that linear thinking brings us down very often, when listening to the discussion, then what's the alternative? As if there is one alternative. (Dave and Sue Oakes 20061022)

The architect and researcher Kiel Moe notes that, because of the oil crisis, "[t]he temperament of topics related to the sustainability of architecture shifted from the literal and actual to the rhetorical" (Moe 2007:24). We have noticed a similar shift in how the representation and reception of off grid living changed after 9/11: from being associated with fuzzy granola-heads to a viable alternative in the event of a major societal crisis. Elsewhere, we have discussed the mixed reception of off-grid living within the American context (Bode and Schmidt 2006. See appendix A). With both 9/11 and the end of oil, crisis is connected to globalization. The etymology of the Greek word *crisis* emphasizes the singularity of moments of uncertainty, unsteadiness and of change, as previously unrelated places and concepts are drawn closer to each other, as in “a turning point in a disease”, or to “separate, decide, judge” and to “sieve, discriminate, distinguish” (www.etymonline.com). Within the interviews, a rhizomatic web of themes were brought together, not only by our three questions, but also by a sense of crisis; Africa, Suburbs, Energy, Ecology, Housing, Politics, Economy, Isomorphism, Art, Artistic Research.

From a Western perspective, globalization has “brought home” a steady flow of immigrants from former colonies, and also from political and/or environmental conflicts, which in Sweden were largely met outside Western borders addressed through development assistance policies. Globalization in its current capitalist phase has not only fundamentally changed nature, but also politics. Specific to environmental politics, any attempt to solve the ecological crisis resulting from global warming must also take place on a global scale. It must not only serve the interests of the so-called rich countries – in fact, the question of whether cutting down on emissions is the responsibility of the global North or South has become a battleground. In 2007 the *EU Globalisation Institute* invited UK school students to take part in a competition to write an essay based on Nicolas Stern’s statement that global warming is the “greatest and widest-ranging market failure ever seen”. Globalization in terms of responses to global warming holds the potential of creating a transnational and transcultural mandate for action, but the actual terms of preventing ecological catastrophe remains deeply conflictual, possibly even leading to a loss of faith in international politics. The analysis of the situation contains both a potential reversal of this conceptualization of globalization in the local context and on the national level as a force from outside “trade openness and portfolio investment inflows negatively affect democracy” (Li and Reuveny 2003), to a liberal idea of globalization within the borders of nation-states, where the “spread of democratic ideas promotes democracy persistently over time” (Ibid). A sign of this other globalization is that the developing countries after the 1997 Kyoto Protocol have pledged to

Their whole lives show, how much they learned form that one trip, and not only another language,

> cooperate with developed countries in reducing greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere only so long as it does not entail great domestic political conflict and so long as the developed countries foot the bill. (Cooper 1998:78)

A global ecological crisis which affects everyone, everywhere, will stretch the weak links between historically contingent political structures and institutions that have been historically based on a coherent national identity. When facing such a global challenge, one must self-reflexively become aware of the need for global justice. The mismatch between institutional activities and actual needs could result in cynicism and frustration towards political structures, but this mismatch is actually symptomatic of crisis and as such is a crack through which we might create constructive renewal. This conflict between institutional isomorphism and the dissolving of institutional borders repeatedly plays out on every level of our research. For example, the democratic politics of globalization that will be necessary to deal with the ecological disaster will require a different structure of the power grid, and a surrender of power from the North and a growing agency of the South:

It was as though a video was being played in front of me, and I don't mean this was like a magic thing of something,
39

> As the prolonged and sometimes acrimonious history leading to international cooperation in containment of contagious diseases suggests, the absence of scientific consensus on how greenhouse gas emissions translate into global warming and how these temperature changes in turn affect the human condition will make it difficult to agree on how to share costly actions or, indeed, on what actions should be taken. Large differences in assessments of the costs of mitigating action will simply magnify the difficulties. But taxes, like death, are inevitable as well as universal, and they can more profitably be imposed on harmful activities than on socially valuable ones. That fundamental truth offers some hope for international action to slow global warming. (Cooper 1998:79)

To speculate, a global tax would help conceptualizing globalization in democratic terms and thus make the responsibility of the West easier to grasp. A world in which rights are evenly distributed would also affect the reception of immigrants in West, and will facilitate the integration *of the Swedish society* in groups of refugees that we have met in Husby, an issue which is not currently being addressed. But what is voiced in the interviews is the opposite scenario: the breakdown of society under the weight of an uncontrollable globalization:

> That's why I say that it in a sense begins at home, begins in one's own family, community. And you know, if only we could do this, we would do better, worldwide. And certainly with the rapid spread of money making corporations at the moment, it's a real challenge for many people. (Judith Schmidt 20070919)

so instead of thinking big, I think small, or rather far, in this case it is far, so I think small, because then I get more control.

And then Shana:

> I don't know that there is hope for us, and I don't think it's going to be a matter of, of... people, peoples likes and dislikes, you know, whether they think this seems attractive. I think it may be that all of a sudden there is no electricity, because a hurricane came, and maybe there's no food because the trucks didn't make it to the grocery store from thousands of miles away, and maybe there is only a tenth, on tenth of the population left by spring, you know, and then the few people that are left create a new culture.
>
> *So you talk about nature and also about the vulnerability of this society then?*
>
> The vulnerability?

Yes.

I think the people moving in to my area of Belfast, it's more and more of what I call hydroponic people, you know? Hydroponic vegetables they grow just in liquid, in water with nutrients, and these are hydroponic people, you can out them anywhere, but you have to pipe in all the nutrients, and they have no flavor, and they have no roots, they could be anywhere, just propped on a hill side. And the people that have been here, very much have roots, and they, know their way around in nature, still, some, they have lost a lot, but they still have a little bit of their culture that goes back and back to people who have farmed for years, thousands of years in Europe and came here, and people who were here rooted for thousands of years. Laurie who I'm working with she is part Abenaki, and they came up on the Appalachian Trail. I think the white people thought that they had wiped them all out, so they only just recently gained tribal status, because they thought that they had killed them all, hence why her relatives probably ended up in Maine, which is not where they started, but. So there are people still with roots, and still with a little bit of a sense, of how to fit in the nature around them, but then there's more and more and more people who have no, no contact directly or no knowledge of what is under their feet, or how to live, just not hydroponically, how to live as a full rooted organism, so... To me electricity or no electricity is kind of the frosting on the cake… It's about food or no food, peace or no peace, you know, are you tight with your neighbors? And are you helping each other and sharing? Or is everybody going to be at each others throats because you never even bothered to know each other? (Shana Hanson 20060926)

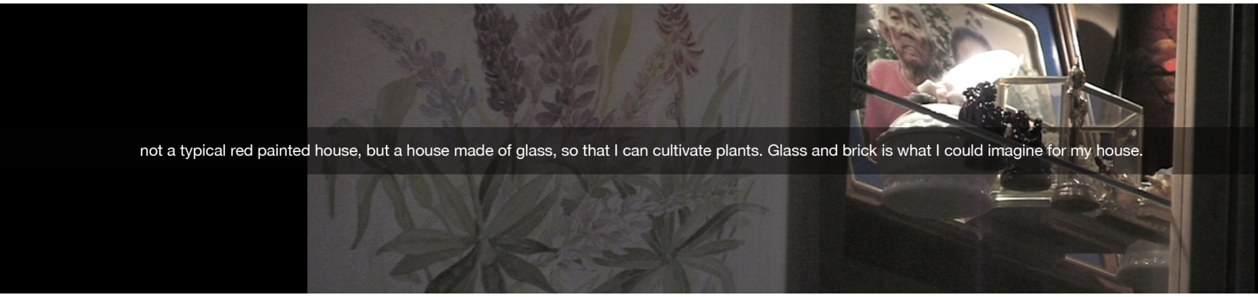
My future only goes with my own, and it's only me who can make my own future, not her. So it was a good thing that she ended our relationship and not me,

Background: housing, travel and social violence

The sense of crisis apparent in many of the interviews makes it possible to begin a discussion with any of these abovementioned themes or concepts: ecology and sustainability is just one possible starting point. We could move within the discursive field of the interviews and dialogues, taking the discussion in thematic or geographical direction and still not swerve from our three initial questions. Because of this, we will continue to discuss the issue of housing (of where and how to live), and apply our research questions to this issue. It immediately becomes evident that houses can both invent new forms of culture, and simultaneously conserve physical, social and economic relations. Building houses entails "an operational understanding of the physical milieu", an "expanded knowledge of material ecologies and effects" including the "capabilities and culpabilities of technology" as well as "the social basis of technology" (Moe 2007:28). This knowledge and understanding are necessary before, as David Harvey has argued, the building process can function as the "advancement of more socially just, politically emancipating and ecologically sane mix of spatiotemporal processes" (Harvey cited in Moe 2007:29). The social and economic conditions differ widely both between different off-griders in the northeastern US and also between the off-griders and the Husby interviewees. To a large extent off-griders build their own houses, or tailor them according to their needs. Building is a small-scale operation, involving house builders but not architects. The building process is initiated by the house owners, with both a confident sense of ownership and also a sense of stewardship – eclectic and idiosyncratic mistakes included. The concept of building as an emancipatory, ecologically sound and socially just process seems distant in Husby, even though its urban density could be seen as "green": as Chris Darby, a New Zeeland city councilor, explains: "Apartment living minimises our ecological footprint and is one solution to addressing climate change. Land use efficiency through consolidation around urban villages has

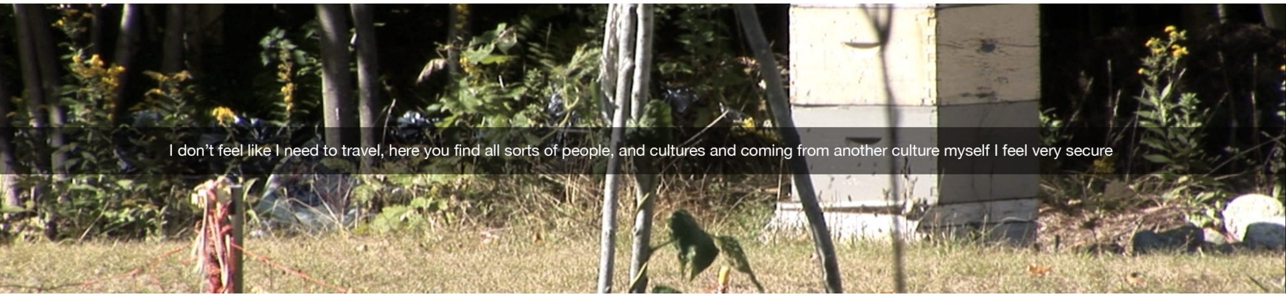
and that's just the common name for it

the potential to reduce greenhouse gases and meet our climate change targets more significantly than converting to blended biofuels” (Darby 2007). The crisis of suburban housing estates shattered the modern, collectivist approaches to planning and depreciated them on a neoliberal and hierarchical spatial scale, that hails the home-mortgage stability. As we have seen, the immigrants living in Husby are inscribed into this narrative. The housing estates in Husby and others like it were built as a response to the housing crisis plaguing Sweden in the 1950s. They were also a manifestation of the 1960s politics of modernist centralization, which conjured a “reasonable” future through a dominating political-economic rationale. In other words, Swedish housing estates were a response to a crisis caused by industrial capitalism. The future was in the hands of collective decision-making processes accepted to be historically necessary: society had embarked on a predictable arrow-like progression towards a goal of the common good. Once in place, the buildings could not catch up with the postindustrial capitalist call for individualization that followed in the 1980s; nor could they deal with more complex definitions of national identity or the demographics of cities. Neoliberal individualism was clearly related to Francis Fukuyama’s proclamation “end of [modern] history”-proclamation, which appeared simultaneously. As a physical manifestation of the afterlife of history, Husby could be seen as the wilted flower of modernity, and the off-girders as the representatives of the return to the futureless future. The widespread sense is that suburbs from this period represent modernity as a reified history that “controls” the individual “by virtue of an autonomy alien to man” (Lukacs 1971:87). Today this sense of living in the ruins of modernity merges with the feeling of being dumped on an endless, directionless plain, within the apolitical limbo of pragmatic problem solving. These feelings could be phantom pains of a missing democracy inside the colossal machine of information processing and population control. But thinking through socio-technical solutions in housing makes it necessary to engage with democratic politics, both in terms of what is technically possible and also in

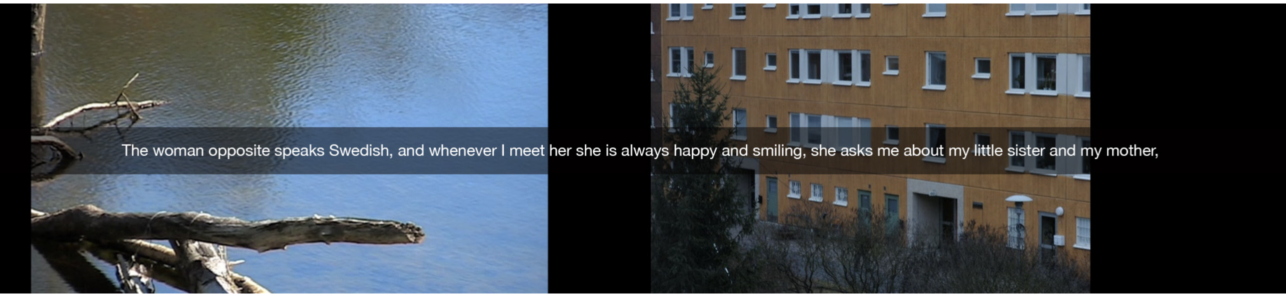

not a typical red painted house, but a house made of glass, so that I can cultivate plants. Glass and brick is what I could imagine for my house.

terms of the goal of creating flexible and reusable infrastructure, which is both affordable and ecologically sustainable. We have time and time again received an overwhelmingly positive response form our Husby interviewees to the idea of turning their neighborhood into a sustainable area, such as the use of the roofs for flat plate solar collectors and photovoltaic energy production. Tools and machines are social before they become technical. *Embracing the reciprocal right to self-definition foregoes change.*

The question of where and how one lives is present throughout the interviews. Off griders talk about their homes and their land. We interviewed eight persons in Husby – out of a population 11.495 (in December 2005) – and talked about their homes in relation to economy and their sense of ownership. This debate became increasingly heated in late fall 2007 because of *Järvalyftet* (The Järva uplift). The *Svenska Bostäder* (Swedish Housing) public housing company began the process with a questionnaire entitled *Trygghet och socialt liv i Husby* (“Security and social life in Husby”, Malm 2006). It was tailored to the area and focused on questions of security. As *urban regeneration*, it disguised what was really a radical and racialized gentrification of the suburbs along the subway lines to the Northwest of Stockholm (Anvari et. al 20080113). Off griders have an ecological awareness, sometimes unintentionally. At the risk of perpetuating national stereotypes, we have noticed that they are generally motivated by an imagined sense of rugged self-reliance and individualism, as well as a generosity we have experienced firsthand. We have also noticed the same ecological awareness and generosity with the interviewees in Husby. However the obvious difference is that the environment in which we conducted the interviews was planned and built by a former industrialist-centralist state. In such an environment, individual creativity takes the form of tactical appropriation – and perhaps destruction (Serfaty 1973). Focusing on the different housing situations, it seems hard to find a common ground;, as building a single home by yourself and moving

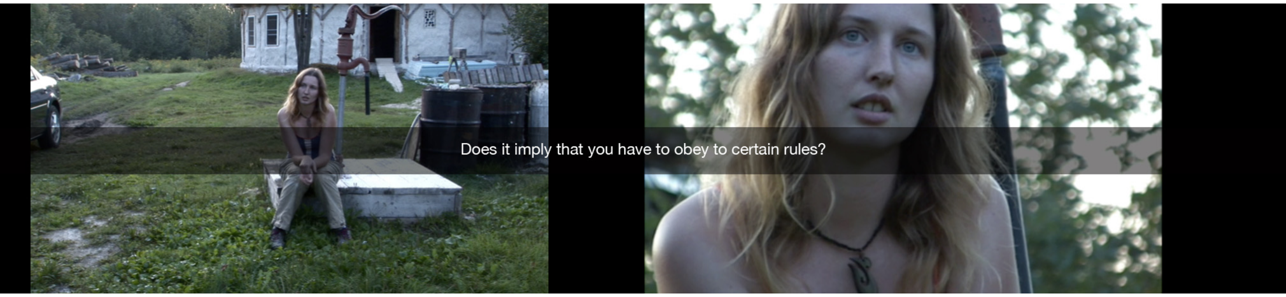

I don’t feel like I need to travel, here you find all sorts of people, and cultures and coming from another culture myself I feel very secure

into a housing estate are connected to different sets of interpretations and imaginations. Following Lefebvre there are two principles at work. The first principle is “production”, defined as the individual or collective interests in which housing is produced; when it is produced by an individual, housing reflects values of personal self-expression and -gratification. The second principle of housing production is linked to appropriation, where the separation that takes place over time between production and the interests involved, is followed by a sense of belonging based on spatial practices. It is in this difference between production and appropriation that off-grid space and Husby space differ the most. This difference is obvious when Shana Hanson says, in the garden outside her off grid house, that building it was a mistake, and that she would have “been happy with just putting a cabin there or living in a barn” (Shana Hanson 20070926). Clearly, there is a social difference, underpinned by politics as well as property and tax law. There is also an obvious material difference between a single-family dwelling owned by those living in it, and a rented flat owned by a public housing company. The difference between being invited to pass through a locked front door before coming to the apartment, and walking through a garden towards the front door is both spatial and social. Because of the dominance of the US media, the cultural fantasies of the US inside and outside America almost totally eclipse the fantasies connected to Husby outside a Swedish, or a Stockholm context, irrespective of its sociopolitical and historical importance. It would have been possible to undertake a more symmetrical research project, interviewing immigrants in the US and off griders in Sweden, but even so the same suggestive media-related fantasies and imaginations would have caused the same complications as we experienced. Still, *even when recognizing the differences in context and background, all interviewees, with the exception of Sarah Haque, have moved because of social violence of varying degrees*. This violence include gender related violence, rape as weapon, revolutionary social changes, military operations, economic straights, destructive identity constructs demanding full



The woman opposite speaks Swedish, and whenever I meet her she is always happy and smiling, she asks me about my little sister and my mother, attention 24/7, and, in particular with the Americans, unfulfilled hopes and a crushing job burden. In 1954, Helen and Scott Nearing formulated what would become the programmatic text for the “back to the landers” movement:

> What we did feel and what we still assert is that it is worth-while for the individual who is rejected by a disintegrating urban community to formulate a theory of conduct and put into practice a program of action which will enable him or her to live as decently as possible under existing circumstances. Viewed in a long perspective, our Vermont project was a personal stop-gap, an emergency expedient. But in the short view it was a way of preserving self-respect and of demonstrating to the few who were willing to observe, listen and participate, that life in a dying acquisitive culture can be individually and socially purposeful, creative, constructive and deeply rewarding, provided that economic solvency and psychological balance are preserved.

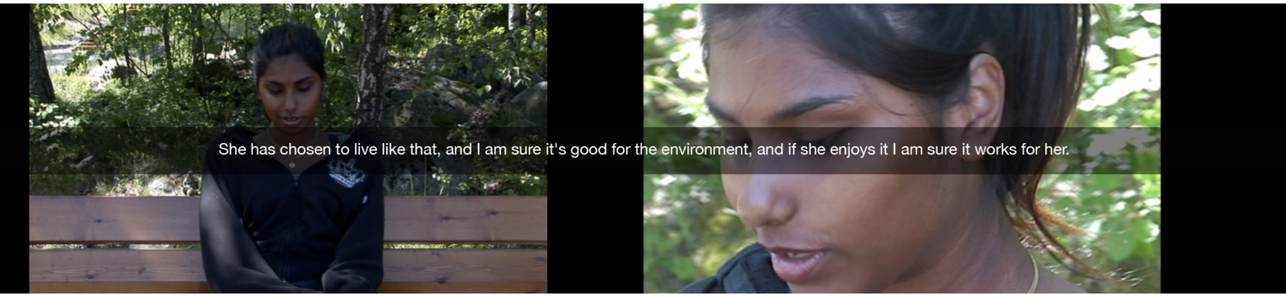

Does it imply that you have to obey to certain rules?

> (Nearing and Nearing 1989:193p)

Francina moved because of being widowed and at the same time starting up a shop, Ed and Karen to avoid Ed’s *karoshi*, Judith because of Reagan-era tax regulation, Chanchai to follow his mother from the slum, Jerusha to settle the burdens living a double-life, Ishmael to find a future outside West Africa, Amona because she trusted her mother, Dave and Sue because they were conflicted over the American way of life, Hooman to escape certain death on the Shatt al-Arab front, Shana to escape small town intolerance, Sarah born in Husby to a political refugee from Bangladesh and a Finn restarting her life, Elizabeth and Dan to leave the deficit routines of big city, Yohannes to avoid war against Ethiopia, David out of frustration with city life’s escaping community spirit, Abdullahi to leave behind the chaos of civil war, Daniel to look for the challenges of farming. And then Nora, Amona’s older sister, looking after her kid siblings when fleeing from the war.

We all have travel as a common experience even if we physically stay put, though it is an important difference between traveling your concepts in anticipation of a safe return and traveling with no support other than the realization of cultural relativity. Travel has meant inserting memories and re-writing parts of the map as it has become lived, activating layers and strata reflecting the communal and reciprocal reach of every move, making representation unstable through self-definition.

Background: is my private house making me incommensurably different from the public you?



She has chosen to live like that, and I am sure it's good for the environment, and if she enjoys it I am sure it works for her.

In the final scene of Jean-Luc Godard's *Two or three things I know about her* (Godard 1966) a number of boxes from commercial products are laid out to form a map or an image of the Parisian suburb, referencing an earlier pan over the area, where the main characters live. These brightly colored boxes are placed on a lawn. The lawn represents a ground which already exists, to mark the liminal horizon of possibilities onto which decisions that are made by us above it are made (before the boxes were placed there). Godard dares to form his own idiosyncratic sociology from which we draw the conclusion that there is *no separation* between the public and the private, global and local, object and subject, words and images. What is painful about Husby is that it embodies, in spatial terms, the ghostly presence of modern liberal principle of a fundamental difference between public and private. From this perspective it is perfectly rational to produce separate housing *boxes* for individual use and then larger public *pipes* (transport infrastructure) to support the original boxes, and leave the semi-private spaces between houses without any purpose or imagination. As Jeff Weintraub asserts, the public-private demarcation

> is not unitary, but protean. It comprises, not a single paired opposition, but a complex family of them, neither mutually reducible nor wholly unrelated. These different usages do not simply point to different phenomena, often they rest on different underlying images of the social world, are driven by social concerns, generate different problematics, and raise very different issues. It is all too common for these fields of discourse to operate in mutual isolation, or to generate confusion (or absurdity) when the categories are casually or unreflectively blended. (Weintraub 1997:2p)

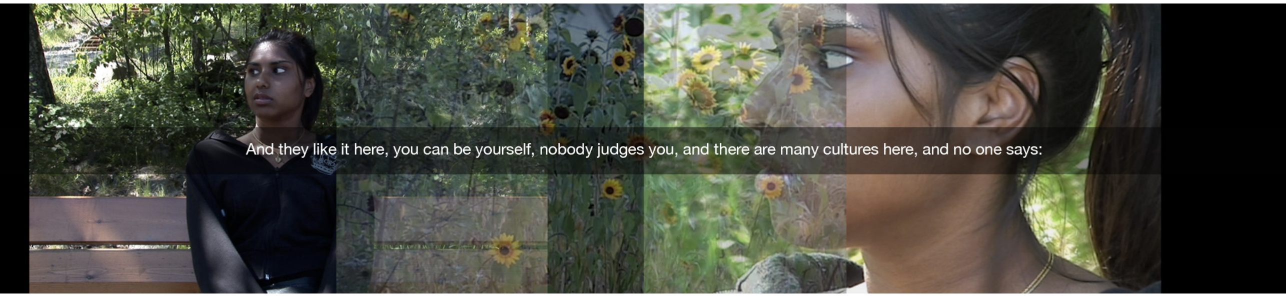
Approaching housing as a practical need or right, or as a reflection of identity will lead to very different results. The specific ways of discussing and representing needs shape how environments are built. There seems to be a short step between the accumulation of words and the accumulation of building material, paragraphs in military formation marching off the pages plunging into the grassy ground.

Like even though we have this property and have put all this time and work into our houses, and living this lifestyle,

Considering the public/private opposition in the light of Michel de Certeau's distinction between tactics and strategy will make them look surprisingly similar due to the powerful normative dispositions they create and support. If we do not accept the public/private as a naturalized distinction, any in-between area (discursive and/or spatial) will be subsumed by dominating interests as unimportant. If we turn from building to psychoanalysis, the category of the unconscious stabilizes the public/private distinction relegating the psychoanalytic unknowable to the last resort of privacy, bringing in time in the intimate sphere so that it cannot be historicized, creating an essence that cannot be superseded. The private is gilded with romanticism as the scene for passions, beyond political analysis and discourse (Baily 2000:396), effectively contrasted by the "paragraph apparatus" of the public domain. Feminists argued that the personal is political, questioning the gendering of the private sphere as feminine and the gendering of the public sphere as masculine. Significantly, the private sphere is not outside of political analysis and action. However, the depoliticization brought on by neoliberalism (which, like aspects of post-feminism, emphasizes private experience) paradoxically upholds a naturalized difference between public and private, instead of thinking of this difference in more constructive terms:

> In the context of a loss of confidence in the public realm as a source of value and well-being, we may *now* be witnessing not only the rise of the private but its possible dominance and its increasing determination of public discourses of understanding and action; that is, the discourses of intimacy, the self and the unconscious invite a public agenda. Hitherto public discourses of the state, civil society and community residualised the private. (Baily 2000:395)

Throughout the interviews, a strong feeling of erasing borders between private and public, speaker and the listener, street and garden, adds to the fleeting presence of the interview situation. Being invited to experience what is normally supposed to be both invisible and also inaudible confuses the spatial separation between public and private. What is “hidden or withdrawn” and thereby marked as a culturally meaningful difference becomes “open, revealed, or accessible” (Weintraub 1997:5). Within the dialogues, the “travel” of people, emotions and ideas are infused with a globally communal language, a set of references mediating world politics and the local situation. In the interviews, when constantly referring to a third perspective moving between Husby and the Northeastern US, the interviewees dissolve the private-as-particular (as separate from *public concerns*), challenging the privatization of experience. It must be noted here that the discourse of travel could then again become diverted from a public, collective conceptualization, and again made intimate and private by the researcher by declaring the interviewees to be “friends”, or allies in a social struggle – which clearly may be the case. This leads to the question *where* the distinction between public and the private is “properly” located, and furthermore in *what form* or *materialization* the public/private distinction wins


And they like it here, you can be yourself, nobody judges you, and there are many cultures here, and no one says:

the approval of the dominant culture. We do work with images, but given that the art market mobilizes images as bearers of the unique and individualizing force between producer and purchaser, we have to ask ourselves how images act to separate public from private. Within communications technology the growing importance of handheld displays stirs interest from advertising as well as in the management and control of public information. Both have a mutual interest in tapping into the flows of "user privacy" digital data (Oliver, et al. 2006). If we return to the art context, another example is of course Andy Warhol's *queering* of the imagery of public and private, as he denied

> the existence of a private self lurking behind the façade of the public celebrity and he took effacement of the private even further by severing the connection between painted image and private artist. (Whiting 1987:58)

I don't know exactly for how long but I am going to live at home for a while, and then I spoke with my mother and she said

We are certainly accustomed to different approaches to images. Museums are much more popular places than they were before the 1960s, as the distinction between market and museum has blurred (Anheier and Toepler 2003). Warhol brought images from outside the (by-then accepted) limits of the art field. It is precisely when images become suggestive, in connection with the concept of art, that reified practices are overlooked or disguised in order to reproduce an epistemic, idealist and "realistic" idea of the art object and individual artist. In other words: the image produces an imaginary which supports the dominant culture. Images which are imagined and presented as representing the private as particular and nondiscursive position themselves in opposition to images self-defined as discursive, doxic and public. Conversely, we see our artistic research project as starting from the public and social and moving beyond the boundaries of the art discipline, will certainly produce a practiced, perhaps pedagogical, art object and an artist without an institutional address:

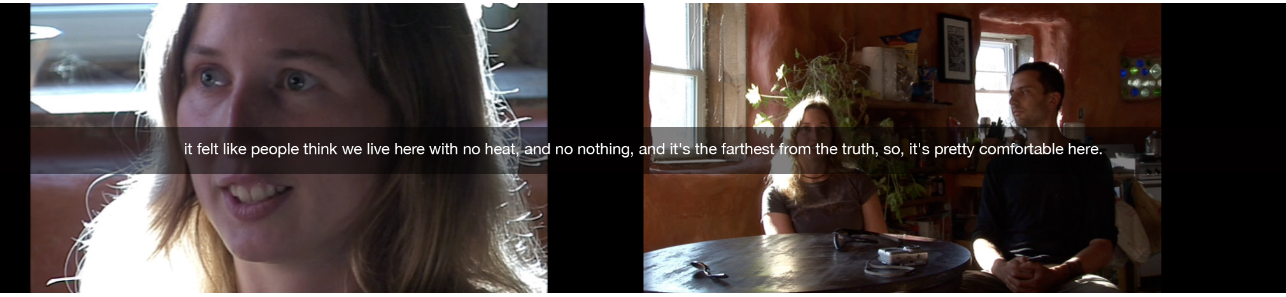
> Theory emerged from the aesthetic itself, from the culture of the modern, and it is only in the dreary light of the old anti-intellectual distinction between the critical and the creative that the movement from Mayakovsky to Jakobson will seem a downward curve, or that from Brecht to Barthes, or from Joyce to Eco, from Proust to Deleuze. (Jameson 1998:85)

Jameson would claim not only to change the means of production, or the dialectics to maintain these pairings. He is also basing his argument on the intersubjective nature of human communication, relying on an elaborate use of language and symbols which will *simultaneously* direct the human mind towards the private/local *and* the public/social. What will become the dominating, but never fully excluding, modus for an individual could take place between what Castoriadis would call the *magmatic* – as the creation, instituting and altering of meanings within the social imaginary – and the *ensemblist-identitary* – defined as the assumption of an epistemic limitation of identity and the social sphere.

and he needed to get a bank loan and now he has his own apartment, and his girlfriend might be moving in,

Background: why only freedom to or freedom from and the spectacle of public housing?

There are assumptions inherent to discussions about individuals living in rental flats in housing estates, or in their own houses. These assumptions reflect dominant class values, which were present both in modernity and also in neoliberal society, and are supported by the distinction between public and private. Within neoliberalism "public" is understood as an orientation towards the nation-state or municipal government, and "private" as oriented towards the individual and the global market. At the risk of generalizing, these conceptions of public and private are also present within associations of social democracy with Sweden and libertarianism with the US. However, a related discussion to "public" and "private" is that of the definition of freedom. In setting up a dialogue between the Northeastern US and Husby we have been dealing with two different but partly overlapping concepts of freedom: freedom *to* decide and act – which some of the interviewees associated with small government and private solutions – and freedom *from* oppression and hunger – which the interviewees associated with the Swedish social security system. Neoliberalism has entered the Swedish public housing sector in form of privatization and barratry (the abuse of the legal system as a form of harassment). However, the right to housing is still maintained within the housing stock: in 2006 around 40% of all housing in Sweden consisted of rental flats, the predominant form of housing in the suburbs (*Hyresgästföreningen* [The tenants organization] 20080402). When asked about the perception of freedom and independence in Sweden and the US specific, Abdullahi (who lives in a rental flat) answered in the following way:



it felt like people think we live here with no heat, and no nothing, and it's the farthest from the truth, so, it's pretty comfortable here.

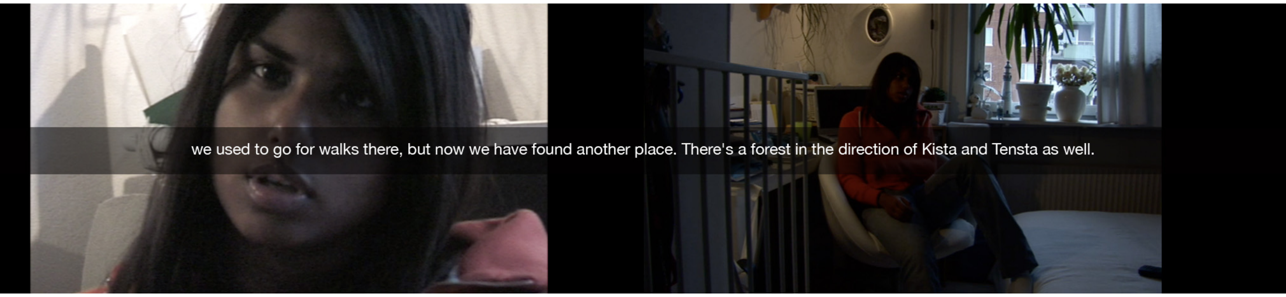
> No, here you don't have the same type of freedom, there is a housing policy, which decides where you are going to live, how, when you go to the local housing authorities and get offered a place to live there are restrictions, "No you can't choose this, you have to choose this area, where there is room", not in the center of the city, they say it's full there. So you already know where you can live, and you cannot choose where you are going to live. It is the politicians who decide where you are going to live, and that's why many immigrants live in the suburbs, it is the housing policies which pushes all of that... backwards. (Abdullahi Mohammed 20070115)

On the other side of the Atlantic, Daniel, who we paired with Abdullahi, lives in a tent in his barn:

> here I am in this building and I don't have a roof and its raining on me or its like I'm cold I don't have any heat! I can think of the time in December, a couple of years

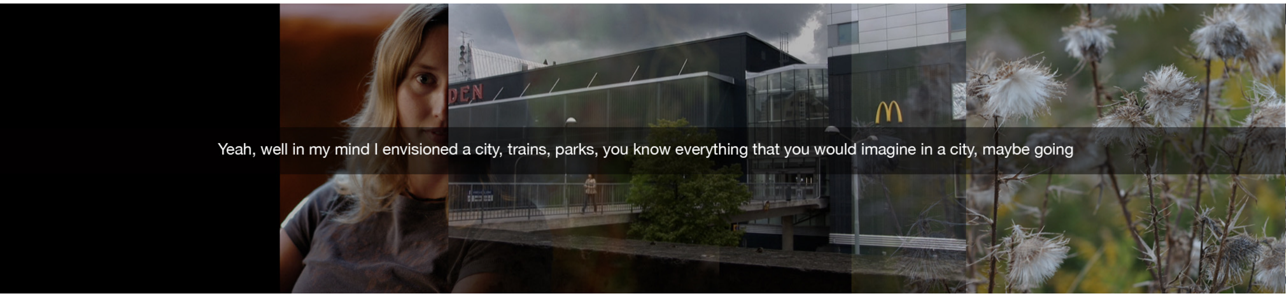
> ago I had that building out there in here in December and I was living in it with no heating or anything. I was struggling to get up in the morning, so I could go over here, so that I could saw some lumber, so that I could get into something. (Daniel Robertshaw 20060915)

The neoliberal ideological onslaught on democratic control of resources, under the false pretensions of giving power back to the individual leads to the discrediting of politics, politicians and public endeavors. The neoliberal agenda is spatially implemented by associating public space and public housing with a general condition of insecurity and theft from the individual. This is combined with the media images of young, unemployed Muslim men on housing estates. In the media, Husby was overshadowed by more stigmatized neighborhoods and did not appear in the media spotlight, until the neoliberal redefinition of public housing reached its doorstep with the2007 *Järva uplift*. A google search on “social problems crime Husby“ results in over five hundred hits, but in changing “Husby” to more notorious suburbs – as Rinkeby to the south of Husby, or Rosengård in Malmö – the figures surge dramatically. The neoliberal agenda has saturated everything with the propagandistic “freedom” of “private solutions”. Self-realization is presented as requiring private resources; the value of other people is in the service they offer. Society becomes an extended mall. If you lack private resources, do not own property, or worse, if you are an immigrant, live in Husby, and do not speak Swedish well or fit socio-cultural or gender norms, then you will become a charge of the municipal government. The support systems will be there for you, but you will also be managed and controlled by the state. In other words, in a context where public support equals theft from individuals, you will have to negotiate a position between the interaction of various forms of social violence. This plight of intersectionality (social and cultural constructions interact throughout society creating inequality) is not limited to certain pre-defined groups. The educational psychologist Dorthe Staunæs expands the



we used to go for walks there, but now we have found another place. There's a forest in the direction of Kista and Tensta as well.

concept of intersectionality as defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw 2002), in order to look beyond "the prerogative of certain actors" and focus on "categories that are produced, sustained and subverted in relation to one another" (Staunæs 2003:105). Intersectionality recognizes class divisions, but does not understand class as locked in binary oppositions to other classes. In listening to the dialogues, if we view self-definition and community through the lens of intersectionality as related to a specific group or class, we would jeopardize the full critical potential of the concept by focusing on the "spectacle" of poverty, suburbs and immigration. We would miss the point that *anyone in any system* can be produced either as properly entitled to self-definition – or as "other", although power structures do not affect everyone in exactly the same way. Screening the interviews through a "matrix of domination" based on who is "wealthy, heterosexual, white, male, Christian, young and slim" (Staunæs 2003:102) would convincingly highlight the conventions and structures of oppression, but it would risk pitting its contextual weight against, for instance, a change by way of technical or spatial means – that are in a Swedish context sure to emanate from top-down structures. We will be using the concept of dominant culture rather than intersectionality because it allows for the possibilities of agency and self-definition from appropriating space, as in this discussion with Elizabeth and Dan:


Yeah, well in my mind I envisioned a city, trains, parks, you know everything that you would imagine in a city, maybe going

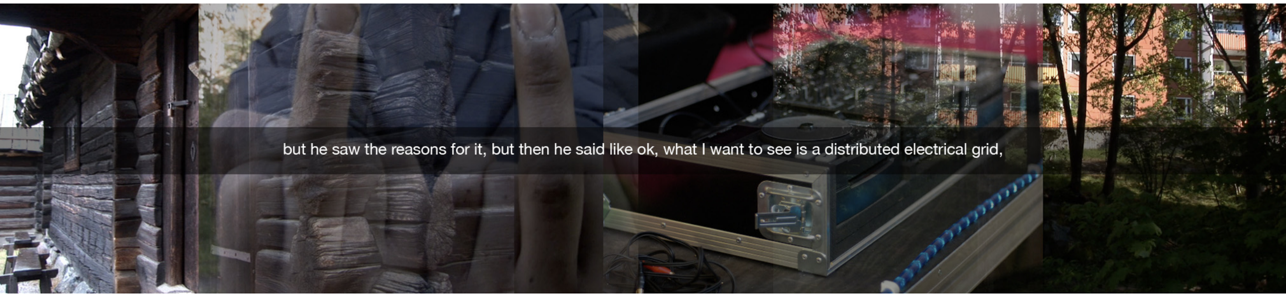
> (Dan)
> Yeah, my Personal reason for moving here is the economics, behind it because of the cheap land, cheap housing like building supplies and stuff like that but… mostly the employment I had, I didn't want to be dependent upon anybody for housing. I wanted to do it on my own, and I bought a chunk of land and maybe it's an American thing when you think of a little log cabin with smoke coming out of its chimneystack, and reading my book by the wood stove, and that seemed intriguing to me. And I wanted my own

kind of thing like that and felt that it was just another step that in wanted to take, that was it, was tiered of working jobs and not having a home to go to, looking for an apartment or running back to my parent house, or something like that just looking for a place to live. I want to build my own place to live.

Stability?

(Dan)
Yeah, I mean a place to go to, everybody wants some kind of stability.

(Elizabeth)
It's like stability and freedom, I don't know, it like kind of goes, like definitely its taken a lot of work to build what we've built, and taken a lot of our time, but in the long run it feel like we have a lot more freedom because of it, so it's not like, ok where am I? Why do I have to keep this job if I don't like it, just to pay my rent, like. We have the kind of freedom to choose what we want to do, and I guess the limited amount of choices we have around here, but, it's not like somebody is going to kick us out if we have a problem, like if we don't make rent next week, well we've still got our place to live.


but he saw the reasons for it, but then he said like ok, what I want to see is a distributed electrical grid,

(Dan)
Well we might not have anything to eat... but we have a place to live. (Elizabeth Grades and Dan Robinson 20070917)

In the interviews, “public' is often understood in terms of the liberty of the individual citizen. But, more interestingly, ”public” can be acted out, based on a definition of collective rights that is both non-étatist and also non-individualist, such as *Husby Unite* or *Common Ground*. In these cases the definition of the public differs from the conventional definitions discussed earlier. The public of *Husby Unite* and *Common*

Ground is perhaps closer to Hardt and Negri's concept of *multitude*, as a "sphere of fluent and polymorphous sociability" (Weintraub 1997:7). However, this particular definition of public also challenges the dominant culture, as something beyond and opposite to the tribal or family related metaphors of society, or other discrete unit in which coercive forces are naturalized. Specifically within the context of housing, we are looking for a model for direct democratic influence over the design, building/planning process and the upkeep of a staircase, a house or perhaps a neighborhood. We wish to offer a participatory housing model as an alternative to the liberal co-operative property rights that are currently presented as the answer to collective housing. It is the unnecessary reality that living in rental flats prevents tenants (as opposed to property owners) from having any influence. We are proposing a form of tenure that is publicly, collectively financed, and where residents have a *collective right* to determine local situation.

Maybe I could be called a capitalistic socialist, I think that what my philosophy is, but that's a whole different ball game,

Background: the Järva uplift classifications, justifications and scandalous democracy

On our first research trip to the Northeast in 2006, we interviewed Bill McKibben (the environmentalist writer and activist) on the steps of Vermont's State House in Montpelier. In 1989 McKibben published *The End of Nature*. It was one of the first books on global warming that raised the specter of nature becoming an "indoor park heated by global economic activities". Global warming makes it evident that nature is inseparable from the social sphere. We asked him if he thought off the grid living was a viable future for America:

> Off the grid is in many ways a very American idea, it's full of our the stuff about individualism and rugged frontier or whatever, and on and on and on, some of which is admirable, and which American has over-dosed on to, in a major way. I think that our hyper-individualism is our biggest problem, and you know one

> manifestation of that is that everyone is feeling that it's alright to go jump in a huge SUV and drive it around wherever they want, and another much more benign, and sort of the other political direction, is a kind of fantasy world in which one is entirely on ones own, doesn't have to depend on anyone else for anything, and doesn't impact anyone else in any way. I consider that a beautiful idea, in certain ways, it derives straight from Henry Thoreau, one of my great heroes, and it has many great advocates like Helen and Scott Nearing, the great you know, homesteading writers of the 20th century. (Bill McKibben 20061024)

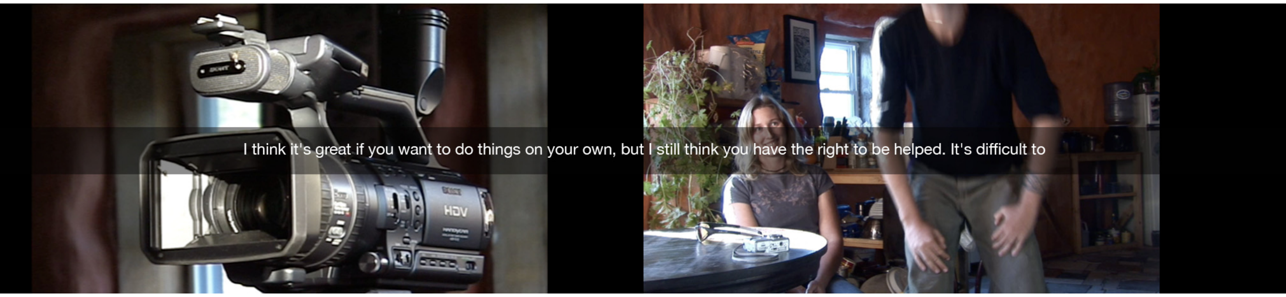
McKibben importantly does not draw a line separating the individual from community, or from the "global multitude" for that matter: it would go against his ecological world-view. The public discussions on off grid living reference sustainability, privacy and security (see appendix A). But what concept of sustainability are we talking about, and what values are involved? First of all, *sustainability* is already a politicized concept. For example, it is used by the *Svenska Bostäder* ("Swedish Housing") public housing corporation in their declaration of the principles for the *Järva Uplift*. Svenska Bostäder has the same goals as any other housing corporation, but its history is linked to Swedish social democratic housing policies which began in the 1920s. Its real estate holdings are financed by the state and the local municipalities and the board is made up of politician and hence, its internal balance shifts with municipal elections. As we have seen, one's housing and living situation can be connected to the right to self-definition through "direct involvement in the design process" (Fowles 2000:111). But a practice-based *sense* of ownership is not necessarily connected to the legalities of *private* ownership (although in a legal sense, owning a house usually gives someone the right to make major design and architectural alterations). There is also the empowering *social value* of becoming a steward of one's own housing situation, which in some cases

to just be on your own, that's really important, but you still need to see someone, to feel that there is always someone around.

can affect the wider community or society. We find it disturbing that a *public* housing company such as *Svenska Bostäder* is unclear about who determines their mandate, when they boast the five goals with the *Järva uplift*;

1, Top class real estate administration
2, Reduced crime and increased security
3, Diversity and reduced segregation
4, Well-functioning neighborhoods
5, High esteem and status *(Järvalyftet 20080221).*

Svenska Bostäder is launching an ideological campaign with roots in the Puritan work ethic, a neoliberal and anti-collectivist ownership agenda. It is based in the fear of the less cultivated classes, drawing on populist ideas of *race-hygiene* and *population policy,* as well as what Foucault has called *biopolitics* (Foucault 1999) – "The outdoor environment will be clean, nice and tidy. Well-managed surroundings contribute to lower crime rates" (*Stadsförnyelse i Järva* [City renewal in Järva] 2007:13). This language signals that the opposite exists in Husgy right now, although, ironically, they are describing Svenska Bostäder's very own estates, inhabited by their tenants. Point 1 reflects the saturation of public housing companies by a neoliberal economism; Point 2 reveals distrust in decentralized, community-based policing; Point 3 is code for the displacement of immigrants and the repopulation of the area by ethnic Swedes; Point 4 differentiates tenants based on their income, and subsequently, their access to space; and Point 5 represents the closing of the gap between commercial propaganda and "sanctioned ignorance". What this reflects is a kind of neoliberal economic determinism, blaming (the relentless onslaught of uncontrollable) globalization. This mixture of economic determinism and fatalism seems to grant absolution from any responsibility. It stops short of challenging dominant, centralized institutional power, because there are no alternatives– those who de


I think it's great if you want to do things on your own, but I still think you have the right to be helped. It's difficult to
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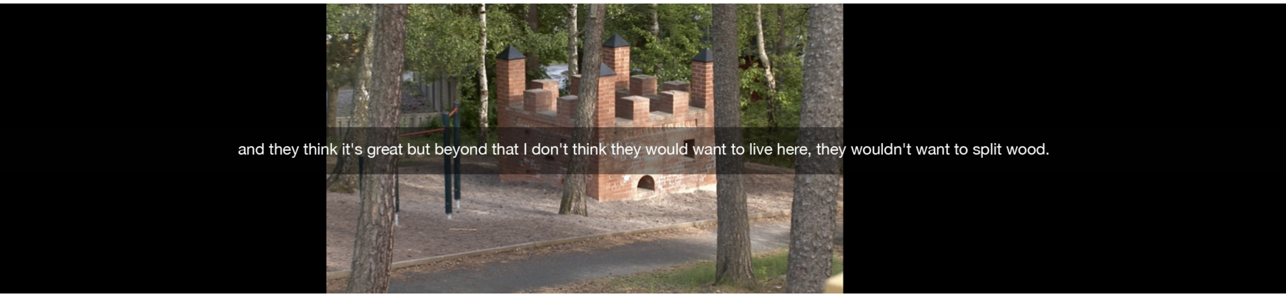
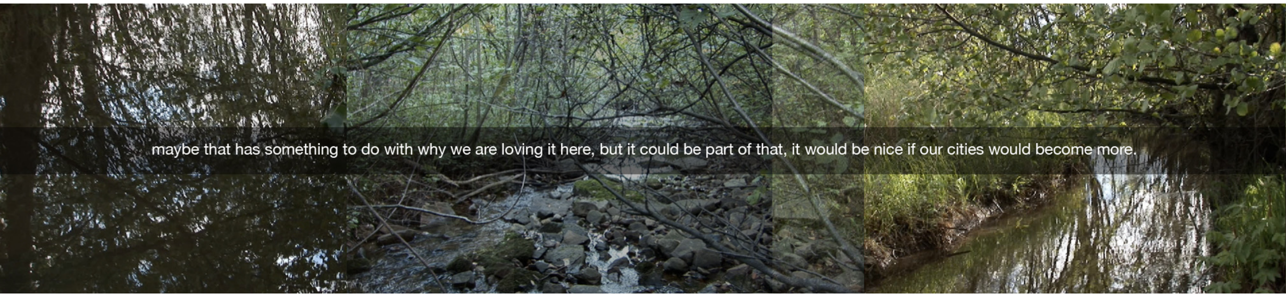
facto live in Husby fit the matrix of domination only as objects of reform. The dominant interests in Husby define their tenants as individuals with individual but not collective rights such as the *right to the city* – a collective desire in urgent need of defense (Harvey 2003).

> I mean there are buses but not the great train to take you across town. It seems like where there is development it's usually only development for the wealthier cities too, it's not the whole city, thinking about the city as a community. It's thinking of cities as "OK, the money is over here, so we are going to out the train out here so that the people over there can go to work in the center of the city". But because no body wants to live in the center of the city, it's not thought of as this is a vile place. Everyone has to prosper for the city to prosper, it's kind of every body for themselves. Make the money and you get the benefits. (Elizabeth Grades 20070917)


and they think it's great but beyond that I don't think they would want to live here, they wouldn't want to split wood.

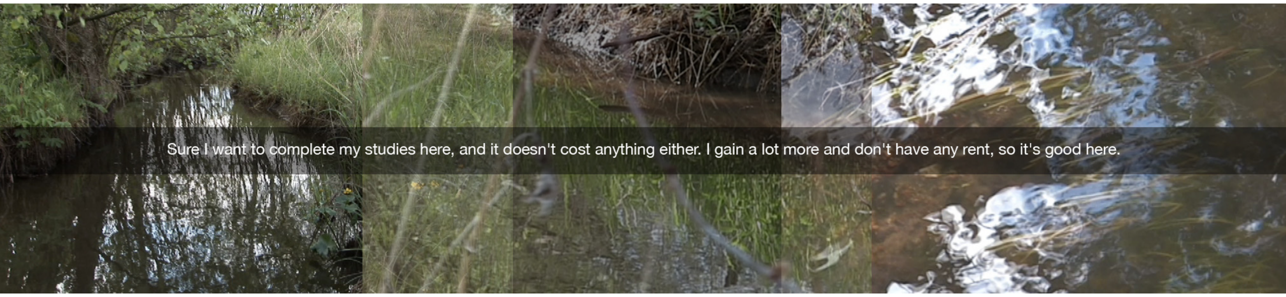
We could conclude that this situation is simply a result of the 2006 election of the Conservatives in Sweden, if it were not for the direct impact this particular change in housing policy has had on our interviewees, which we witnessed during the course of our research. In November 2007, the tenants in three houses on Trondheimsgatan received a message from *Svenska Bostäder* in their mail slots, bearing the following headline: "We are going to rebuild your house and you have to move". Tenants were called to a meeting "where we will give all information you need about moving out and what is taking place". The message, or rather the *ukaz*, is in its Swedish original an insidious mix of condescension from official authority, absence of any reference to the actual tenants as specific subjects, and the impossibility of any alternatives: "All together, the demands of the planned conversion of the houses and the yard means it will be impossible to stay. We will therefore need to evacuate all the apartments in the buildings on Trondheimsgatan 26, 30 and 32. You will consequently be offered other apartments" (Svenska Bostäder 200711). The only reason given for this cold shower was a reference to the "answers we received from you tenants in a survey in 2006 show that we need to improve housing security". This heavily biased survey, which was also referred to in the abovementioned *Järva uplift* campaign material, has no credibility other than the claim to objectivity. The arguments taken from the *Broken Window* model – that any sign of lack of care and supervision (as a broken window) would lead to the spread of disorder – by the crime prevention consultant Ulf Malm (Malm 2006) have long been shown to be scientifically flawed, but useful to neoconservative and neoliberal interests by the Swedish urban sociologist Ingrid Sahlin and many others (Sahlin 2000; Harcourt 2001; Macallair 2002). Both this survey, and the consequences of its use, exemplify how the public housing sector currently plays the interests of tenants against a ghostly "public" interest connected privatizing the housing market. This situation reflects the replacing of democratic decision-making by *systemically isomorphic* "*justification expertise"*, neutralizing dissent and conflict through "the closure of liberal democracy as pure elitism or detached pragmatism" (Arditi 2003:79). It is the logic of gentrification and the exclusion of those defined as "other" from the dominant culture. In this context, the campaign should be seen as propaganda (defined as "information, ideas, or rumors deliberately spread widely to help or harm a person, group, movement, institution, nation, etc." (Dictionary.com 20080222); we see the *Järva uplift* campaign as a kind of military operation, following the dictionary definition:


maybe that has something to do with why we are loving it here, but it could be part of that, it would be nice if our cities would become more.

> 1.*Military*. a. military operations for a specific objective. b. *Obsolete*. the military operations of an army in the field for one season. 2. a systematic course of aggressive activities for some specific purpose: *a sales campaign*. 3. the competition by rival political candidates and organizations for public office. *–verb (used without object)* 4. to serve in or go on a campaign: *He planned to campaign for the candidate. He campaigned in France. –verb (used with object)* 5. to race (a horse, boat, car, etc.) in a number or series of competitions". (Dictionary.com 20080222)

The campaign material qualifies Point 5 by adding “The Järva uplift is everybody’s concern” (“Stadsförnyelse i Järva” 2007:13). By doing so it camouflages the illegitimate, undemocratic nature of its activities, using an abstract concept of public interest and the legal and democratic rule of Svenska Bostäder. The *Järva uplift* is really “everybody’s concern”, because governance in Husby operates as “the power of those who have no natural reason to govern over those who have no natural reason to be governed” (Rancière 2007). Power is a matter of equal influence over space. Hooman Anvari comments on the situation:

> In one way everything here is regulated, what we have in the form of democratic processes is in one way a sham democracy. For example most of the suggestions made here by the citizens to the governing committee of the local city council, are usually rejected. In a way it is OK that you as a citizen are permitted to hand in suggestions, but it’s a far cry from actually realizing them. Then we don’t have this, which we need as a precondition for interdependency, the process of participation, participatory democracy when discussing the question of democracy. I think that our democracy has become mainly a ceremonial democracy. Sure, we vote every four years - but then what happens? Democracy for me is what happens between two general elections, and the way in which society handles the questions and the dissatisfaction of its citizens - in the case of Husby and the Järva uplift.


Sure I want to complete my studies here, and it doesn't cost anything either. I gain a lot more and don't have any rent, so it's good here.

> *What about communication between different strata in society, in housing, in its organization and structure?*

> No. The problem is that the power is always somewhere else. If you go to the local city council they tell you that “We don’t own and can’t take responsibility for this question, it belongs to the town hall”, if you go to the town hall they tell you “No, this is a question for the government”, if you go to the government they

> tell you "No, this is a question for the EU". Somehow there must be a possibility to influence. Having real influence is like an illusion, it is like the horizon you never reach, but what this will imply has still to be shown. Maybe we will arrive at a point when people will say "No, we want to have real influence", then we would be demanding power and that would be exciting in relation to democracy and the power of the citizen to decide for themselves. (Hooman Anvari 20071215)

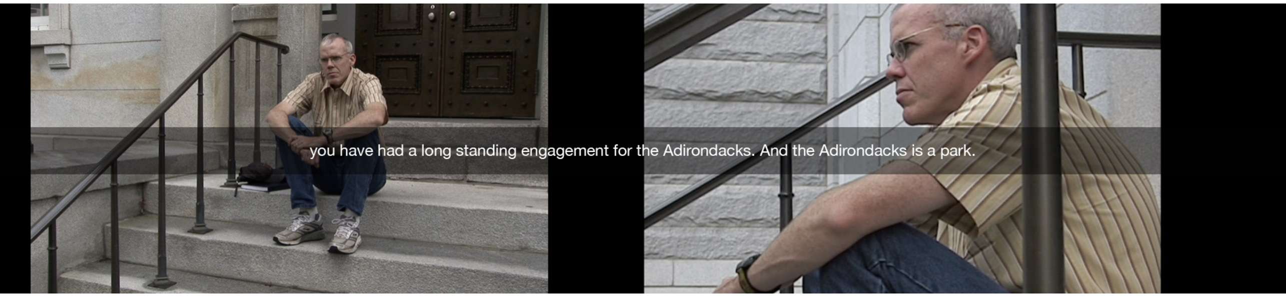
In comparison the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights state that:

> Terms such as "unavoidable" and "in the public interest" seek to indicate the inevitability of eviction, but are frequently used before exploring possible alternatives to a planned eviction. (UNHCHR 1993:Fact Sheet No. 25)

And further that

> it remains commonplace for economic and similar considerations to take precedence over the human rights of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and this trend may intensify in the era of globalization unless adequate safeguards are developed and enforced. (UNHCHR 1993:Fact Sheet No. 25)

The basic conflict here is around *scandal of democracy* that asserts the possibilities of equal rights and real, participatory influence over that controlled by those in power. Democratic movements and organizations that wrested power from the elite in the name of the people are not able to solve the fundamental and deeply problematic association between ownership and legal rights. The obvious historical example is the restriction of voting rights to property owners. Because liberal democracy is trapped by its inextricable links to pre-existing power structures, it has become reduced to a juridical system of identifying and sorting individual agency by income, and discussion is reduced to the common sense of the supposedly majority. This disregards democracy's radical, scandalous histories and possibilities of equality and dissent. If we think of democracy in *formal* terms, a public housing corporation seems better than a private landlord. However in liberal politics agency still depends on property ownership, the right to ownership is not in the hands of those living in the houses, the situation is actually no different, and is perhaps even more hypocritical. The exploitation of this hypocrisy leads to a depoliticized *withdrawal from society* of a hollowed-out no-reply@democracy.com. This scenario reduces collective rights (such as the right to housing) to individualized real estate consumption. In Husby, this is quite cynical as it only really means a secondary forced emigration. The reduction of community to market individualism has been a major concern to several of our off the grid interviewees, such as when David Beringer, who is paired with Yohannes Abraham, comments on the realistic possibility of leaving *the grid* in a more metaphorical sense:



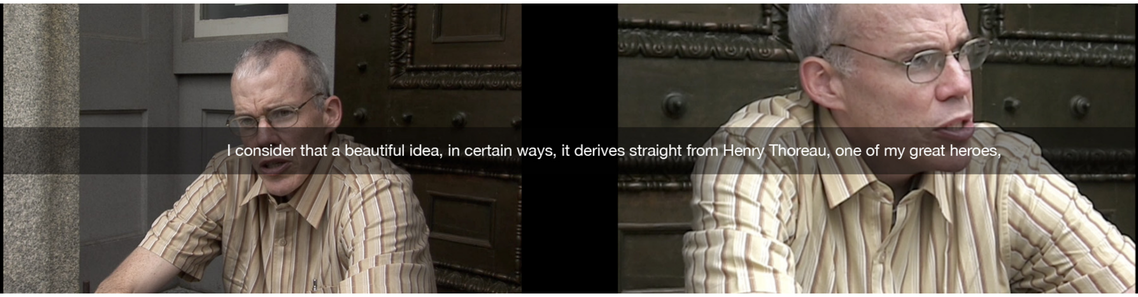
you have had a long standing engagement for the Adirondacks. And the Adirondacks is a park.

> But I think that, in thinking about Yohannes and they way he brought these projects together, really made me think about that broader term of Off the grid, and I really don't think there's a way to get off the grid, I think it's more a matter of becoming conscious of your grid and making conscious choices about what your grid in a more metaphorical sense, is. That's where the human freedom plays into it... first of all seeing that it is a grid, that there are these interconnections, and then figuring out which ones are beneficial - for yourself, for the people around you that you love, for the world at large, and starting to make choices based on what you'd like to see develop in the world, rather than just what's easiest or more convenient, or cheaper or you know, some other criterion, like once it becomes conscious, that this is a greater inter-relationship that sustains all of us, no one can live without human interaction, no child can develop without love or interaction. And I think we all need that. And, we have choices in how we make those interconnections. (David Beringer 20070921)

If we think of democracy in spatial terms, that would encompass equality, dissent, and ecology, the question becomes more fundamental:

> It's about the visibilities of the places and abilities of the body in those places, about the partition of private and public spaces, about the very configuration of the visible and the relation of the visible to what can be said about it. All that is what I call the partition of the sensible. (Rancière 2003:5)

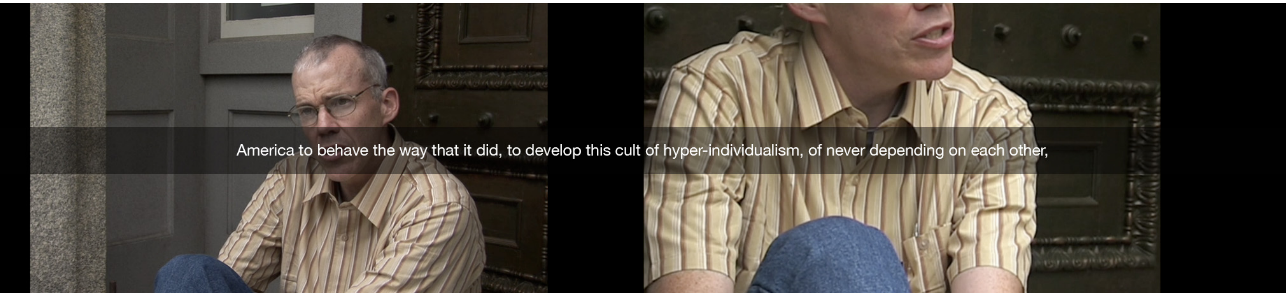
Democracy in Rancière's sense is based on equality that is "verified through emancipation" (Dillon 2005), which exists *without* a pre-determined or permanent form (reflecting the Deleuzian influence on Rancière's thinking). Rancière claims juridical and political universalism only in the name of an equality that comes out of engagement in "counter-hegemonic projects that create equivalential linkages between different demands, interests and identities" (Howarth 2007:5).


I consider that a beautiful idea, in certain ways, it derives straight from Henry Thoreau, one of my great heroes,

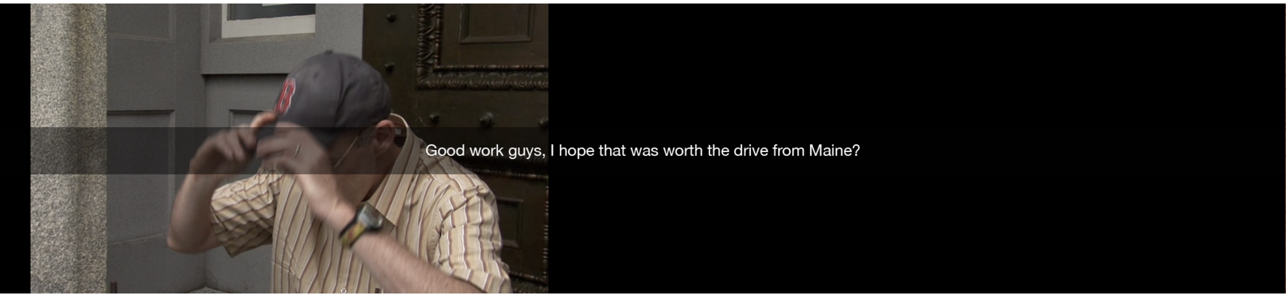
We find Ishmael Fatty's story of Husby Gård to be an interesting example of both Rancière's definition of democracy and the strategic appropriation of space:

> there have been lots of protests on the streets, this and that, that services have got worse because of the immigrants etc. We talked about it at a culture meeting and when we had our coffee break they said why don't we talk about culture instead of you talking about you broken lifts! Well, it's also a cultural question, broken lifts are a cultural question. It changes people living conditions, their way of life. If you don't collect the garbage in time it starts to smell, and you lose your traditions of smell, and then it become a cultural issue as well. You know I am a kind a person who doesn't make so many demands on other people. Although sometimes I can get irritated when talking about in depth about these things, and ask myself how could Svenska Bostäder in the space of one year change the whole area in the way

they have done, in a very silent way, without, you know we are not used to demonstrating and things just got done, hush hush and bam bam bam and that is it. And then, what has been tragic in the whole process is that the people living here hadn't had a chance to speak about it in the beginning, it was the politicians, the people in power at Svenska Bostäder and the local authorities who have been speaking for Husby, you understand? That is what happened. So I remember when Luis Abascal became the head of the local council, he said "You have to take your own initiatives, come to the local council meetings, that is what they were made for, for the inhabitants to be a part, a part of the decision making process, somewhere where you can play a part in opinion making, situations where you can change opinions", something like that, and we started going there to discuss things. And this has entailed that some if us became conscious of these things, this system, because the system in Sweden, I mean if you come from another country, the system here is so sophisticated and complicated, so that you don't know which way you should enter it, who does one have to talk to etc. But anyway he has at least created a space, a platform so that we can go there and say no, that we want to give the schools more money instead of something else, or that we don't want the cash dispensers to be moved to somewhere else, or we don't want the bank to move away or things like that, or that or that, we have the platform to do that. And in this way we have built up the different clubs and associations like the crafts association that drives Husby Gård at the moment. It comes directly out of this process. We received support from Luis, moral support, so that we could find a way to struggle. But in the beginning it was like the politician spoke for us instead of us speaking for ourselves, and we didn't even know who our politician were, like "Who represents us? I don't know? Is it that tall Swede? That is right, the one with the peaked cap!" I mean what the hell! (Ishmael Fatty 20070217)


America to behave the way that it did, to develop this cult of hyper-individualism, of never depending on each other,

Democracy in its liberal form, Rancière argues, has gone astray because it attempts to bring society together based on "common rule" instead of taking the direct route of an (universalized and non-excluding) Athenian political philosophy, "a good, straight way from the essence of the common to the distribution of power" (Rancière 2003:6/4). Bringing together politics and essence is contentious, in particular since decisions cannot be based on "instincts or interests", but in "an already-existing order of disorder or disorder of order, which is called 'democracy'" (Ibid). For example, Ishmael asks how others have come to speak on behalf of Husby and its residents. This indicates how in Sweden, local democracy has become a tool to silence and subdue the citizens of particular communities. Any protest is dismissed as bad behavior, *out of order* or even dismissed as *disorderly*, since liberal democracy has supposedly given it its final form: the freedom to purchase your apartment and the *biopolitical government of the poor* and those identified as in need of the *Järva uplift*. Rancière sees contemporary democracy as the "regime of politics", and not as a "political regime", that would mean


Good work guys, I hope that was worth the drive from Maine?

> the government of those who are nothing – the government of those who have no title, no qualification for ruling. There are a number of powers, based on birth, knowledge, virtue, wealth, and there is the last form, the government based on nothing, nothing but the lack of basis, the lack of an entitlement or qualification for ruling. This means, properly, anarchy – the absence of any arche, meaning any principle leading from the essence of the common to the forms of the community. (Rancière 2003:6, 4)

The debates on human rights and who can access them emphasize both the formal structures which inscribe the individual within democratic rule and a formalism of democratic rule in a general sense. Acknowledging the importance of considering aesthetics in relation to democracy our concern is about government's insistence on a certain level of proper language, bureaucratic language and procedures necessary for "democratic culture". By so doing the "regime of politics", the dominant form of representative democracy, or with Rancière the *police*, only respects institutionally sanctioned language, thereby negating the agency of self-definition, as well as those experiences that are not already accepted as *formally* known. The consequences are that first, the usurping of democracy by money and power, and second, the exclusion of those disempowered by the rationale of orderly language and formal rules and isomorphic knowledge–all of us living outside narrow and homogenous definitions of community. Asked about the effects of the Järva uplift, Yohannes said:

> Yes, exactly, we talk about it all of the time. Just look at all the children who moved into the city? We had a meeting here last week with the headmaster of the Husby school I was there, it was the Somali association who... organized it. Two headmasters were there, women. There was a woman from Eritrea speaking about the area and a lot of Somalis were there protesting: there are no good teachers, there are only relief-teachers. But the Eritrean woman said that even if they were relief teachers they were still teachers. She works somewhere in the city, and when she wakes up in the morning and leaves for work she sees girls and boys who are only seven eight years old on the underground on their way to the city, they already moved them from Husby. Why did they move them from Husby School, from Akalla and from Husby? All the parents said, "No, there's no good school here", "There are no Swedes here", they moved just like that. Sometimes it's a misunderstanding. The children can stay on to the sixth or seventh grade here and they can learn, I don't think it's such a big problem, but the parents to get around it, send their kids to the city. As you say, what are the inhabitants of Akalla and Husby going to do if they "uplift" them in this way? We can't live here. They can build villas and so on, but we can't live here, I don't think so. We don't earn enough money. They can come back here, the

rich people. When we came here in 1997 there were a lot of Swedish people here. Akalla, Husby. It was eighty percent Swedish, but today it is only one percent Swedish. But they want to come back.

Is this related to Kista, and to purchasing power?

There is a work force of almost fifty thousand in Kista.

You are thinking of the commuters?

Fifty to sixty thousand. Why do you come from Uppsala to work in Kista? You can move here and live in Husby. But you cannot be a part of it... that's the way it is. This could be a conflict. One could say you can move here, but there has to be a system to move people.

I mean for someone to own a piece of land, for me having never owned anything other than a car or something like that,
SUPPORT LOCAL

Everyone we talk to say they love Husby.

Even if we have, they are always writing in the newspapers that we have problems, something with the police or whatever. But nothing occurs here, I have never seen anything. There were once two boys that were making threats with a knife and so on, that was just once, but I have never seen anyone with a gun. But they are always writing about it here.

Prejudices?

If you were to tell me which area I could go where there would be room for me, where do you want to live? But I can't I can't; only Husby, I can only say I want Husby.

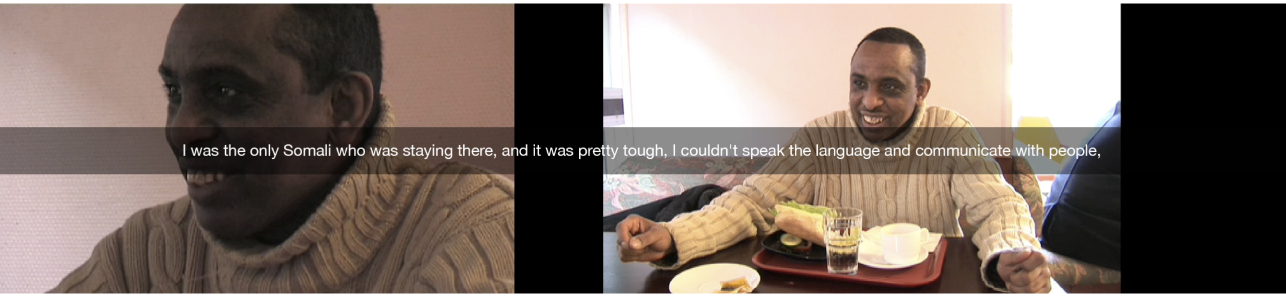
If you could say Östermalm?

Exactly, although Östermalm is finer, but I have never been there, but I still don't think so.

You have a community here.

Yes, a lot. The largest community of Eritreans is here. We have great clubs and strong associations. We work together a lot, even with the whole of the Husby area, we have integrated a lot. We have a good relationship with the state too. The Eritrean community is really strong here. All of Husby, Akalla and Kista. Nearly one thousand Eritreans.

Does the group help each other?


I was the only Somali who was staying there, and it was pretty tough, I couldn't speak the language and communicate with people,

Very, very much. If somebody dies, or is unwell, you know we have our culture; we gather all the time, we mourn together. And when it comes to refugees from Eritrea, we send the most to Eritrea. We also have to collect money. All the time, we have a big culture, we help each other.

But the Eritrean culture all over the world, even in Eritrea, a poor family, neighbors, if it's a rich person over here, the rich are never alone, No, we help each other all the time, even as a culture we help as well, and like each here. We meet up all the time. I believe we have a very rich culture in Eritrea, the most in Africa, I don't know. But we are nationalistic, very much so, Eritrean. We say, from all over the world we are nationalists. We have paid ten percent over thirty years. They are sixty, eighty-five years old, the ministers in the government. They have spent twenty-five years in the liberation movement, the have fought for thirty-five years. Today they are in their seventies. We are the same, there are many Eritreans who live here and there who have fought in Eritrea and who have come here. But I say we are nationalistic, we are not commercial beings, we are not businessmen and there are no rich Eritreans in the whole of Sweden, no we are always at home and with help our mother, father, parents, government and those that have problems we are helping all the time. There are not rich. We are only rich in nationalism and help each other.

Solidarity?

That's it. There are people who want to be rich all the time, but we cannot! We have no business culture. No. (Yohannes Abraham 20071201)

Maybe they are saying that the poor should move out and then the rich will come here and live, the middle class is going to live here.

Background: from conviction to practice – on or off grid in Husby and elsewhere

Several Husby interviewees bring up the neglect in maintenance, which has influenced the image of the neighborhood; lifts that does not work, and hallways that are not cleaned. The sentiment is that the contract between the tenant and the public housing company has been unilaterally broken. The formal democratic structure does not recognize them beyond bringing energy into the system and it does not empower them as subjects, or giving the community agency on its own terms. This is, after all, what the dominant interests in society grant itself. The orientation towards the market has created structural problems for democracy that the market cannot solve, neither in Husby nor in the US. Discussions on democracy need to be situated to be emancipative, it must respect the differences appearing from travel, the right of self-definition and focus on community thinking.

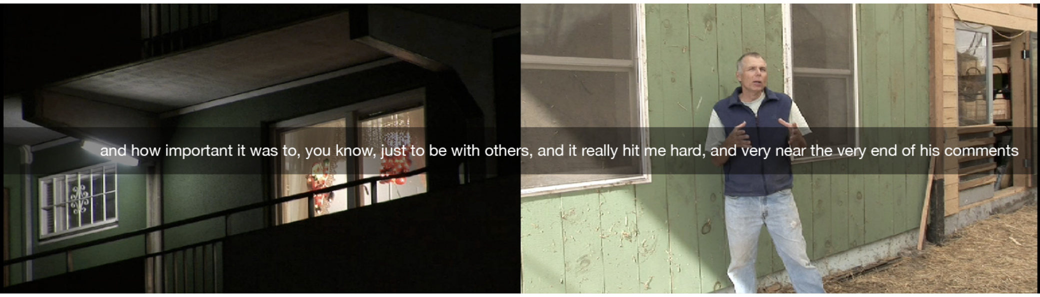
For me, and this is a difference between Sweden and America, where you are here in some level you are really on your own, once you get away from your family and the community that you were born into there is no one taking care of you or your health care, and no-one taking care of some of those human needs, making sure that you have food, making sure that you have shelter. And here there are many corporations and businesses that want to step right in and take your money and provide those things for you, and in other countries it's a government that makes sure that everyone has those, has those needs met. And, so our independence is not so much from our community around us but as from some of those businesses that would like to be selling us a ready made house, or selling us electricity. So I think that's, that's where I see the differences, but as it, as I read what Yohannes talks about, there's a lot of similarities, I think those human needs are things that we all feel, you know I have children too, I'm concerned over their immediate things that they need, and the many things that and all the experience in the world as they grow.

And he talked about how important it was to be with a community, and how important that was.

Yohannes is asking who is going to provide for housing in the US.

Yeah, and here I think that that's a big question. There are, there are people who are trying to find lower cost ways of building or, building for each other, I think there's an old tradition of communities helping one another. There was a case where a school house was burned down and over the weekend the community came together and built a new school house and had it up and ready for the children to come in on Monday morning... that's rare here now, but that was the sort of self-reliance that was, that existed here and I think in many places. I think that is breaking down, it is not happening in this way, so it's... you are a little bit more on your own, unless you can create a community of people to help you. (David Beringer 20070921)

What it means to live off grid is only really understood by the off-griders once they have actually done so in practice; the same gradual *embracing* and social production of space is also performed by the Husby interviewees. The difference between searching for a home and having built and/or, with Lefebvre, socially produced/lived a home is not instantaneous. The narration of one's travels changes gradually, as does self-definition when it becomes related to a new community. Then the dominant culture will decide how to frame any particular claims to production of space or personal homecoming, and then will deal with you as though you are on or off the social-institutional grid. *Marginalization may be chosen or produced from the outside but is mapped and implemented in spatial terms*. (Sara Haque is the only interviewee who was born and raised in the place where the interview took place: she expressed no intentions to move or a need to change her life, though moving away from Husby was suggested to her by employees at her *Skansen* heritage buildings outdoor museum summer job.)


and how important it was to, you know, just to be with others, and it really hit me hard, and very near the very end of his comments

We have here to remember McKibben's critique of the contemporary version of American individualism, that pits self-definition against community. Because of this we are interested to look for practices of social empowerment in living an off grid life.

Off the grid houses can showcase sustainable technology:

> I think that is part of our bed and breakfast here, that we can share this experience, that you can lead a very normal looking life, I think a lot of people have the perception that off the grid means you live in a shack in the woods and we are able to show people that that is not the case. With a little thought and a little effort you can use all of the modern conveniences and have a modern life but be environmentally conscious at the same time. (Ed and Karen Curtis 20070927)

It can be understood as independent research:

> it's an up hill battle, in a lot of respects for the consumer, just like today, I can't just go out and buy the car I would like to buy, you know, it's not there! I research it, I go on line, I look at the electric car, and we talked about the grease car, I can't buy it, it's the same for someone who really wants to go off the grid, you have got to go and invent it (Dave and Sue Oaks 20060921)

And as situationally specific, and even unintentional:

> if you are talked about choosing to go off the grid, that we sort of, I look at it as situational, and that is that, the property that I found that I liked, happened to be a property that, was going to be very expensive, 45.000 dollars or more to be able to be on the grid. (Daniel Robertshaw 20060920)

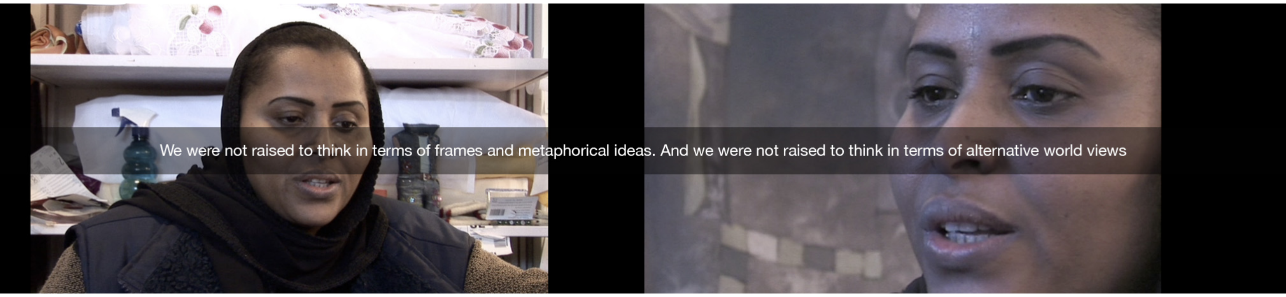
But (to risk stretching the metaphor too far) one can understand oneself as already being off grid in the sense of being politically and economically marginalized, but assuming political agency starting from self-definition, the identification of a community and the appropriation of an existing space

> thanks to the newspapers informing that there was going to be a new crafts house, and that it was going to be important for the local area, and I fought a lot for this, together with my colleagues, but in the end no cultural house was ever built, but we got those premises, which was an old day-care centre /---/ in a way Husby Gård is even better than our dream about the culture house, because this is a fantastic place with first-rate premises. So I had the self-confidence, that I could do things myself, to take initiative and to change my own conditions, no one else can do it for me! That's it! You can sing into my ears forever but this doesn't help me, I have to take control and do this myself. So

> Husby, like I said earlier, has become a sort or deserted and isolated area, because all the Swedes started moving away, so we have to do something to change our image into something more positive, that is why I always say to the media "Don't call my home a ghetto, if you do that then I am going to shoot your ass because it's not a fucking ghetto!" you know. Because we have to do something, we have to do something, and we that are left here, not just the immigrants but also the few small Swedish families that are left, we have to help each other, we have to, because we have to look to the future (Ishmael Fatty 20070217)

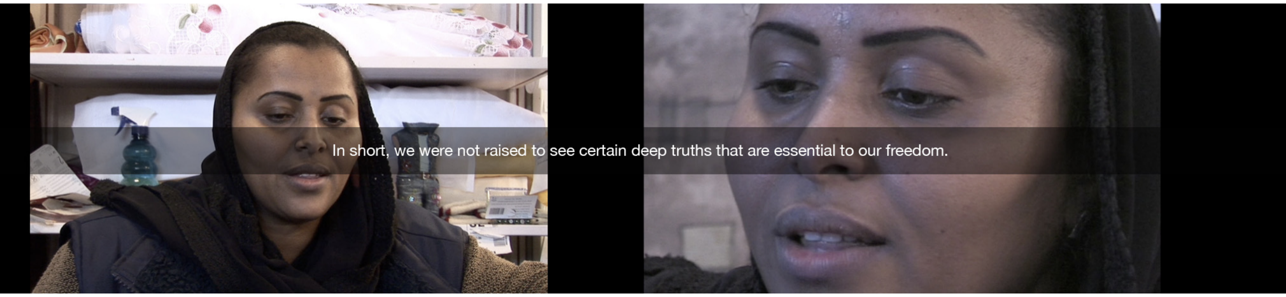
People also live off the grid because of sustainability, defined here both in terms of ecology and reliability:

> Well yes, there's another thing because it's much safer if people have individual energy, because it there, well obviously with the terrorism period we are going through right now, it's very obvious the danger of power plants being wiped out and so forth, but in any case, like we had an ice storm here about three winters ago, and many places in Maine here were without electricity for two or three weeks, without any electricity, and because of the way most people lived they lost all their food in the freezers and refrigerators, and they had a terrible time just managing, they didn't have heat and various things, damage happened to their places, and I lost my phone for a short time and that means that, I don't thing that I, or maybe, I think I had just started to use email, yes, I was using email when that happened, and so I was without the phone line and without the computer for a very short time, but that was all the inconvenience that I experienced, I had my electricity I had my hot water, and I was giving people hot showers and hot meals and it was just fascinating, and I was featured in some local newspapers about being just fine. So it was a real opportunity to show people how much better it is to be independent, because the power company places were all just wiped out. (Judith Schmidt 20060919)


We were not raised to think in terms of frames and metaphorical ideas. And we were not raised to think in terms of alternative world views

Going off grid because the utility grid is about power distribution, in both a literal and a metaphorical sense:

> I think I became involved in protests and things about trying to stop nuclear power, trying to… I lived outside of Philadelphia for a while and we promoted people saving energy as a way of reducing the need for these huge nuclear power plants, and trying to create a picture of decentralizing and this doesn't have to be these huge monolithic power companies, we could be more efficient if we put more of these decisions into local control, it was a long time ago now, but that kind of evolved through learning more about energy, and power companies, learning about alternatives, and trying for a long time both to try and get the power companies to take up the alternatives, and working with my own life and realizing that eventually I can make more changes for my own life than I am going to be able to get these changes out in the world, and then hopefully through my choices and how I do these things, can influence other people, so it's possible.


In short, we were not raised to see certain deep truths that are essential to our freedom.

> *OK, to become an example of sorts... freedom from these companies? Really?*
>
> Yes, its definitely still there, I think there is a lot, a lot of interpenetration anyway, they are involved in our lives, I rely on them when I am at work and our neighbors rely on them, so, but I do feel that there's, when decisions are made for stockholders rather that energy consumers then one type of decision is going to predominate, but then I am more interested in collected or local decisions. (David Beringer 20060920)

In some cases, living off the grid was not an "alternative", but the only affordable and acceptable choice:

> I didn't choose to be off the grid, I just never situated myself to get on the grid /---/ just after having turned 19 that summer, I took a Greyhound bus and landed in Maine, and within a couple of weeks I ended up at somebody's house, that invited me to live there because she wanted to play the fiddle better, and I had saved money for land by playing the fiddle in Boston that year before. And she was up the road were they didn't have any electricity, so there wasn't any choice about being off grid, and that's the thing in Maine that it's only been a short while that people have even had the choice of being on the grid here. And in Hartford, Maine where she lived, a lot of the people were older and most of them lived most of their lives without electricity because it just wasn't there yet. So her house didn't have the choice of having electricity until quite recently, and so I lived there and back then she didn't have any electricity at all, she had kerosene lamps, she didn't even have a telephone (Shana Hanson 20060926)

Well, like I said earlier, I didn't. I didn't choose to be off the grid, I just never situated myself to get on the grid.

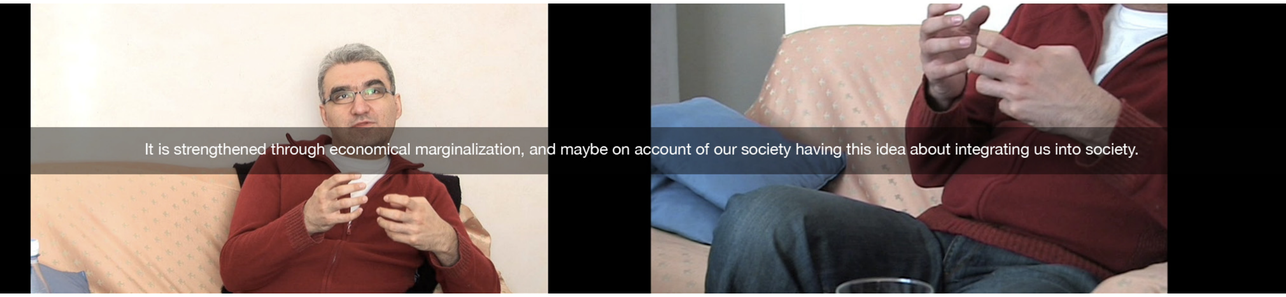
Throughout the interview material from Husby and the Northeast there is an imperative to imagine a definition of universal good that is not opposed to self-definition. The responsibility involved in self-definition is based in equality. We will now turn to Henry David Thoreau, writing in the 1850s, during the years of rapid growth of the railway which can be seen metaphorically as a *grid* (one track, still in use, touching the pond). He made a clear statement about the necessity of taking the step from conviction to practice, or, in our situation, to add imaginative practice to that what seems socially incoherent and incomprehensible:

> There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but no philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live. To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically. (Thoreau 2003:16)

Background: how buildings allow for self-definition on an overheating planet 1

If we consider a possible future for collective housing, what role can be played by off grid homes and their appeal for the people we have interviewed? Peter Buchanan, the curator of the exhibition *Ten Shades of Green* (tenshadesofgreen.org), lists ten aspects of sustainable architecture; 1) low energy/high performance; 2) renewable resources; 3) recycling; 4) the energy total of house production, or “embodied energy”; 5) long life, loose fit [the possibility to rearrange space according to changed use]; 6, total lifecycle costing; 7, being “embedded” in a place; 8, access within the urban context; 9, health and happiness; 10, community and connection. Buchanan notes that

> green design is not only about energy efficiency, and it is not purely a technical matter. Instead it involves a whole nexus of interrelated issues, the social, cultural, psychological and economic dimensions. (tenshadesofgreen.org 20080215)


It is strengthened through economical marginalization, and maybe on account of our society having this idea about integrating us into society.

If we would apply Buchanan’s first six criteria for sustainability, we would compare off grid houses to the houses in Husby *from a technical point of view*. Needless to say, the houses represent completely different situations (historical, economic and social) that makes such a comparison difficult. However, the criteria of 7 to 10 are broad enough so they are not limited to the architectural field. In this case, the differences are not as clear and the benefits of moving from the building of housing estates to ecological housing become more difficult to predict, because the factors involved. Any worthy green building policy must deal with the relationship between building and urban planning and the social consequences of these practices. In a neoliberal world without conflicting imaginary futures, the *form* in which you create your life overshadows the choices you are able to make; choice is cleansed of its social dimension and becomes seen only within individualized, and mostly aesthetic discourse. The American situation shows quite clearly that agency is directly linked to individual control of resources. In arguing for individual control over resources we are not saying that collective housing impedes self-definition. Rather, we are arguing for a form of tenancy in which housing resources are publicly funded but the stewardship from staircase to community is granted to the tenants. Off the grid housing can be criticized as a replica of the cold war model of housing, where self-definition is defined according to *purchasing power*. There is something paradoxical, and even contradictory about claiming responsibility for saving the planet and then scraping up resources to build a single-family house. Amona repeatedly connected the off griders' living conditions with economic privilege, and Yohannes saw them as an extreme form of individualism. How does our orientation to the right to travel, self-definition and community allow us to imagine the future?

I don't give them any. I don't think they make good decisions. And I think, well I don't think life is any better when it's more complicated.

Background: individuals, islands and bunker idealism

Islands may be ecological refuges, monocultural deserts, social/political islands, ghetto-enclaves or Bantustans, as the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Colberg-Schrader and Oberhuemer describe the "islandization" of children in Western cities where "processes of functionalization and specialization of different areas are particularly apparent" (Colberg-Schrader and Oberhuemer 1993:59). Car culture leads to commuting between *activity islands*. City islands also exist within the sciences: Paul Crutzen, a scientist at the Max Planck Institute notes that "urban heat islands" with "increasing concentration of pollutant emissions" will change local and global "meteorological conditions":

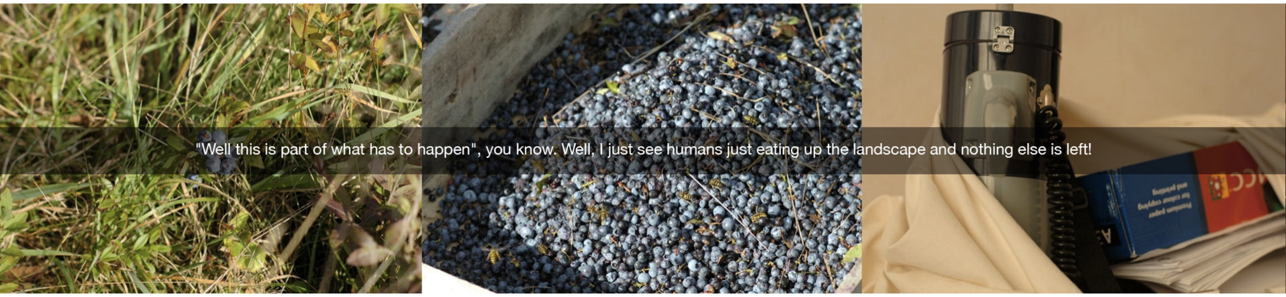
> With the projected doubling of the world population within 50 years, the two- to five-fold growth in world-wide energy production and 10-15-fold increase

> in world economic output projected during this century, and the doubling of urbanization within the next two decades, with 80% of the world population then living in cities and megacities, especially in Asia, it will be important to explore the consequences of combined urban heat and pollution island effects for meso-scale dynamics and chemistry, and regional and maybe global climate. (Crutzen 2004:3540)

If we imagine an island, it would be solid and we would be able to view it from above in its entirety and see the completed physical perimeter surrounding it. An island can be understood as a place of "negative entropy", a nurturing cocoon to those living on it, but from the outside and on a distance it may be seen as a looming threat. Both Thoreau's *Walden* cabin and the Nearing's Maine house resemble an island, with the allure of individual fantasies of independence. Although both Thoreau and also the Nearing's were mavericks they were still well connected to society. Thoreau's and the Nearing's relative spatial isolation was essentially voluntary: an effect of their political convictions and relationship to nature. Literary examples of islands include Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* via Verne's *The Mysterious Island* and perhaps Tournier's *Friday; or, The Other Island*, with its anthropological soap continuation in the TV-sequel *Lost*, in which people appear as either simple or not to be trusted. Kurt Schwitters *Merzbau*, Duchamp's installation of the 1938 *International Surrealist Exhibition*, Allan Kaprow's *Environment*, the whitewashed bunkers, *Série de cellules*, by Absalon, the N55's *Floating Platform* (a buoyant version of their *Spaceframe*) and *Escape Vehicles* by Andrea Zittel, are examples of islands within the visual arts field. Although they retain the imaginary of the identified-as-isolated subject, but shifting the focus to art's tradition of romantic self-reflexivity and auto-referentiality would risk abandoning a social and participatory interpretation and accept the objectal, albeit critical, institutional isolation as final.

in a cabin in the woods with no electricity, that had roots that way. But I'm more concerned: I think there's not going to be a choice.

The isolation of suburban communities and off griders exists within mixed, conflictual associations with identity and isolation. From the outside, Husby may appear as a village, both linked to and distanced from its surroundings by roads and walkways. It consists of close to thirty groups of four residential buildings surrounding a yard, and extends down the hill towards Järva field that delimit the space to the south, which you access by foot. There are also a number of smaller houses serving different purposes as daycares, laundry rooms, meeting spaces, and communal garages. As an individual your sense of scale and pace change as you approach Husby from the access motorway or subway, catching glimpses of the towering housing estate "islands", ignoring the smaller roads and escalators to the passages, gangways, the yards, the bushes, flowerbeds, and outer doors. From a distance, Husby is the "prison island", and Stockholm is the *Being There*-island. *If* neoliberal society makes it difficult to share with others, this dynamic also exists in spatial terms, since there are no other people around than your work mates, who are also your competitors, and possibly some select neighbors). If we continue to consider the neoliberal individual as "island", off griders are difficult to define as a collective social movement or a class, since their primary identification is with their property, which means that their sustainable future cannot really be shared with others. Off the grid homes need not the step-by-step slowing down arrival process (you leave the freeway, drive between the estates, park the car and continue by foot) as the Husby homes does. At first glance, the eight homes plus the other off grid places we visited could all be described as "islands" in their conventional self-containment: a delimited stretch of land, a clearing around the house from which you sometimes can spot remote power lines, a road separating the site from the "ocean" of the rest of society. From a functional perspective, the off grid houses are operating on a model of independency. For example: most of the off griders not only rely the energy, but also the food from their land.



"Well this is part of what has to happen", you know. Well, I just see humans just eating up the landscape and nothing else is left!

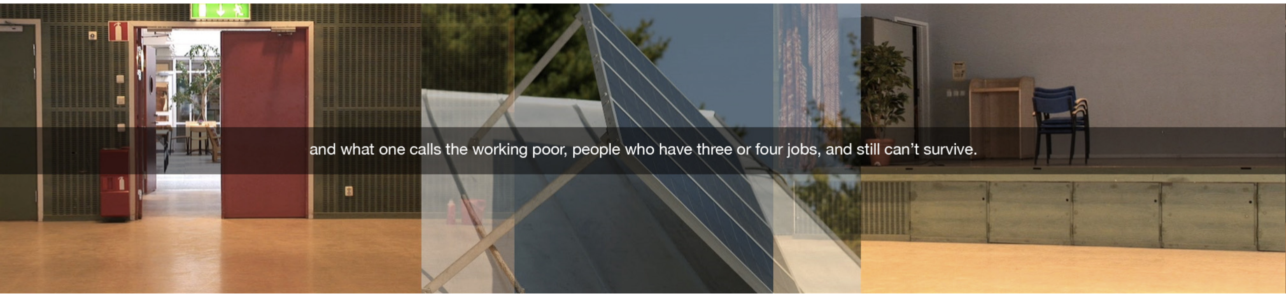
Climate change, as an inevitable effect of the flows within the globalized networks are produced by but also produce specific locations; its sprawling city islands, its infrastructural grids, its housing complexes and factory archipelagos. The globalized world is, in one or the other way, onboard very substantial and hazardous "vehicles of mass transportation" as in de Certeau's *metaphorai*: "To go to work or come home, one takes a 'metaphor'" (Certeau 1984:115). The vehicles of narration – which simultaneously are the vehicles of mass transportation – allows you to see things sieved through the narrative delimitations toward what is left outside as inert or left outside albeit resounding, but rather than being the narrators ourselves, we are caught up in transportation-stories. The western cultural *zone of proximal development* (Vygotskij 1978) – the difference between our cultural achievements aided or unaided by fossil energy consumption – is accompanied, even supported by the transportation industry. We are indeed being sieved. All of this is man-made, and even if we may produce life and genetically alter the properties of plants (we will be more precise about genetic modification later). The range of the laboratory successes as compared to the planetary scale ecological laboratory havoc is limited. In acknowledging this, we have to give up the limited rationality that is based on the presumed Hegelian division between the "island" of Mind/Spirit (including the idealism of Art) and the formlessness of Nature.

And it's kind of like when the deer population gets really high, or else when their land gets smaller and smaller,

> But the mind and its artistic beauty, in being 'higher' as compared with nature, have a distinction which is not simply relative. Mind, and mind only, is capable of truth, and comprehends in itself all that is, so that whatever is beautiful can only be really and truly beautiful as partaking in this higher element and as created thereby. In this sense the beauty of nature reveals itself as but a reflection of the beauty which belongs to the mind, as an imperfect, incomplete mode of being, as a mode whose really substantial element is contained in mind itself. (Hegel 1993:11)

In a footnote to an article called *The Work of Art in the Age of Biocybernetic Reproduction*, W.J.T. Mitchell heaves a deep sigh over the marginalization of the role of art and artists to jester-like secondary figures for Renaissance-court like biotechnology companies, in their quest for a ideal “biocybernetic” agent:

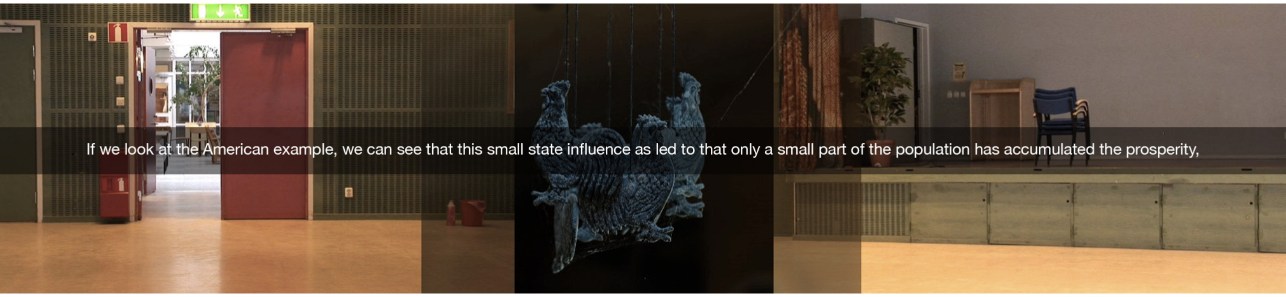
> The notion of an idealizing function for the artist, as a perfecter and improver of images (and perhaps of life-forms) seems to be displaced by work of this sort by an idealization of the biological scientist, who works to improve species through genetic engineering. Does this mean that the artist now is mainly consigned to counter-images of idealization, in which the “improvements” promised by genetics are critiqued, mocked, and satirized by the artist? Or is there still room for a positive role for the artist in the age of biocybernetics? (Mitchell 2003:500)


and what one calls the working poor, people who have three or four jobs, and still can’t survive.

Through keeping an eye on the productive forces which have their origins in modern claims for the *absolute* (such as biotechnology), the question of us as producers is: “What comes after art?” We are asking these questions as producers of “situated images”, engaging with aesthetics and still loyal to Hegelian absolute, as “the shaping power of the human collectivity over its own destiny” (Jameson 1998:77). This is perhaps another way of describing how the “situated” visual art discourse pushes for “the abolition of the aesthetic by itself and under its own internal momentum, the self-transcendence of the aesthetic towards something else” (Jameson 1998:76). To us artistic research is meaningful as practices of producing images, to work that fits within art conventions, but without the need for internal justification, according to the rules of the art context. Jameson’s text comes close to our understanding of self-definition that stick with the “shaping power”, or imaginary practice that reaches out “towards something else” beyond isomorphic definitions of art. This also means demystifying, and ultimately rejecting the transference of power from God to the artist embraced by bourgeois self-centered romanticism:

> For an artist's creative intelligence can truly express itself only when prompted by his intellect and when he is in a state of inspired rapture; it is then that he abundantly demonstrates his God-given powers and sublime ideas. (Vasari 1988:95)

In the bleak light of climate change, the irrationality of conceptual or physical "islandization" is eclipsed by globalization. We feel that Mitchell is trying to imagine a definition of the artist connected to self-definition, rather than the passive critique of the "artist-island" or art-institution. According to this definition, the artist needs to get his or hers hands dirty breaking the 19th century taboo that defined art's autonomy in terms of purposelessness. Art conventions, like all conventions, have repercussions elsewhere. These consequences become evident in the "casting" processes in the global art economy: curators of biennales and international art fairs having continual, insular and self-reflexive discussions over the reproduction of the globalized artist. This frivolous power-play does not escape its inevitable *other*:


If we look at the American example, we can see that this small state influence as led to that only a small part of the population has accumulated the prosperity,

> Governments and the lawyers they hire lean over backwards to draw a line between the free circulation of capital, finance, investments and the businesspeople who carry them, welcoming them and wanting them to multiply and the transmigrations of the job-seekers which they, not to be outdone by their electors, publicly abhor – but such a line cannot be drawn and, if drawn, would be promptly obliterated. (Bauman 2001:101p)

The pressures of globalization, as they are manifested through environmental devastation, on global culture need to discuss cultural norms in their own terms and simultaneously be reminded of the shaping power of the "*ultimate norms*" that regulate a real and symbolic economy:

> When it is said that it is economically more rational to transport heavy goods from A to B by means of trucks than by means of horses, it does not exclude the possibility that it is unwise to transport any heavy goods from A to B” (Naess 1989:107).

A Hegelian perspective on the environmental effects of globalization would be no different from any situation where the right to self-definition is infringed upon by liberalism, causing a breach between individual and collective rights. However, to overcome an “autonomy alien to man” that is directly linked to nature-as-product, a re-evaluation must take place because the crisis brings with it a defining moment for global democracy. Island utopias or dystopias are illusions because in reality we do not actually live in isolation. Their scale and scope are only folds in the vector of globalization. The “islands” of self-definition cannot be seen as either separate from their environment and social context. *Only a democracy of all life forms can claim responsibility at this historical moment when all terrestrial life is experiencing the consequences of climate change.*

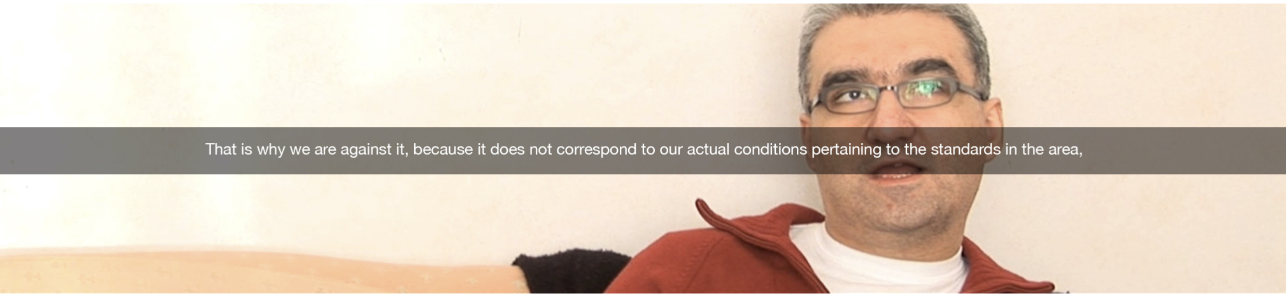
We asked her if the choice that she had made could be brought together with community.

Vi frågade henne hur hennes val kan förenas med en samhällsgemenskap.

Background: self-definition could well be a spacious piece of pie

A reciprocal transnational space is also transconceptual. If we try to perceive globalization from above, we would see it as an aggregate, or the coalescence of disembodied institutional power. Whereas the concept of travel, as we conceive of it, represent a manifold horizontal accumulation of singular perspectives “on the ground”. To a certain extent, our project can be seen as an inconclusive attempt to map out the reciprocal *third space* between sixteen different perspectives. Working with images allows us to “zoom in” on the micro-level of a particular places and experiences, but also to “zoom out” to the concepts, topics and ideas brought up in the dialogues as universal tools. Self-definition is inseparable from travel; both are inseparable from community. Our artistic research has meant a process moving from the scattered “islands” and archipelagos of institutionalized art towards other practice-based communities. As a process, self-definition involves navigating *with* and *toward* an imaginary future but *without a script*. Moving towards an imagined place will mean re-negotiating conventions, but this renegotiation will not necessarily be seen in explicitly political terms, as grassroots activism for example. When asked if he saw off grid living as a critique of society at large, Ed reflected on his motivations for living off the grid:

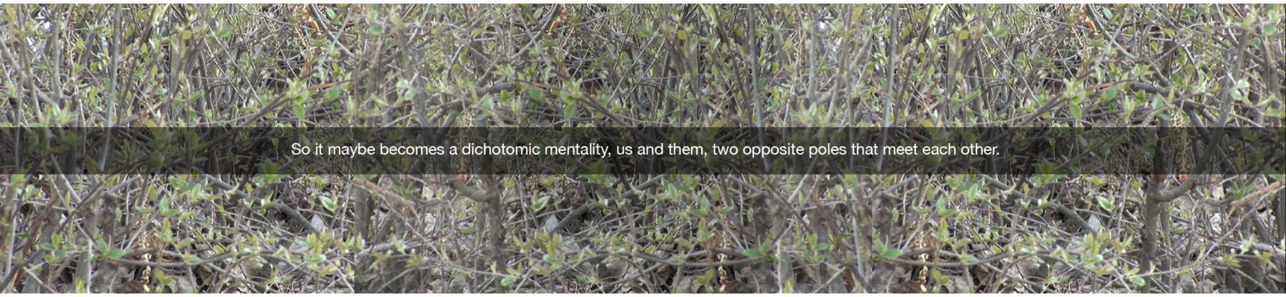
> I am glad I am still physically able to get out to do the things that I like to do and it is much more immediate and gratifying living like this and I don’t think it is so much political as just realizing in general that we are a very wasteful society. It is going to take one person at a time because I don’t think the government can make the people do it, it is usually going to take more for people to want to do it on their own and maybe being ahead of the curve and just doing it because they want to and because they know it is right and a typical major change I don’t think will happen till a crises or catastrophe occurs and I don’t find the government pro active until something major happens and then they will react but then there are pockets of people who for whatever reason look ahead and conceive maybe what is coming and are willing to do their little part early on and I just feel satisfied that we have done it, I wish I had done it sooner, but it is better late than never. (Ed and Karen 20070927)



That is why we are against it, because it does not correspond to our actual conditions pertaining to the standards in the area,

Self-definition, as we now understand it, does not have to start from making a conscious decision to redefine one’s identity. Self-definition could be related to a highly specific “compound” community, which for all intents and purposes could be reactionary. But that would not fit our description. Instead, it can be a result of moving towards or away from something more general; the urge to travel is awakened because of a social, economic or psychological situation that denies what one imagines. For example, through moving away from social violence, and to one's imagined the future home, one gradually becomes aware of the processual nature of self-definition, which, at least with our interviewees, develops at the same pace as the new home is "produced" and/or appropriated.

> this was the second home originally, and when I sold my house-house, my real house, I started coming up here in the weekends, I started coming up here for weeks off, and just absolutely fell in love with the area itself, and I think living off the grid was more like a default choice, more like I didn't have a choice, I mean there will never be power up here, I don't know, we didn't talk about that? But because of the national forest there will never be power there will never be a phone, so your sort of have to make do with what you have, so a lot of it was kind of accepting what you have and developing it to a point where you are comfortable and you have the resources that you need, and then making do with the rest.
>
> Once I started living here full time or being here on the weekends, it definitely became like my personal project, like for myself and for the property, because you learn so much about what you can handle, or what your limits are when you are up here alone, and the also, you know, what the property is. There's so much about it! That every time you do a project or every time you cut another tree down and you open things up and you really see what's there, it's like an ongoing project, you know, it's always changing, like the stone wall that I built down there, terracing the lot, and every-time you come back after up having been gone for a week and there a new flowers blooming, and like when the thrushes left this year I was so sad, like the property has got a life of its own, and so, you just kind of have to… it's like sailing or using clay, you don't have control over it, like you can harness it, but you never have control. (Jerusha Murray 20061001)



So it maybe becomes a dichotomic mentality, us and them, two opposite poles that meet each other.

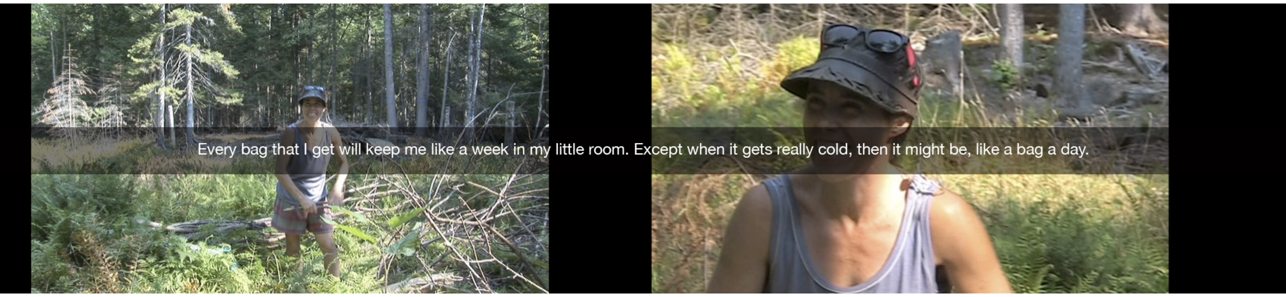
Jerusha describes this “zooming in and out” between concrete experience and abstract concepts, using the language of movement and change: “coming from/going to” or “before/after”. This is a continuous and dialectical travel between the individual and community that does not conclude with a “happily ever after”. Instead, self-definition involves adapting to a given situation, which can mean not only claiming space, as a tactical appropriation, but it is also a way that people can act without being locked into a fixed sense of identity or origin.

> I really appreciate her strength and I don’t know why she suddenly seems to be so relaxed, and you know, maybe in some way she has accomplished what she wanted to do. She has succeeded. And then you say what do I actually want?
>
> *You saw that she was crying because of things that you said made her see her own accomplishment. That she had arrived in a community.*

One does not have, in practice, the possibility to choose where one lives. So there are complex mechanisms, which affect each other.

> She spoke of the surroundings too, neighborliness. It’s a complete scenario which has a beginning and an end, one dreamed about building a house there, she visited it several times until she decided now she was going to buy the place, which means you have an image in your mind about what you want, and it’s not something she inherited from her family, it’s not something that someone else decided upon, ok, it was her boyfriend who started it off, but then she was alone with the whole thing, she did it alone. Then there is a beginning and an end and then I think one can be satisfied, and inside you feel great relief, I think so. I had the same problems, but for me it was very different, because the dream of building a crafts centre in Husby was a huge image in my head and in the heads of the others struggling for the same goal. And so when the project was shelved: I felt a great sorrow and a great disappointment with myself. I couldn’t understand that there were many different factors resulting in it not being built, I thought the whole thing was my fault, that I had failed, why didn’t I think more about the whole

situation? To have analyzed it better and succeeded? Why hadn't I done that? It was a deep thing. But at the same time, I don't know how I would have survived? In Husby people know that it was me who was talking about this project that we were going to... no, there is not going to be a crafts centre, they are going to build a swimming pool instead. Then you can feel the pressure you get from Husby, because the craft centre was a kind of immigrant project, you see. And when it failed, all the immigrants went; "Aha, we told you so! The Swedes would never build the centre. You are stupid Ishmael, God damn it, go and find a job." It was that kind of feeling. Then you become, you know, kind of like this... so I said let's forget about it and spoke with Mohammed Derashan who's on the local council, and said that I couldn't blame the state, I couldn't blame anyone. I take the responsibility, even if Svenska Bostäder has let me down and the whole project, I can't carry the idea that it's Svenska Bostäder that's caused the problem, it's my problem, it's me, it's me who's failed, not Svenska Bostäder. But I could also see that it wasn't a shut door, I could see people who had been part of the project actually succeeding in different ways so maybe what we did was a good thing, though – we started something in everybody's heads. (Ishmael Fatty 20071215)


Every bag that I get will keep me like a week in my little room. Except when it gets really cold, then it might be, like a bag a day.

Background: a brief history of institutional failure and the aesthetic of disbelief

This discussion on failure (in which Ishmael places himself as the mediator) and the tendency to personalize structural conditions is, as we see it, connected to what tentatively could be called an *aesthetic of disbelief* which we are defining as a situation where individuals "seek biographical solutions to systemic contradictions" (Ulrich Beck in Bauman 2001:101). If an individual achieves systemic change it will be seen as an expression of strength and heroism, but if nothing happens and events turn sour, it will be declared to be a personal failure. The odds for an individual to achieve systemic change are long, particularly when it comes to changes on a wider community scale. When the project you set out to accomplish does not materialize, and failure becomes evident, the possibility opens for an aesthetic of disbelief to deal with the individual experience, and a separation between self-definition and community seems to make sense:

> Seeking with near certainty of failure is, however, a harrowing experience – and so a promise to relieve the seekers of the obligation to go on searching sounds sweet. (Bauman 2001:101)

In other words, this situation is about identities, as well as conflicting means and ends. If influencing Svenska Bostäder to build a craft centre is the end goal, then the inability to mobilize the housing corporation would, in fact be a failure. This situation also points to the unwillingness of governments, housing corporations and other bureaucratic agencies to listen to their own constituents, as one of the characteristics of neoliberalism. Ishmael admits he has failed, but he also points to positive developments which were set in motion by this conflict between the interests of his crafts community and the public housing company: people realized that Svenska Bostäder was not acting in their best interests. However, this is only a failure by a certain preconception about the acting bodies and their respective means and ends. A dominant interest is an agent who is "free to change one's decisions once they cease to satisfy; to be the source of a constant uncertainty in the condition of the dominated" (Bauman 2001:93). The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argues in his book *Community* that group identities are, regardless of their composition, ascribed by a collectively institutionalized normality. Minority communities "are first and foremost products of 'enclosure from outside', and second, if at all, the outcome of self-enclosure" (Bauman 2001:90). A strong sense of community appears when a marginalized group "finds the premises of their collective existence threatened and who construct out of this a community of identity which provides a strong sense of resistance and empowerment"

[redacted]

(Weeks cited after Bauman 2001:100). The coming together of Husby as a positive social identity was catalyzed by the social violence inflicted on the residents by the institutionalized normality represented by Svenska Bostäder. It is easy to become caught in a web of mutually negative strategies of recognition, with the goals of the “separation and ghettoization of ‘alien elements’, which in turn reverberate in the impulse to self-estrangement and the self-enclosure of the forcefully ghettoized group” (Bauman 2001:103). This tension between institutions and communities where “the tendency to communal enclosure is prompted and encouraged in both directions” (Ibid) seems to be played out on all levels in a neoliberal society, where collective social interaction and long-term commitment is reduced to short lived protests guided by individualization and the market. While we acknowledge that we do not have to deal with the loss of our homes, or the stigmatization of the places where we live, we immediately recognize ourselves in Ishmael’s situation. We can immediately transplant his description into our context, although we should also acknowledge that, as artistic researchers, we are actually working within an academic institution, which indicates our involvement in the dominant culture. However, we are under coercive institutional pressure to “normalize” our work, and it is far from evident that we will be able to continue receive stable institutional support for further research. As we have discussed, there are also tensions inside the art institution between art and artistic research, well as between the art institution and the right to self-definition.

So I am much more, like, well I talk about the coming famine, I probably talked about that last time, and I think we're in for it, you know.

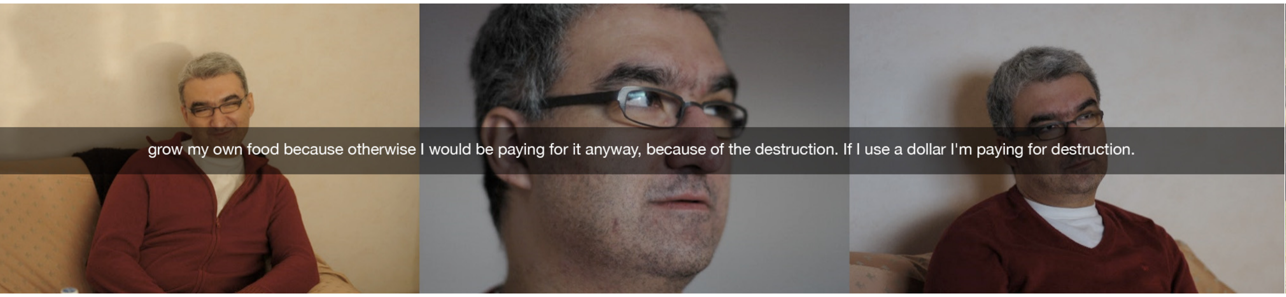
This is the point where an “artistic” identity and a surviving modernist *aesthetic of disbelief*, (based on the failure of the individual striving to vindicate his/her self-definition versus the institutional order), offers solace. Accepting this frame as given, as Jean-Paul Sartre noted, entails a “realistic” handing over of agency and authority to sedimented history (the history written by the victors), and as a consequence accepting the role as “a revealing person, a pure intermediary between these objects and their consequences. *Through me* they realize their function and produce their effects with certainty" (Sartre 1995:69). The subject objectifies him or herself. Our worry is that it becomes all too easy to heroize one's role in these situations, within a bourgeois-romantic artistic account of the conflict. To counter this tendency, we feel it is useful to draw attention to other perspectives, other goals, in some cases using them to intervene in a situation. Romanticism offers an escape from institutional determinism (countering the logic whereby acknowledging power leads to accepting it). However, the problem is how the "unconventional" or "transgressive" is contained by art institutions as "invention" and/or "criticality" without any consequences, so that, whatever is said by the artist "the end could not be *proposed* but imposed" (Ibid). What Sartre here indicates is the presence of a totalizing idealism of ends as imposed by dominating institutions: institutions proliferate a reductionist or even epistemic measuring that turn rich experience into predictable examples.

because she's not burning wood and she's not growing a garden. And so she like's to just come out and do something now and again,

Only ends are creative, and, not to be mistaken, institutions monopolize ends: an/one end outside of the embodied and situated with the capacity to describe and hierarchically compare individuals perusing their self-definition as success or failure.

> If the simple decision to realize this end entails the automatic compliance to the means, which so many people dream of, the result would be that the means exist only *through* the end, and for the end. (Sartre 1995:70)

The failure appears within the mismatch between the idealism of ends and the real situation. The institutionalized end at once summons up and hollows out the means, just as commercials displace subjectivity and desire, and by totalizing, generalizing theories of the imagined goal, which are both inadequate and heavy-handed, in the face of the complexities of the everyday, where "the resistance of the situation" occurs (Sartre 1995:71). Ishmael's situation presents two prospects of freedom; first, freedom as the power to identify and enact change in a specific context, and second, freedom as existing outside the ends-means definition of power and failure “in different ways” (Ishmael Fatty 20071215). In other words: the awareness and the solidarity among the Husby residents produced by the conflict could be seen as a “third space”. In this case, freedom is not an expressive gesture, “where reality always remain on the level of possibility” (Sartre 1995:71) which takes place outside of history. Rather, it is understood as a transgressive, socio-political resistance, reflecting a specific community and, in Ishmael’s situation, necessarily constructed as an “aesthetic of disbelief”. Beginning with an assumed failure, the aesthetic of disbelief can lead one to question dominant interests, particularly by looking to other victories outside the framework of dominant interests.


grow my own food because otherwise I would be paying for it anyway, because of the destruction. If I use a dollar I'm paying for destruction.

Background: what image makes it worth losing the agency to change?

Paul Trembath has written an interesting text about the life of Jean-Paul Sartre, ridded with references to its main character but without mentioning the apprehension of Sartre on a Parisian street in June 1970 for selling the journal *La cause du peuple* [ina.fr]. Trembath reflects on the turn taken by Sartre late in life, when activism and local engagement came to overshadow his *oeuvre*; Sartre recognizes “the importance of strategic local rebellions” as consequential to his writing, and not as ”particular texts, something of a first for the endlessly writing Sartre; he does it in his acts” (Trembath 1991). This indicate an ”aesthetics of historical effects” or “an aesthetics of revolt” (Trembath 1991), an aesthetics of disbelief and a self-definition committed to ”the cumbersome and messy ties of dependency” of community involvement (Bauman 2001:107) This approach does not strive for ”the beautiful, the sublime, the innovative, the problematic”, but re-evaluates them “in terms of social efficacy”:

> Sartre came to demonstrate that the whole notion of private creativity – so much a reified part of our collective Western culture – needed to be reinvested with a sense of public effectiveness. That is, Sartre strove to reinvent the concept of the aesthetic not merely in commonly expected terms of private expression and production, but in terms of public and historical effectivity. For the later Sartre, “artwork” was no longer something one did in quietistic solitude, only to emerge publicly with the hermetic results of one’s private labor (a painting, a play, an opera, a new theory of art, and so forth). The aesthetic became the entire realm of social invention – a realm utterly mediated by our continuous responsibility for the freedom and power of self-determination of other social “selves”. (Trembath 1991)

Referring to Sartre does not undo the question of failure, or the difficulty of creating institutional change. If we consider Ishmael’s initiative according to other criteria, it becomes more difficult to say whether he has in fact failed, as he has challenged the balance in the aesthetic discourse between fine art and craft, to undermine the limitations of private labor and ownership, and replace them by the popular struggle for the collective workshop at Husby Gård. The status quo has essentially been left intact – artists like Ishmael are still bound to fail if they stray from trivial institutional mapping of genre borders and institutionally defined ends, and activists in Husby cannot take the step from the streets into the political decision making process. But if the exclusion from institutionalized politics has in fact lead to a broad mobilization of the Husby residents, have they not, in the long run, won? If we shift from talking about the situation in Husby to our own careers as artists, we have not really been successful in our “personal” i.e. *brand identity experience*, in terms of grants and job prospects. The growing unwillingness to play the brand game and the shift of interest towards research in our projects, as well as the weak and contested identity of artistic research, could easily collapse our awkward relationship to institutions into a sense of

I tried to do it fast this time and hire people, I had money form that other land, and I was avoiding paying any capital gains to the government.

personal failure. Maureen Reed, a researcher working with the social dimensions of environmental management, contextualizes success and failure from a feminist perspective in relation to a distant and abstract "public policy focus", which is also the case with artistic research within academia. On being informed that she has been unsuccessful with a funding application, she is accused of lacking "prior experience in feminist research", which can be interpreted as a general problem with emerging disciplines such as gender studies, a "presumed dubious relevance" of her research to "aims of the funding agency" which does not respect issue-based research, and "a desire to 'make a difference' both theoretically and in the lives of my research subjects" (Reed 2002:138). This is the question we are obliged to continually ask ourselves, but are unable to answer. Interventionist research, like Reeds' and in some ways our own, is also in an awkward position in relation to traditional academic values of individual knowledge production established through disinterest and distance from the messy problems of everyday life.

We both went towards civilization as soon as we split up, because we needed other people.

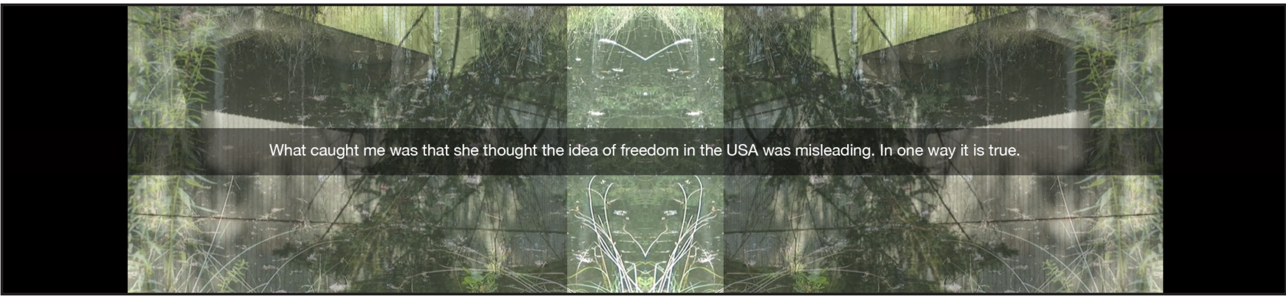
Why is it then, as Mitchell earlier suggested, that the "biocybernetic" scientist seems to have a more captivating narrative role than an artist, a narrative that art in many ways tries to emulate? The widespread sense of crisis, illustrated by neoliberal economics and the never-ending "war on terror", causes the social imaginary to become so transparent that it reveals its artificiality and hollowness. Without contact with reality we are left with conspiracy theories and a sense of unreality in the corridors of power, the paranoia towards a perceived "dark side", forcing world leaders to "spend time in the shadows in the intelligence world" (Cheney 20011016). Our answer to this overall sense of crisis has been to follow the specificity of the dialogues and images before turning to theory. In the seminal essay *On the History and Present Condition of Geography: An Historical Materialist Manifesto* issues David Harvey a stern warning not to "retreat into the supposed particularities of place and moment, resort to naive empiricism, and produce as many *ad hoc* theories as there are instances" (Harvey 1984:8). Harvey, who comes out of an orthodox Marxist politics, does not approve of “ambiguity” as a “basis for science” even though it “may be preferable to rigid and uncompromising orthodoxy” (Ibid). Refraining from theorizing and embracing ambiguity was of course a convention of the art field well before the postmodernism Harvey argued against. Since the fall of the Berlin wall, 9/11 and the rising awareness of globalization, un/orthodox ambiguity has been superseded by ambiguity in service of institutionalized power. However, the situation has also been marked by a growing interest in practice-based theory and the pluralities of theory from below. Our hope for artistic research as a discipline is similar to Harvey’s hopes for geography: to become the ”flash-points for the crystallization of new conceptions of the world and new possibilities for active intervention” (Ibid). In order for this to happen, the function and purpose of ambiguity in aesthetic practice must reworked, in parallel to a re-negotiation of the principles of art and scientific research. Science (as with Harvey and Critical Geography – both social and natural science) seemingly offers the precise remedy, but, and this is how we think about it, only if renegotiated thinking with the conceptual and visual situated image, and effectively relate to a social movement. Science plays on the fantasy of a straightforward step from imaginary to real, as well as that of being able to change nature according to one’s will. Based on Mitchell’s example, biotechnology does not attempt to change the dominant mode of production (in this case agriculture). Instead, scientists genetically modify plants so that they can better withstand drought created by climate change, all while absorbing more carbon dioxide at the same time:

we went to the threshing and winnowing across the fair, I guess they had some exhibit, and they said: "We learned more in the children's area".

> The continuing rise in atmospheric [CO2] is predicted to have diverse and dramatic effects on the productivity of agriculture, plant ecosystems and gas exchange. Stomatal pores in the epidermis provide gates for the exchange of CO2 and water between plants and the atmosphere, processes vital to plant life. Increased [CO2] has been shown to enhance

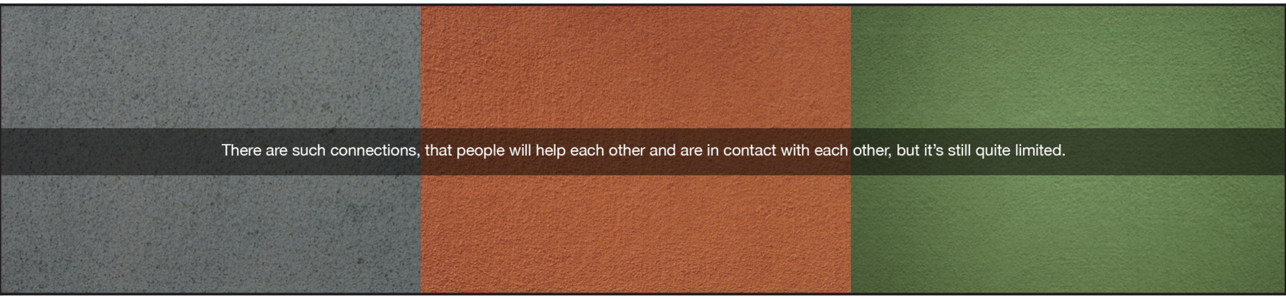
> anion channel activity proposed to mediate efflux of osmoregulatory anions (Cl– and malate2–) from guard cells during stomatal closure. However, the genes encoding anion efflux channels in plant plasma membranes remain unknown. (Negi et al. 20080227)

In this case the scientific model is naively justifying its value in society based on the dominant form of production. Isomorphism under neoliberal ideology operates according to a circular logic, so that it justifies ”corporations and businesses that want to step right in and take your money and provide those things for you” (David Beringer 20070921). The most vulnerable step would be to travel from the de facto image – which could also be described as the practiced, or deconstructed, or re-negotiated image of what is isomorphic to the general mode of production – to the possible image of self-definition and community. Why then does science receive funding more readily than artistic research? The answer is connected to the creation of value: in this case, scientific research offers both the clear and demonstrable outcomes.


What caught me was that she thought the idea of freedom in the USA was misleading. In one way it is true.

Of course, we should avoid a naive reliance on ”use-value” that ”seems to offer the most secure anchor of social ’value’ in a vague way” (Spivak 1985:118), i.e. to be able to renegotiate the unnecessary reality in practice. Gayatri Spivak has dealt with the social production of value in two essays, specifically the ethical relation between the ontic “madness” of the individual (that what is undifferentiated without any reference to knowledge) and ontological subjectivation (what exists as a difference to what does not exist), or in other words, developing an ethical practice that travels across the irresolvable divide between the ”self-proximate ontic ‘knowing’ and ontological knowledge” (Spivak 1996:155). Spivak points to values created in “the ways in which the subject ”subjects” itself through ”ability to know” (*pouvoir-savoir*)” (Ibid.). The value of a “situated image” *cannot be* private. Appealing to individual experience would only reproduce conservative definitions of the unconscious, that is: falling for the "madness of unification" (Castoriadis 1987:299) as a naturalized given, or self-centered neoliberal romanticism. In situations of supposed "failure", we hope to work with images as part of a process that will help those such as Yohannes feel that cultural and ecological crisis is not only their individual responsibility, but that they have agency and the possibility of changing dominant culture. We believe that artistic research is one way to represent the need to:

> break up the closure of the hitherto prevailing instituted society and open up a space where the activities of thinking and of politics lead to putting again and again into question not only the given forms of the social institution and of the social representation of the world but the possible ground for any such form. Autonomy here takes the meaning of self-institution of society (Castoriadis 1997: 17p)



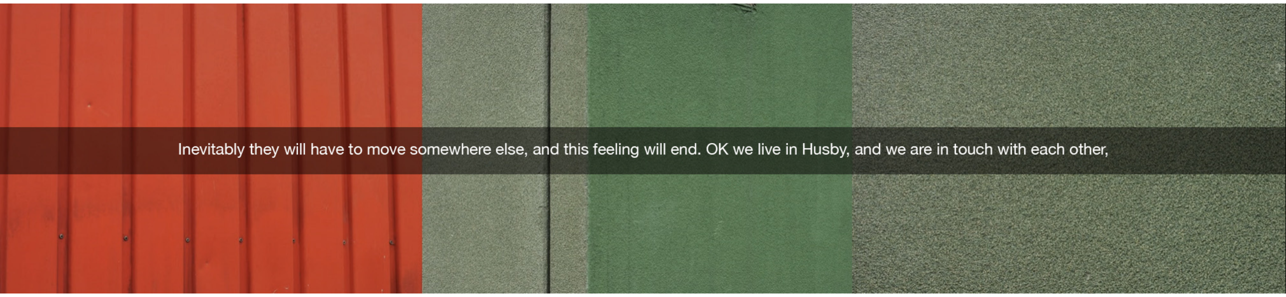
There are such connections, that people will help each other and are in contact with each other, but it's still quite limited.

Background: how buildings allow for self-definition on an overheating planet 2

Whether we like it or not, the images of the off grid houses could be seen as "selling" privatized experience in the dematerialized "knowledge economy " reflecting a certain isolationism, ascetics and neo-primitivism: the second round house next to the Canadian border that Elizabeth and Dan built from straw bales, and Ed and Karen's Cape Cod revival house by the Sullivan Harbor bay. In hindsight, we have found ourselves nostalgically longing for the *idea* of a particular place – both in US and in Husby – generated by the slippage of normalcy within images *we captured ourselves*. While these images documented the houses and their surroundings, the fantasy of a possible livable future slipped in as though it were superimposing itself on the documentary material. Eventually this fantasy replaced the actual memory.

According to the architect Kenneth Yeang, the ”given pre-requisites” for contemporary architecture are as follows: ”to build with minimal impact on the natural environment, to integrate the built-environment with the ecological systems (ecosystems) of the locality and if possible, to positively contribute to the ecological and energy productivity of the location” (Yeang glassfiles.com/library/11/article786.htm). But is this actually possible? And what does architectural and ecological integration mean, if it does not engage with social and community issues? Architect William McDonough and chemist Michael Braungart look at the thrust for universal technical solutions – not necessarily exclusively modern ones – with skepticism:

> even the most advanced building or factory in the world is still a kind of steamship, polluting, contaminating, and depleting the surrounding environment, and relying on scarce amounts of natural light and fresh air. (McDonough and Braungart 1998)



Inevitably they will have to move somewhere else, and this feeling will end. OK we live in Husby, and we are in touch with each other,

McDonough and Braungart have set up a scheme, starting off from three leading principles. The first principle is *equity and social justice*; this means asking if “a design depreciate or enrich people and communities?” The second principle is *economy*, since “commerce is the engine of change”. The third is *ecology* because it “refers to environmental intelligence. Is a material a biological nutrient or a technical nutrient?” (McDonough and Braungart 1998). Using an example from Mexico, we can compare Husby to another North American situation where the “federal governments shift to market economy, and its consequently diminished participation in the social problems of the country” (Palleroni 2006:48) also has a direct impact on housing. The architect-activist Sergio Palleroni worked for two years setting up a “savings and credit support group” with Yaqui Indian women in Mexico before the building of their new homes began in 2004. Palleroni provides a model for sustainability that does not only address environmental concerns, but also begins with creating a self-empowered community:

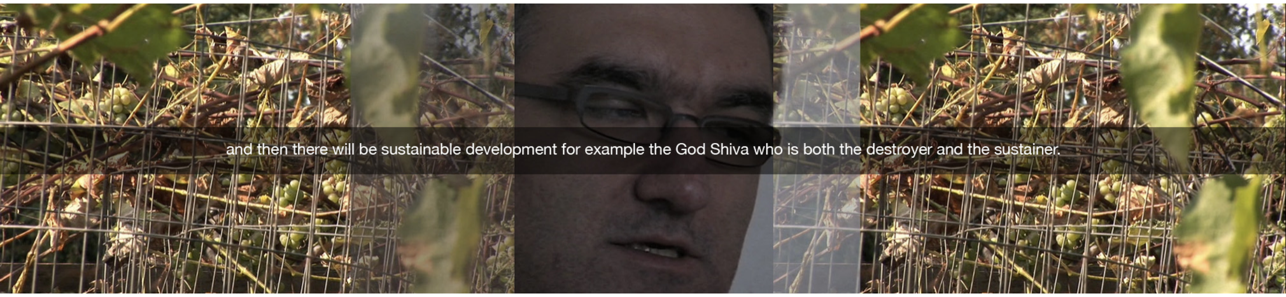
> 6 months serve to establish the groups [Sic] identity as a social safety net and support group in service of economic education and integration into the economic life of the larger community. (Palleroni 2006:47)

The building style and some of the techniques drew from indigenous traditions, such as adobe brick. However, another outcome of the project was perhaps more important in the long term:

> the emergence of organized citizen groups which provide the marginalized Yaqui individual, a social and political base of support by which to address their economic, political and social situation. The result of this housing program is therefore not only sustainable, and affordable homes for a segment of society who would have no other economic means by which to finance them, but the creation of citizen groups, organized to overcome the difficulties that the poor have in Mexico to get a home but with the long term outcome that the civic society of the Municipality of Cajeme is reinforced. (Palleroni 2006:47)

Then we would be demanding power and that would be exciting in relation to democracy and the power of the citizen to decide for themselves.

Could a similar process of empowerment take place in Husby? The starting point in this case is a neighborhood's right to self-definition. And as earlier mentioned: crisis opens a gap between the present as real and the present as socially meaningful. This gap is tentatively overcome through specific political struggle, which asserting self-definition to a sense of community. The monoculture of Sweden's 1960s were demonized in the media as filthy, poorly built, and inhumane: public housing suburbs, the slab blockhouses and the lifeless public spaces (Ericson, Molina and Ristilammi 2002). Suburbs are associated with inertness and passivity; historically speaking, this has a *metaphysical* significance. Rereading Hegel, John Whiteman notes that architecture acts on "external inorganic nature" to become "cognate to mind", but that it remains "external": "the ideal of concrete spirituality does not admit of being realized" (Whiteman 1987:7). Hegel defines architecture as “symbolic”, ”the prime exemplar of a time and place” (Krukowski 1986:282), from the perspective of the “Spirit” architecture was seen as unable to “transgress” its materiality. In Sweden, immigrants are associated with suburbs and their proper place is seen to be substandard public housing – as though they cannot manage their own living situations. Immigrants are seen to represent inertia, body, materiality; these kinds of projections position them as *other* to “enlightened”, institutional rationality. This sort of stereotyping is certainly convenient to those wishing to undertake building or forced renovation on a massive scale. This authoritarianism in architecture and urban planning is reflected in shifts in urban planning from satisfying communal needs on a material level, towards processes of city branding and creating symbols of spectacular aesthetic freedom, represented by “trophy buildings” such as the aforementioned Guggenheim Bilbao, Malmö’s *Turning Torso* and the skyscraper hotel which will replace Kista Science Tower as Kista’s tallest building. These architectural showpieces literally overshadow the ordinary inhabitants’ practices of everyday appropriation of space, and it opens up the hiatus between a desirable population and the existing population. A trophy building is a


and then there will be sustainable development for example the God Shiva who is both the destroyer and the sustainer.

> landmark property that is well known by the public and highly sought by institutional investors such as pension funds and insurance companies. Generally one-of-a-kind architectural designs, with the highest quality of materials and finish, expensive trim. (Answers.com/topic/trophy-building 20071129)

Background: does cultural conservatism make globalization a grid-story already told?

When talking about housing, the interviewees constantly shift between talking about the present and speculating about the future. They consider the built reality where they live, and try to imagine themselves in within the situation of their counterparts in the project, as well as the possibilities they want to see realized. Globalization (defined here as travel/immigration) opens up a cultural heterogeneity that, as we see it, fundamentally challenges the opposition between insiders (with associations with familiar experiences) and outsiders, between place and space. These changes require a reconsideration of the construction of democracy, in particular the relation to physical space, including that of housing, according to what we see as principles of self-definition and community. For example, Western ethnographic museum collections are now being remodeled because of the realization that they reproduce colonial narratives through their display: globalization has brought once distant cultures to the doorstep of national identities and its connection to space. The reconsideration of democracy cannot take place without producing "viable institutions of political control and by the emergence of anything like a truly global culture" (Bauman 2001:97). The dominant cultures' way of representing other has to change from fascination and exoticism to the more mundane discussion on the equal right to self-definition:

> now there are more people coming from Africa, more people coming from central America, Latin America and I think its hard for those people now, I don't know if all those rungs of the ladder are really in place for them, or not. I didn't come from a wealthy family, my father's a minister, we didn't own our own house, as I was growing up, and at one point my parents were able to buy a house of their own. The way that I was able to do it was my wife and I both had jobs, we bought land first, because we could not afford to buy land and a house either in Portland or anywhere at that point. We, so we kept, we had the land for 3 or 4 years before we could start to afford to build a house. We built a little cabin to live in while we built the house, and then I built most of the house myself and with, with a helper that I hired. And if I had had to pay somebody else to build the house for me I wouldn't have it.

It is cheaper than a ready-made house?

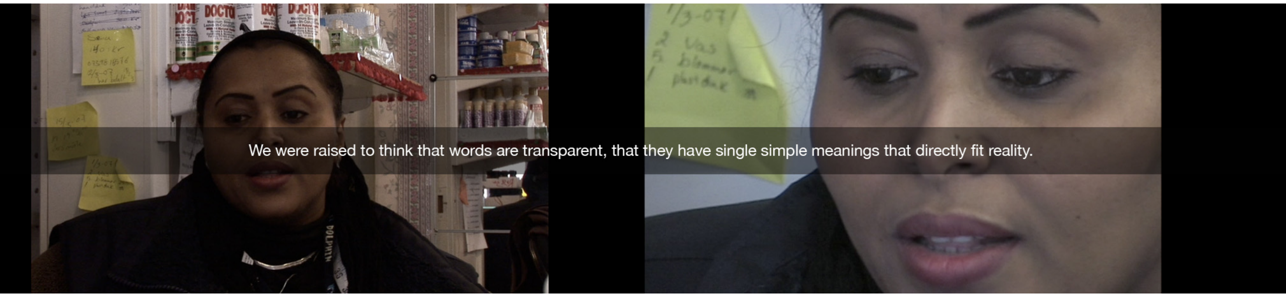
Yeah, half the costs, as buying close to Portland.

And the experience to live in a self built house?

Well that's, I think, there would be other ways to do it, we could have had saved up our money until we had enough to buy a another house that was maybe close to Portland, but I got excited about building a house that was unique for me, that was my own, my own house, and…

That is still gratifying?

That is still gratifying! You know it's a lot of work and there are times when I want to have something done, I can't hire somebody to come and do it because but everything is a little quirky. But it's also not too quirky, so they can usually figure it out, or I have to do it myself. That's all right too.



We were raised to think that words are transparent, that they have single simple meanings that directly fit reality.

Now Husby is thoroughly planned...

I do, I can see the other side of it as well...

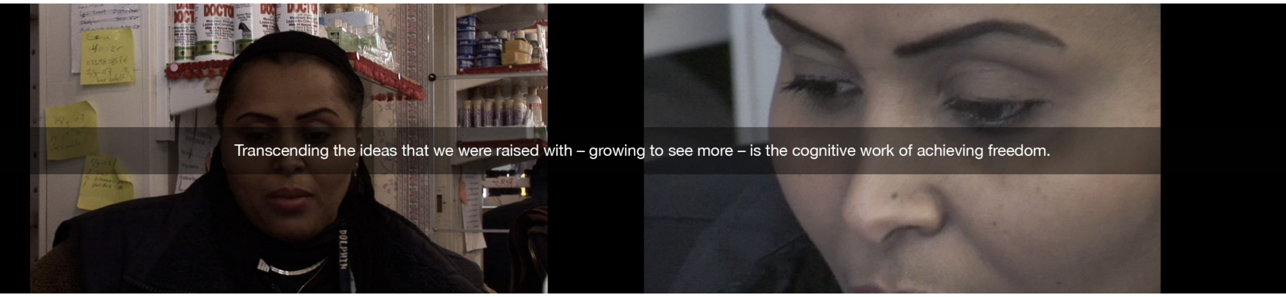
Husby… a package solution…

You know I might, I might have had a completely different feeling about it if that package had been available. I might have had other things that I would want to be excited about: whether it was education, or? I don't know, anything, music or art, or… you know I, I put a lot of my own, my own interest in art and aesthetics into the house. If I didn't have to build the house, maybe instead

> of, or alongside of being a teacher, I would be doing more artwork, if those, some of those basic needs were taken care of - and I would have to come up with my own plan for them, which I guess I did not have to – but I wasn't… I had to come up with something, and so I've looked for something that would have expressed more of my, more of my interests, more of my personality in what I had to do. I could see that, that… you know if I had the time that would be generated by living in an apartment or something small in Portland didn't need a car and didn't need any of these other things that yes, there might be more room in my life for something else. (David Beringer 20070921)

When Abdullahi looks at Dan's fields from the perspective of living in Husby, the picture is changed, if not inverted:

> there is a big difference, if you want to own land here it is very difficult, it's difficult to find land, and it costs a lot to own land, and then you have to pay taxes as well. It is not easy for poor people to find land where you can live your life and try and start something.


Transcending the ideas that we were raised with – growing to see more – is the cognitive work of achieving freedom.

> *Do you think there are Somalis in Sweden who would like to become farmers?*
>
> Yes there are, there are many who are interested in raising livestock here, and raising camels and goats. We are used to drinking camel milk, and you can't get camel milk here, so you see there's a big market here for raising camels and selling their products, yes that's true. You can't find land and it costs a lot, and then you can't import camels either, they say no because it is outside of Europe, so you see there are many difficulties.
>
> *Goats might have been easier here?*

> Yes you are allowed to have goats here, but you need land also, it's the land that you need for consumption, and it costs a lot, so you need one of these solar energy things like they use, but here it's cold and there's the winter. So there are a lot of costs involved, especially like in the houses where we live we pay quite a lot for our electricity costs, and so if you have to buy all the equipment for the plant then there are even more costs, so it's not so easy.
> *Here in Husby people live quite close to each other, while many of the people who live off the grid, they live mostly by themselves, they live quite far away from each other, and what do you think about that?*
>
> Well, I actually feel it is very good, with open landscapes and beautiful views.
>
> *So if you and other Somalis could chose freely do you think they would want to live in such a way?*

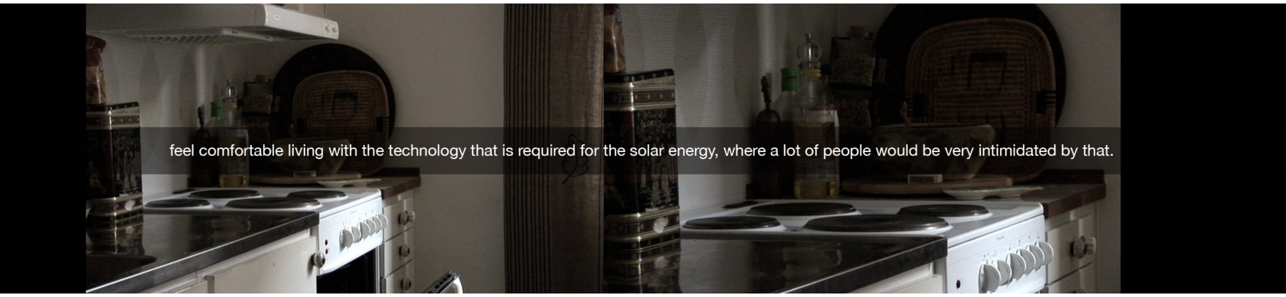
The gardening that Ed does, he does organically, no pesticides so in addition to not creating pollution we try not to use other things that will contribute to that.

> Yes, they would rather live in an open landscape, to be in touch with nature and the environment, yes there it is highly prized to live like that, it is important in many ways and valuable, to live close to nature. (Abdullahi Mohammed 20070114)

In this conversation it would seem as though we were associating Abdullahi's Somali community both with "nature" and a clearly defined national identity, language and a "common culture" in a national-romantic sense. However, it would be a serious mistake to define community in such a simplistic way. The discussion on cultural differences and the "awkward encounters" (Tsing 2005) they produce would limit the more fundamental discussions on power and agency. Not that cultural difference should be not respected, but globalization has marked many places with "floating populations, transnational politics within national borders, and mobile configurations of technology and expertise" (Appadurai 2002:274).

Globalization is about travel, but people travel according to their point of origin on a very unequal socio-economic world map. Appadurai describes how the prevalence of conservative gender roles puts disciplining pressure on women to remain a work force “vital to emerging markets and manufacturing sites”; the inseparability of local and global forces create tensions:

> If globalization is characterized by disjunctive flows that generate acute problems of social well-being, one positive force that encourages an emancipatory politics of globalization is the role of imagination in social life. The imagination is no longer a matter of individual genius, escapism from ordinary life, or just a dimension of aesthetics. It is a faculty that informs the daily lives of ordinary people in myriad ways: it allows people to consider migration, resist state violence, seek social redress, and design new forms of civic association and collaboration, often across national borders. (Appadurai 2002:274)

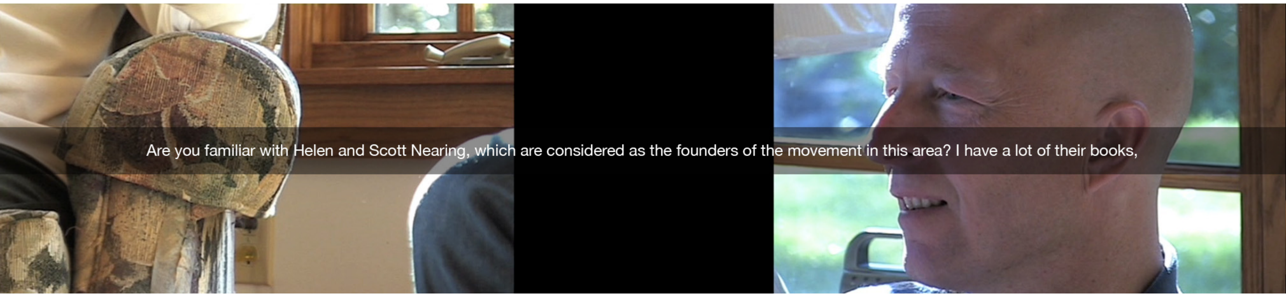


feel comfortable living with the technology that is required for the solar energy, where a lot of people would be very intimidated by that.

While we acknowledge the role that cultural self-determination has played within national liberation or indigenous rights struggles, our problem with static definitions of culture is that they are naturalized to coincide with dominant interests. Within this framework, it is difficult to consider how one might create change on the ground. Globalization is feared as a homogenizing force: “it is well possible that mankind will, overall, enrich itself economically from globalization, yet in the process become culturally destitute” (Redner 2004:3). Within this framework, any change to culture as a result of globalization would be seen as a loss of identity. In contrast, we see what is meaningful as coming out of everyday experiences and social practices. For example, on several occasions, we were invited to share meals and spend the night. Involving people in discussion on specific issues will irrevocably change the way that we conceptualize our identities, and it is yet another way we can understand Lefebvre’s notion of spatial appropriation.

Background: privileged practices to undo abstract space, and lack of choice

In *The Production of Space* Lefebvre historicizes the development of the “abstract” space of capitalism with its surveillance and borders, as following the “absolute” or animated space up until the Renaissance: “Absolute space, religious and political in character, was a product of the bonds of consanguinity, soil and language” (Lefebvre 1991:48). Abstract space was heralded by the invention of supervision and surveillance technologies such as the compass, chronometer, the census, techniques for the exact measurement of space, and technologies for industrial production. These ”are part of a strategy of those in power to ’grid’ or, as Gilles Deleuze would have it, ’striate’ the world to render it legible as a plotted text” (Conley 2001:485). In this sense, off griders have deliberately rejected the 24/7-production society. This is present in David’s critique of nuclear power, as well as Ed and Karen Curtis’ comments, which reveal a hope of undoing the contradictions *of* abstract space.



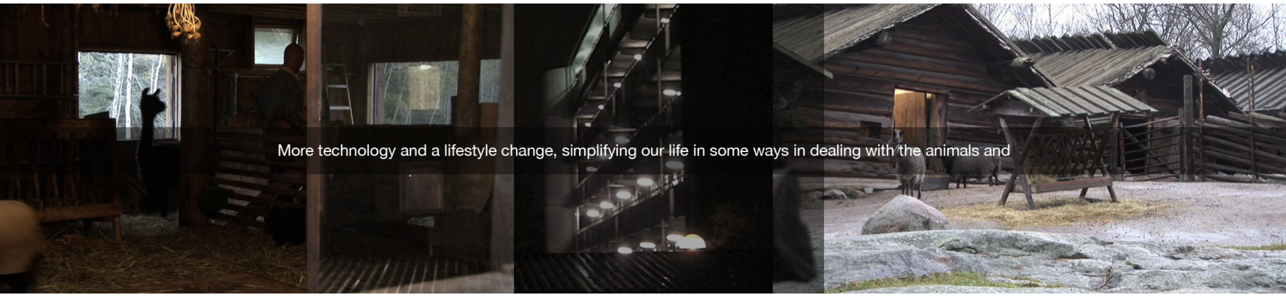
Are you familiar with Helen and Scott Nearing, which are considered as the founders of the movement in this area? I have a lot of their books,

Our neighbors down the road moved up here in the late seventies, he is an organic chemist and he makes pottery. Are you familiar with Helen and Scott Nearing which is considered as the founders of the movement in this area, and I have a lot of their books, living the good life and their whole philosophy and their homestead is still open and they give talks and they are very inspirational. I read a lot of their books before I came up here. They are very much pioneers or something else and they were able to publish and explain why they did it.

But they were also highly political.

Yes they were and he was blackballed from a lot of universities for his political thoughts he published some books that did not go over well and that kind of fostered his move back to the land, Vermont and then Maine. It stemmed from politics, I guess. Our motivation is not, more technology and a lifestyle

> change, simplifying our life in some ways in dealing with the animals and what Mother Nature brings presents different challenges, our day-to-day life is not necessarily simpler sometimes. The means to do things are much simpler we don't need computers
>
> *Would you say that you are in control of your lives in a different way?*
>
> Yes, much more immediate; when I worked there I was thought of as a number and you are looking to some day get a pension it just was not satisfying at all, I felt as if I was obligated to do it, because I had so much schooling and I happened to be good at it so I felt I should give back or at least make use of my education. But it did get to the point when I had enough and felt it had run its course and I was really ready for a change and I think this portion of my life will define me much more than what I did as an engineer (Ed and Karen Curtis 20070927)


More technology and a lifestyle change, simplifying our life in some ways in dealing with the animals and

The contradictions of abstract space and the economization of basic needs will not be resolved by returning to a pre-industrial way of life, but off grid living also does not necessarily mean activating references to absolute space. However, we must also admit that we avoiding a discussion on religious faith, expressing the sanctity of all life-forms, dazzled by a show on an evangelical television network about transportation which was framed by the slogan *What would Jesus drive?* (whatwouldjesusdrive.org). This television program clearly indicates a different relationship to arrival and departure, without changing one's circumstances. McKibben states that

> In this country the churches have a big role to play in this work, churches have a big role in almost anything that happens here! 80 or 85% of Americans identify themselves as Christians, and so understanding that means that working within those religious communities for change. And there are many

> religious communities who, for instance, have begun to undertake energy conservation very seriously.(McKibben 20061024)

When considering absolute space in terms of sanctity, we feel it functions as a kind of social imaginary, since it is hard to discuss it as one homogenous concept. The informality of off grid spaces is far too easily contrasted by the rigidity of industrial built space. The timeless abstraction and purity of absolute space could disrupt discussions on travel, and become a moral *punctum* in analyzing the direction of flows in network society. But the reference to absolute space is, as we see it, not necessary. After the development of abstract space, as Lefebvre described it, the concept of absolute space starts to become nostalgic if not reactionary. We see the definition of absolute space as connected to the simplistic and essentialist descriptions of immigrant communities, and most recently in the *clash of civilizations* discourse. Absolute space is articulated as the community of the chosen, justifying the segregation of the social and economic elite: referring to it seems to produce the same glib explanations from the gated communities to the world cities slums. Certeau notes that the basis of “ethnic confrontations” becomes “manifest in opposition to the foreign ‘ways’ of reusing our space and against the ‘errors’ or the ‘barbarisms’ that indicate, among our ways of doing things, these different uses of our territory” (Certeau 1997:170):

People come down for breakfast and say we did not know that you were off the grid, "You mean all your electricity?"

> This very violence sheds light on what is at stake. The confrontation with these different ways of practicing our space initiates a renunciation of property. For “proprietary” individuals it involves a loss that will appear even more threatening when the conflict takes the figure of ravished statues and stolen goods and when every promotion of the “foreigner” seems to dislodge a “natural being”. (Certeau 1997:171)

Certeau then is also hopeful: “Whatever the case, the encounter will not leave the majority intact” (Certeau 1997:171). Ethnicity does not only operate on a strictly cultural level, but has material consequences. For example, tensions arise around different ways of using “our” land (if defined “ours” as in the use of longtime indigenous residents);

> for myself I don’t feel like in the community that I am in, that I am a “prized” person. I think in respect to him, not having, like being a tenant, living in a tenant that would be like: wow, that’s another oasis out there! And you can get to, and very rewarding, so long as the community would accept them. I think, I guess that is the hard part. Cause I think you could have a piece of land anywhere, in the United States, but you’ve got to have community members that are willing to accept you for what you are doing. (Daniel Robertshaw 20070916)

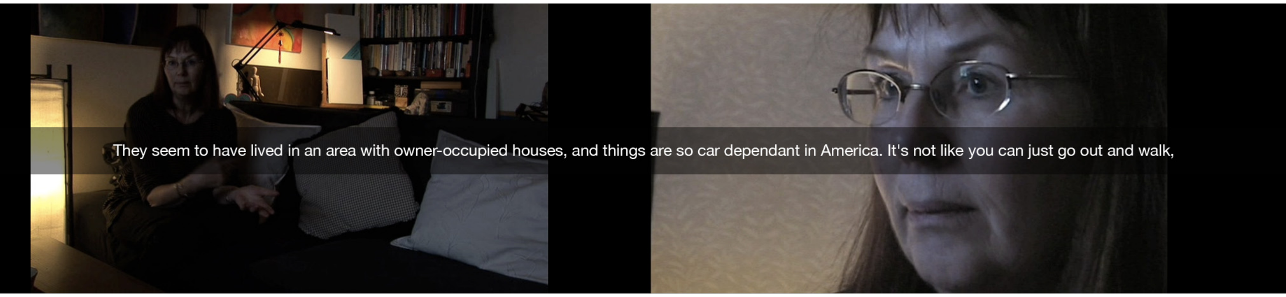
when we need to do something, we do it. I don't tell people I cannot change the beds because of the washing machine or something.

Living in Husby means being stigmatized with “poverty, misery and narrow-mindedness” (Listerborn 2007:2). Dispelling associations with violence and crime is difficult, because it depends on its polar opposite (order and “good behavior”). This polarization follows a *spatial hierarchy* connected with unproblematized Eurocentric and classicist values: “Arcane speculations about Numbers, with its talk of the golden number, moduli and ‘canons’, tends to perpetuate thus view of matters” (Lefebvre 1991: 38). Both socially and aesthetically we hold that self-definition is not conditioned by to the form of housing you live in, it is a particular economic situation that equals self-definition with living at the end of a remote gravel road. Housing should not determine agency. However, the beauty or ugliness of particular space is both culturally specific and socially constructed. In Husby, we see attempts at self-definition through the residents’ recognition of common space, which we also see as an act of appropriation. At the top of the spatial hierarchy, gated communities tap into romanticized, even fetishized images of “the beautiful house” and “the good life” permeated with nostalgia for a small town America. Inaccessibly expensive neighborhoods disguise structural effects through local ordinances. We are calling for a reconfiguration of the production of space according to principles of self-definition of community.

This situation brings up three paradoxes. Lefebvre describes the first paradox: “in absolute space, the absolute has no place” (Lefebvre 1991:35), “religio-political space” is made up of “areas set apart” (Ibid) and cannot be compared nor historized. We interpret the absolute as similar to what Castoriadis describes changing, indeterminate “’*magma’* of *social imaginary significations*” (Castoriadis 1997:7), which can become solidified and spatially mapped by dominant interests into identical and identifiable social significations. The second paradox is that community can be modeled on absolute and/or abstract space, but it is lived and practiced as social space. This means that those who believe in some form of absolute space can appeal any reality that suits their interests, and naturalize it as universal. As mentioned earlier, Lefebvre shows that the production of space involves movement between representations of space, built physical space and lived/practiced space (or “third space”). In other words, the production of space can be defined as creating a passage from imaginary to the social. The third paradox, which is closely related to the first two, applies to the art context: the sublime and the beautiful in art cannot be dissociated from the social even though they are seen to be autonomous. The niceties of the art discourse create the assumption that the unconventional, the unique and the explorations of the unknown can find a set apart place outside the social. This confirms yet again the long-standing misbelief that both social construction, the democratic politics of self-definition and aesthetics exist below a Platonic sky, that to prove your legitimacy in fine art you must pass from the muddled and ugly of the everyday and connect to the bright and beautiful absolute space. Lefebvre, writing in the relative stability of the

And pretty much now it is rare and I have learned a lot of those skills by reading that is not something that is plentiful any more.

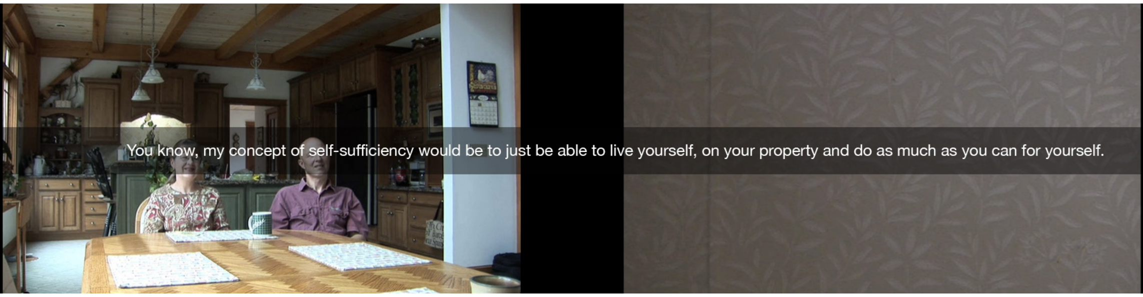
Fordist industrial era, dismisses this test as “reserved places, such as places of initiation, inside social space” (Lefebvre; 1991, 35). For us, as artists and researchers in the post-Fordist era, these sites could be exemplified by places of career advancement and permanent crisis; the university, the art world, and the housing market. These fake universal test sites that serve to verify the liberal individual curbs the social magma to the standing order. Because of their socio-economic background and professional identities, most of the US interviewees understand our anxiety. However, for some of the Husby interviewees our problems are those of the already privileged, and in both cases these problems are related to the liberal individual, for instance the failure to come up with a concept of a *common and global* struggle for self-definition. The stigmatization of the suburb and following exodus of the Swedes from Husby makes it clear that the choice of travel is what is different, particularly for those with limited mobility:



They seem to have lived in an area with owner-occupied houses, and things are so car dependant in America. It's not like you can just go out and walk,

> When I see David answering the questions, I think that there are different things in America, there are people in America who choose not to live with different people, with rich people or with criminals, they might want to live alone and they don’t want to have any bills, no police, nothing, they want to live in that way in peace, but this might also make you ill, leave when you are ill you have to go to a hospital and see a doctor, but in America it is really important to have a lot of money and insurance and everything, but they might not want to pay for insurance and everything, they would rather live in this way. But there is a risk involved as well. Sometimes would might become ill, but then no money or anything, and you could die, so that is another thing. But when one comes to Sweden, things are different, here in Sweden people have insurance, they have the possibility to get an apartment, and everything, there are lots of possibilities here, and even if we talk about democracy, in the USA they have democracy, but I don’t think so. Democracy can be many

> different things, there are millions of people in the USA which have, or who live somewhere, on the streets, without food, and no one asks about them, but here it is different. If I live here in Sweden I don't need to live like people like David, I want to live, I have possibilities to find a place, maybe, that is my answer in regards to David. But also, in the whole of the western world, and here in Europe too there are ideologies, and in the Germany there is the green party, and they want to live in green areas, they have tents and everything, and they don't want to live in apartments, of course it can be in different ways but its almost like this, but they have been in conflict in parliament all the time, "You are backward looking", "It's not a good idea", and such things, so there are these kinds of ideas in Europe too, like I say. But in America I think you can choose such problems, OK there are risks but they can live that way too. (Yohannes Abraham 20070309)



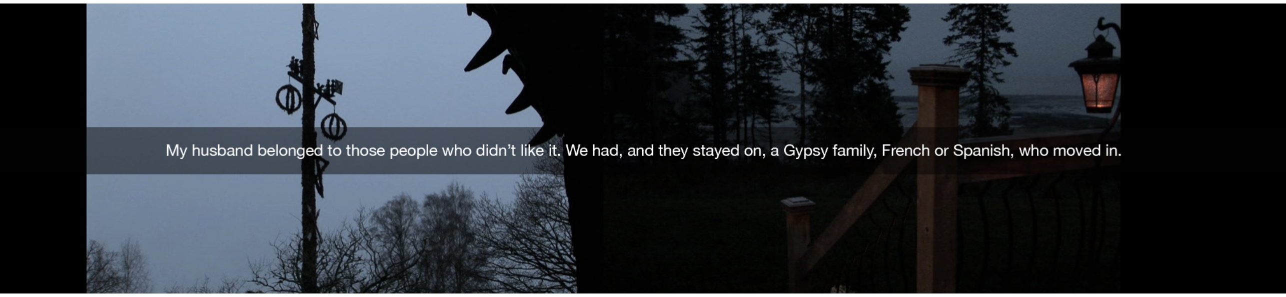
You know, my concept of self-sufficiency would be to just be able to live yourself, on your property and do as much as you can for yourself.

Background: gallows optimism?

An overall difference between the off griders and Husby interviewees would perhaps be that American interviewees (unlike the Husby interviewees) jump from their living situation, in particular from discussions related to their houses, to a political or ideological discussion. This may partly result from the fact that they have made a conscious (and in some cases unpopular choice) to live off the grid. We have also noted that off griders translate and communicate their social position in relation to technology. It is an optimistic and pragmatic way of moving from an inability to act in a specific political system to that what is thoroughly and openly man made; this is how we understand Bill McKibben's commentaries:

> But I think that in the end, what we very much need in this country, is more community, and less individualism. I think the nicest future… imagine an energy

> grid that works differently than the one does at the moment, instead of a grid where there's one great gigantic central place pumping energy out to everyone else, a grid that works a lot more like the internet, where you know. In the afternoon at my house on a sunny day we are producing lots of power, the solar panels on my roof are churning it out, and the electric meter on the side of the house is spinning backwards, but that power is going through an inverter into a grid, and it's powering my neighbors refrigerator, and you know whatever else. I think that the day of that kind of distributed energy resource, is coming at us, and is probably coming at us quickly, and I hope that as they develop these grids are small and fairly tight, and allow for a lot of human interchange, where one knows sort of, who one is working with, to create the energy that we need. Some people will have windmills up and some people will have solar panels and some people will have a stream near their community and will be running a hydro, a little river hydro-system, and you know there will be utilities with some natural gas to back it all up when everything fails, and so on and so forth. (McKibben 20060924)

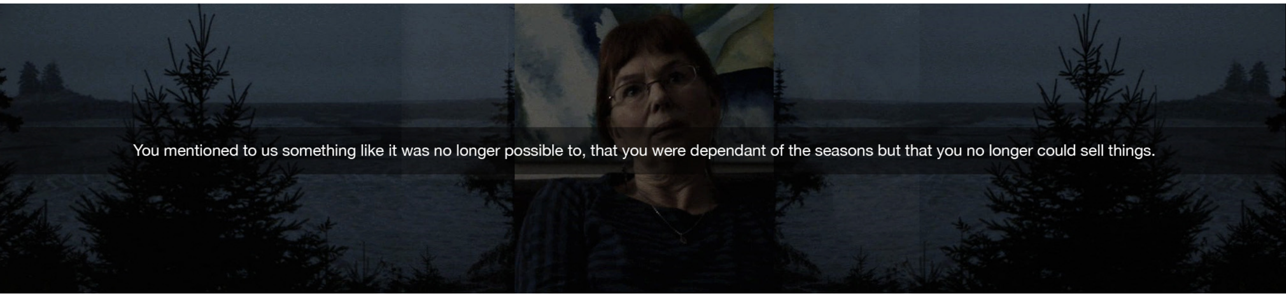

My husband belonged to those people who didn't like it. We had, and they stayed on, a Gypsy family, French or Spanish, who moved in.

Here McKibben takes the step from those small-scale activities which are under individual control – to an awareness of democracy, equality and community, as well as a wider global ecological perspective. But McKibben makes it very clear that individualism without community is a menace to social sustainability:

> This kind of distributed energy grid, can only be realized if we become way more efficient in our use of energy, which is clearly possible to do. Americans per capita, use twice as much energy as Europeans, so it gives you some sense of the enormous saving there are to be had, and that's one of things for which we to thanks over and over and over again, the kind of off the grid pioneers, they have been driven by practical necessity to explore the kind of frontier of energy conservation, because they didn't have unlimited amounts of power

> to run the computer, to run the… so they have taught us lot of smart things, including that we don't need to be using immense amounts of energy all the time. If the sun is not out, don't wash your clothes, because you won't be able to dry them on your clothes line, that's a very good kind of change in habits that Americans should be perfectly capable of making. It won't be easy because we are very stuck in our hyper individualist ways, but I think that's where the future, the nicest future lies. (McKibben, 20060924)

We have noticed four recurring themes throughout the interviews with the off griders. The first is about regaining lost *agency*; the second is a struggle for *trust and communication*; and, third, the interviews are grounded in very specific localized situations, in terms of *conceptual and/or practical reach/scope/scale*. Finally the interviewees have a strong negative perception of the world being *out-of-control*. Out of this tangle of contradictory, conflicting ideas and emotions, we can discern both a cautious practical optimism, as with Bill McKibben (above) as well as Dave Oaks, and “civil libertarian pessimism” (Waddington 2005:353) with David Beringer and Shana Hanson.



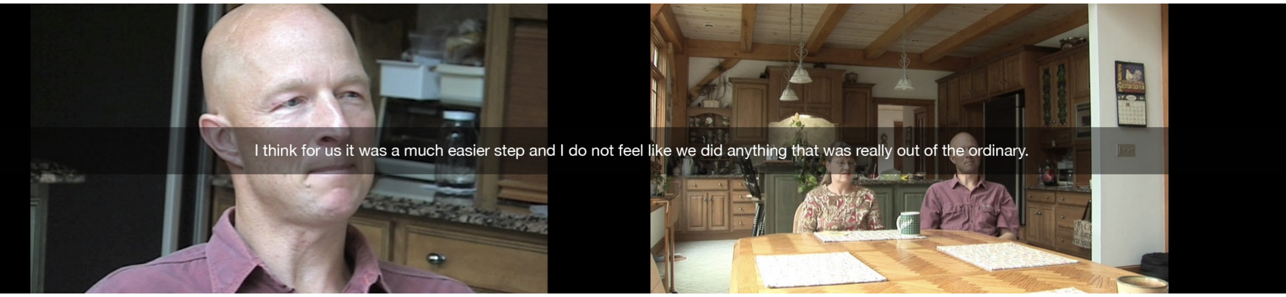
You mentioned to us something like it was no longer possible to, that you were dependant of the seasons but that you no longer could sell things.

> What we are trying to do is, we are trying to focus, if you look at our curriculum, ten percent of it looks at problems, the global problem spaces, ninety percent looks at solutions. What we are trying to do is to get students to think there is a different way you can live, you can live in an alternative way, you can live sustainably, but in order to get to that level of thinking, you have to change your thought, you have to willing to change, be willing to change you thought. We have been wrestling with what kind of experience can motivate students, will impel students, to change the way they think. To stop, decide what you think, put it on the back burner and then be willing and hoping to be able to look at different perspectives and different points of view. So we are wrestling with that as part of our curriculum, how can I frame experiences and then debrief those

experiences and give students the opportunity to look “in”. We are going like a mile wide with experiences, new experiences that make them uncomfortable, we sometimes give them opportunity to look at new ways of doing things, and then to be able to reflect upon those and go then miles deep and say, how does that relate to me? How can I bring that home? Is that viable in, you know, my context, and to the rest of the world?

/---/

Listening to Amona thinking about that conflict, thinking about the opportunity, what are the possibilities and what could be put in place and how her life needs to change in order to perceive that we do in fact have possibilities, we do have opportunities even though they may seem impossible, and you can get to the point where the impossible can become possible. That’s the kind of thinking we’ve been wrestling with and when you frame an educational experience that teaches people that anything is possible, anything is possible. And so we are wrestling with that, and one of things that we have come up with is this, we have been reading a lot about critical thinking, you know. It’s the scientific method where you take a problem, you identify the problem, you gather information about it, you research it, you come up with some sort of hypothesis, you test it and you draw a conclusion, it’s a vertical thinking process, the thing with critical thinking is it walks you through step by step of thinking. We realized there’s something else that’s missing in that process and that’s the creative thinking, the lateral thing, thinking like an artist. Being able to take a problem saying… what if it weren’t a problem? In a different context what if that was a solution? Or how could an artist think of that, just go lateral, and ask “What if?” kind of questions, what if we did this? What if money wasn’t an issue? What if time were not a factor? What if the lack of water in this area were not an issue? To look at it completely out of the box form different perspectives and different points of view. (Dave Oaks 20070913)



I think for us it was a much easier step and I do not feel like we did anything that was really out of the ordinary.

Shana:
I am not your generic American and as far as the government, all the discussion about the government, you know more social services versus less, and, most of the liberals here, you know it's a very liberal county because all the people from away and most of them are for national healthcare, and various things. I am not! I don't see how we can agree on which health care. I don't want most of what they are offering, I would much rather just die in a hole, than a lot of the things that they do in the hospitals. A lot of this is toxic, they're using bad chemicals that should never have been manufactured. I don't want my tax dollars to pay for that, and I don't want to pay more tax dollars. I'd much rather help my neighbors to figure out how to eat well and leave it at that. (Shana Hanson 20070926)

David:
I would like to think that people would want to conserve energy, use energy efficient things, appliances and lights, and everything… but my experience when I was working with going door to door and talking to people about putting insulating blankets on their water heaters and shower heads that would use less hot water and that kind of thing, I ran into some, you know, "I'm paying for the electricity and I'll use it however I want!" And so on some level when those blackouts or brownouts are happening there's part of me that says "Well, that's what you get", these are not my best moments. But I think it's so huge, we use so much power and we use so much gasoline too, and that's where I will be left in the lurch or left out when there's no oil. We will figure out what to do, but, sometimes it takes those kinds of shortages to bring something up to consciousness, and I can't help thinking that that's a good thing. (David Beringer 20060920)

I can understand when she had to change what she was selling that her happiness with the business decreased.

And again Shana, responding to a question on the politics of *Common Ground Fair*:

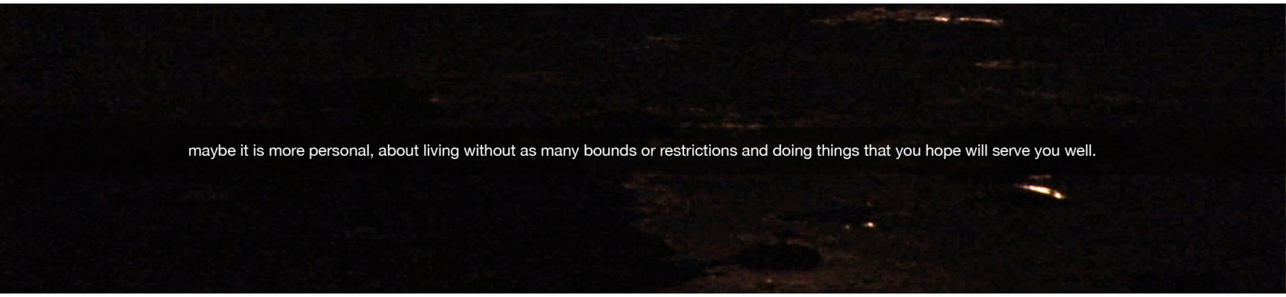
> it's exposure for all kinds of… specially on Friday, because people, parents, kids' parents volunteer to come on this school trip, it's all school trips, and you get a wide diversity and it's all new to them, and some of the kids get really inspired. But I think they're late, I think we are like a generation late. I'm not feeling like... I'm feeling like we're in for it. I don't know if we are in for it permanently and irretrievably, or, but I feel like it's really late for people to start figuring out a land-based culture now. I have been doing this for, you know, since 1983 on and off, to some degree all the time. I still have don't have it down, the way the generation before did. 'Cause you are relearning and then the conditions are changing all the time. I have trouble saving my seeds here. I had it down in South Paris after five years there, but all of a sudden here it's harder to learn, I have had gardens here six years, I still don't have it because the weather isn't always the same. (Shana Hanson 20070926)

It's not fair to the animals to not take advantage of technology and science that is available.

To dismiss Shana's reflections as pessimistic is to fail to recognize that she is actually realistic. Given the impending disaster of climate change, she has passed a point that "relies upon potential rather than practice, because it fails to recognise the influence of culture" (Waddington 2005:353). Shana's cultural critique goes beyond Libertarian pessimism, it is profound because she says that we do not have the relevant culture or knowledge to stay alive if our current use of energy came to a sudden end. Any Popperian would feel it would be easy to instantly dismiss her. It is, as Felix Oppenheim noted "not *generally* true that epistemological optimism is linked to liberalism, and epistemological pessimism to authoritarianism" (Oppenheim 1964:353). For Popper, "anti-rationalism – is a synonym for epistemological pessimism" that denies "objective truth" and relies "on dogmatic authority or tradition" (Oppenheim 1964:349). To a certain extent, both David and Shana believe in tradition. They are pessimistic about individualism as it impacts people's willingness to live in a more environmentally sustainable way or to recognize that all life is interconnected. Are they actually being irrational, and are they fundamentally opposed to individual agency? In this situation, we would argue that it is not they who are irrational, but the wider culture that because of the deep entrenchment of individualist values, refuses to engage in the development of “a land-based culture”.

Background: self-definition and institutional change

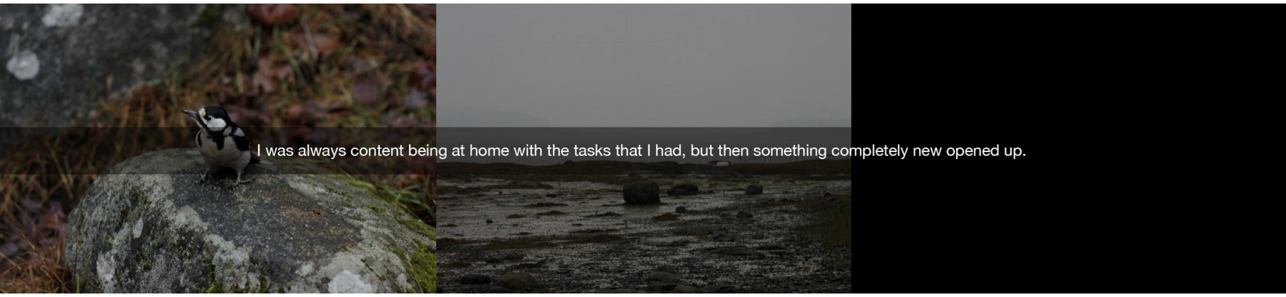
Self-definition is not to be mistaken for the individualized process of self-realization. It is not, as we see it, about celebrating the bourgeois romantic tradition which would equate self, uniqueness and equality of agency, but in reality only allowing the agency of those who are already privileged. Instead we see it as a part of a triad – travel, self-definition, community – that we found useful in the search for democratic ways of grapple with a spatial and conceptual globalization. We have tried to question both the exceptional nature of the art discipline, and also the striving for exceptional status. We see the exceptional nature of art as connected to the impasse of the liberal individual. Within this framework, anyone pointing to wider structural issues is dismissed as too negative, perhaps even the source of the problem – be it wasteful energy consumption, lack of public influence over housing conditions, or the institutional difficulties that might open up through artistic research. Faced with this stalemate, the predictable conclusion, to “realistically” proclaim “this is just the way things are” and other than perhaps more analysis, that nothing can really be changed. There is a slippage between “being in the presence of the natural”, experiencing what is “naturalized as natural” to experiencing social pressure from naturalized positions and what-to-do’s, where the possibility of self-definition is more graspable. And there is a seductive regressive force concealed by individual exceptionality, that institutionally required to enter the image-making process – i.e. the reproduction of the status quo as absolute



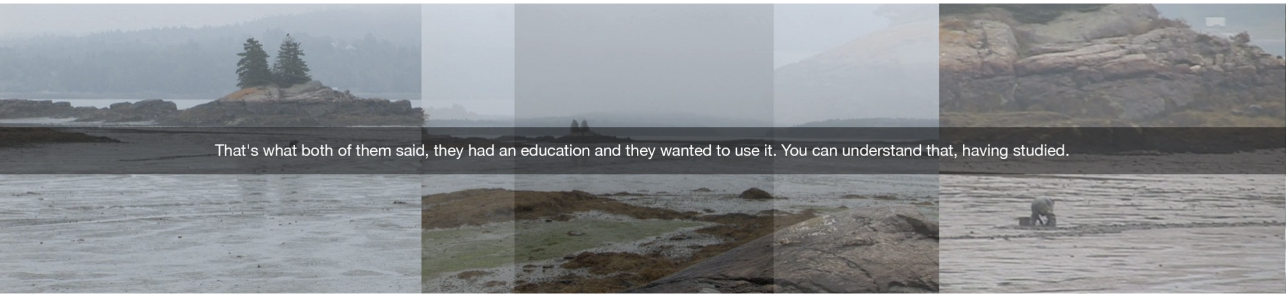
maybe it is more personal, about living without as many bounds or restrictions and doing things that you hope will serve you well.

space/unique expression, the confluence of self-realization and self-definition, and the process of naturalization of the mechanisms of dominant interests.

From the perspective of our artistic research, the terms for participation is connected, and in some cases shaped by our relationship to institutions. These institutions hold the power to discontinue or extend funding and support for the research, as well as one's livelihood. The liberal concept of the individual guides the idea that institutions are essentially an impingement on self-definition, and that only through power over institutions can individuals be set free. However, in practice, when one passes from an outside position into institutions, this process is narrated in terms of the transformation of individual agency into an institutionally disciplined and sanctioned individualism. In other words, the loss of autonomy becomes a necessary price to pay for political influence; social engagement becomes reduced to individual gain. This is a double-bind typical of the art world: self-definition must be wrenched from confrontation with institutions, but furthermore, self-definition through art too often asserts to a dichotomic lock-down effect, missing the point that there are multiple and overlapping outsides and insides. The reality of what Giddens calls continuous structuration, and what we have elsewhere called the socio-imaginary and/or social constructivism becomes presented within globalization as timeless, depoliticized conflicts between norms and social institutions. This logic demands both individuals' unconditional subjectivation on one hand, and their self-definition on the other. The principle of individualization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) has to be theorized as constitutive of the "second modernity" (in which societies and individuals realize that uncertainty and risk cannot be controlled by the modern means of administration), through its self-reflexive character, linked to the right to self-definition. Self-definition is seen to be separate from not only institutional feudalism, but also from the labor market. Self-definition amounts to the doxic formation of the real, where knowledge is fully involved

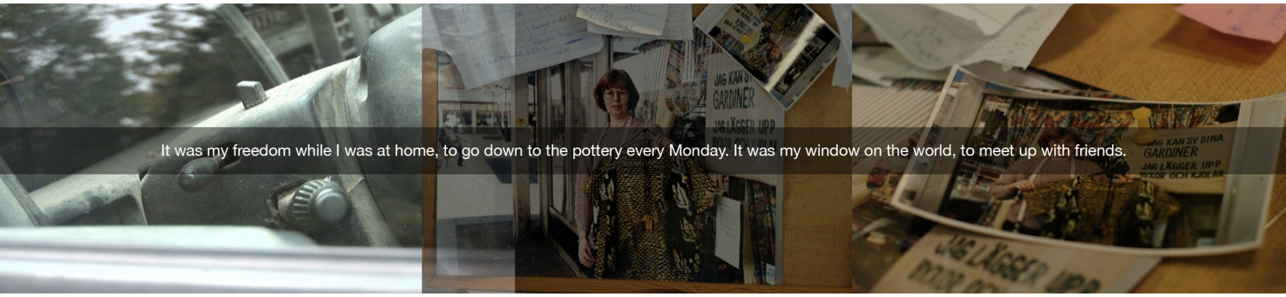

I was always content being at home with the tasks that I had, but then something completely new opened up.

in social production. The conditions for self-definition are very similar to those for individualization but in the difference is that self-definition involves an attempt to grasp the moment of the social imaginary, without denying that one is always "tied into a network of regulations, conditions, provisions…from pension rights to insurance protection, from educational grants to tax rates" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002:2). There is also an acknowledgment that modern society "is a work of art of labyrinthine complexity, which accompanies us literally from the cradle to the grave" (Ibid). In Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's understanding the concept of individualization is thoroughly modern, since it "means the disintegration of previously exiting social norms" (Ibid), but without any revolutionary romanticism. Self-definition, as we understand it, brings about an emancipatory move where, as Scott Lash notes in the foreword, "the individual must be much more the rule finder himself" (Lash in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002:xi), but self-definition cannot be complete without community. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's analysis focuses on the individual more as an unavoidable, general effect of modernization rather than a set of re-negotiable micro-conventions:


That's what both of them said, they had an education and they wanted to use it. You can understand that, having studied.

> decisions, possibly undecidable ones, with guidelines that lead into dilemmas – but decisions which place the individual, as an individual, at the center and correspondingly penalize traditional lifestyles and behaviour. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002:4)

Within our project, self-definition is form of an agency that is practiced – with the interviewees and in-between ourselves – in the simultaneous disintegration and construction of a highly uncertain and situated object of engagement; be it a community, the standard of living, the need to travel, or art. Because of this, it becomes important to conceive of self-definition as the agency to alienate, disperse and unsettle. It is difficult to generalize and prescribe a course of action; however, we can say that those we have identified (which have been quite localized and specific) include both communities and institutions. However, this does not indicate that politics is only local, that a larger, global change is not possible, or that conflict does not necessarily exist between individuals and institutions.

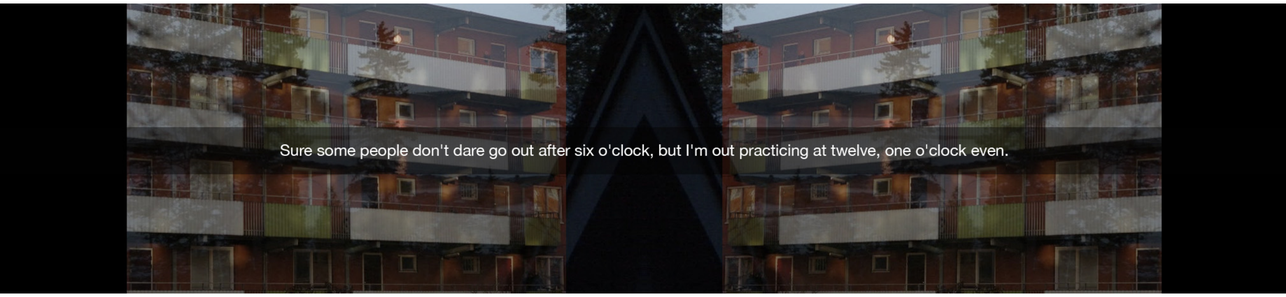

It was my freedom while I was at home, to go down to the pottery every Monday. It was my window on the world, to meet up with friends.
JAG KAN SY DINA GARDINER
JAG LÄGGER UPP BYXOR OCH KJOLAR

Instead of a summary

We have lived and worked together with eight off griders and eight people from Husby for more than two years. We have also self-reflexively included our own situations as artistic researchers as part of the work. Needless to say, many more have generously contributed to our work, in the US, in Husby and at our university.

We started this work by a “serious hanging out” in Husby and since then, we have spent considerably more time there, and, in small ways, have supported the Husby residents.

Our aim has been to find a common ground or “third space”, between people in very different circumstances without dissolving differences of identity, power and privilege.


Sure some people don't dare go out after six o'clock, but I'm out practicing at twelve, one o'clock even.

We understand “third space” as a space to develop, and struggle for collective rights.

We see neoliberal politics and the investment by dominant interests in the liberal individual as an attempt to obstruct and discredit the realization of community. We see this development of community to be possible, given people with different background and circumstances are able to share a dialogue

We share the conviction with the interviewees that the global ecological crisis will force us to seek a common ground, and that the ecological crisis is also a social crisis. We have to hope that new forms of global democracy will be born out of this deep crisis, and that the necessary changes are also the real changes needed.

We began our research by trying not to filter or organize whom we met, saw or what we were told, neither according to political or moral criteria, nor in terms of personal likes and dislikes.

We brought people together through interviews that became dialogues. We articulate our thoughts throughout the interview material, but also in this written thesis.

The Americans interviewees lived in a way that was scattered over a vast geographical area, struggling to create their community within a culture of "prefab" individualism.

The Husby interviewees share a common space, and were able to formulate their self-definition as what Lefebvre would call the right to their city.

As artistic researchers we have traveled between these different sites, applying images as situated concepts to work through the spcific concreteness of the discussions.

We were not raised to think in terms of contested concepts that have uncontested cores and virtually opposite extended meanings.

We have discussed the coercive effects of isomorphic social and economic institutions, generally equating the art institution with the public housing corporation, as well as, in a wider sense, the institution of the liberal individual.

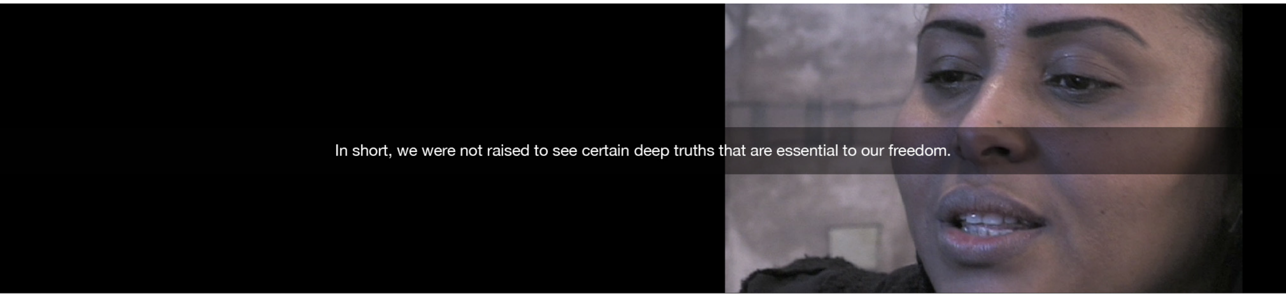
We have found that social violence is responsible for interrelated individual and collective hardship, opposing, deferring, violating or threatening the right to self-definition.

We have summarized contextual differences in the concept of travel. In considering the specific discussions with the interviewees, we found that any truthful description had to entail "traveling" between contradictory and incoherent perspectives and fields of knowledge.

This has meant approaching issues and topics in a lateral manner, resulting in some awkward encounters highlighting the institutional weakness as an important asset in our artistic research. To the best of our knowledge, this is the only way to connect our thinking with the “situated image”.

We have mostly discussed the concept of self-definition in spatial terms, but we have also, (in a romantic-revolutionary way), argued that self-definition is never totally contained, that it does not really fit in “given” contexts, that it is “magmatic” to its core.

By bringing up art production in connection to both (mass produced) software and the uneasy nature of a collaborative, we have tried to find our own professional self-definition away from the individualist traditions of fine art.


In short, we were not raised to see certain deep truths that are essential to our freedom.

From the perspective of environmental sustainability, a housing estate neighborhood is a far better alternative to conventional property ownership than off grid living, if the tenants are given both agency and also extended responsibilities over their own living situation, and also take if we take full advantage of green technologies, (such as installing solar energy appliances on the flat roofs). Off grid living means dealing with energy needs on the level of individual dwellings, which means that it is in many ways similar to suburban life and long distance commuting. Given the inadequate or absent public transport in the rural northeastern US, this way of living cannot be seen as sustainable.

Our hopes lie within the possibilities of both collectivity and community. We feel a participatory democratic society is the only way to prevent this world from irreversible disaster. Aspects of the dialogue gesture towards the possibilities of a global community; it is not only possible but also desirable and even inevitable to bring the common rights of people together.

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Appendix A:
Other examples of “off the grid” in an American context

In writing about the dire consequences for the environment when property rights overrule the protection of both people and the environment and people, Bruce Barcott states, in the May/June 2003 issue of *Mother Jones*, that ”Northern California’s woolly Siskiyou country” is related to living not only outside the cities, but also entrenched in a normative scheme associated with ”home to Bigfoot sightings, marijuana patches, off-the-grid rednecks, and long-toothed hippies” (motherjones.com/news/feature/2003/05/ma_366_01.html). Off the grid living is furthermore linked to both dropping out of the system on the scale of the individual lifestyle, but also the threat of unknown *others*. This attitude became exemplified by the Unabomber; it is also enforced by federal authorities that with their attempt to criminalize those parts of the world that are “off the grid” of technology, capitalism and compliance with the West as “isolated” and potentially dangerous. The off grid discussions, within both fiction and ‘real life scenarios’ are replete with references to war and even apocalypse. Ron Strom of the Republican website *WorldNetDaily*, writes about the possibility of an Iranian nuclear attack on the US with a ”blackout bomb” (21052005). Strom makes a direct reference to living off the grid: ”Since power could be down for an extended period of time, a generator could prove useful – another item popular with those who prepared for the year 2K scenario. Those who live ’off the grid,’ for example, using solar energy exclusively, would be much less vulnerable to an EMP event – at least when it comes to electrical needs” (worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=44305).

A familiar scenario in Hollywood films is the figure of the agent behind enemy lines. In its most successful post cold war interpretation, the agent is not only in territory, but also beyond its time limitations, as in the *Terminator* sequels. This excerpt from the official press information about *Terminator 3* illustrates this: ”A decade has passed since John Connor (Nick Stahl) helped prevent Judgment Day and save mankind from mass destruction. Now 25, Connor lives ’off the grid’ - no home, no credit cards, no cell phone and no job. No record of his existence. No way he can be traced by Skynet - the highly developed network of machines that once tried to kill him and wage war on humanity” (terminator3.com/). The associations with both living *off the grid* and saving humanity are related to those of the outsider, the dropout and the renegade. At risk of perpetuating simplistic definitions of national identity, we have noticed that revolution is in the making of the American psyche, at least as long as we follow the national stereotyping in US media and Hollywood films.

The prestige surrounding new technology, is often opposed to the individual finding his or her way. There are several biographical entries on off griders, that embodies this move from the pace of life in the corporate world, to embracing the “slow life”: ”In 1992, MIT graduate student Eric Brende and his new wife, Mary, committed to living a year off the grid. No phone. No computer. No refrigerator. No electricity. They settled in a community of people Brende calls the ’Minimites’ – a little bit Amish, a little bit Mennonite, all about avoiding technology. Eric and Mary went 18 months with their experiment, and came out changed”. This personal introduction to a life style then appears on the web: ”In a new book, Brende says that the surprising discovery he and his wife made is that the people up at dawn and working with their hands on the farm have more leisure time than plugged-in, turbo-charged city folks working 9-to-5. And it is the very ’time-saving’ technology itself, he concludes, that often robs people’s free time” (onpointradio.org/shows/2004/08/20040803_b_main.asp).

The opposite is also true. The *Off-Grid* on line magazine site has ”Free Yourself” as its subtext. As an article from Nick Rosen’s article, “Off-Grid Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous” (11042005) includes the following: “’Some of our high-end clients literally never see their energy bills,’ says Steven J. Strong, president of Solar Design Associates in Harvard, Mass. ’They are putting a higher value on having more control over their energy destiny. This is a hedge against uncertainty.’ The US DOE [Department of Energy] estimates that average-heating costs increased 7% in the US, which takes into account Arizona, Florida and other states with year-round temperate climates. Meanwhile, state and federal incentives help homeowners install renewable energy sources or implement energy-efficient strategies in their houses. And those big home owners have big lawyers and accountants who sweep up the grants the rest of us cannot get around to”. The text goes on to inform us that ”Those big homes are getting more energy independent, Strong told Forbes magazine”.

Rosen refers to recent natural disasters, which now includes Hurricane Katrina (2005) and the air-conditioner induced blackouts during the July 2006 heat wave in the San Fernando valley: ”The 2001 California blackouts, the Northeast blackout of 2003 and the hurricanes that left some Florida residents without power for weeks last summer have encouraged the ultra-rich to consider alternative power sources–or going off the grid entirely–for their homes. Solar Design's projects include a beachfront estate in Martha's Vineyard, a solar power system for the White House and The *Solaire*, a residential tower in downtown Manhattan that has solar panels built into its skin". Finally the following piece of information seems to be designed to win over the skeptical: "James Woolsey, who directed the CIA from 1993 to 1995, has a photovoltaic system on his home in Maryland" (off-grid.net/index.php?p=358). But this article does not mention a single word on the reasons for the strains on the energy systems (such as overloading or the privatization of electricity in California). Nor do they mention the possibility of a distributed utility grid, or the all-encompassing character of the climate changes for that matter. We are firmly presented the world according to a salesman, with the soothing belief that the market will know no limits.

The website *Intentional Communities* presents a great deal of information on establishing communities based on different ideological or "spiritual" convictions. The dangers of being cut off from the rest of the society (which in reality is impossible) and the wish for independence are mixed up with amalgam of "pragmatic", hands-on technological solutions (mostly in relation to energy and food) and hopes for individual spiritual growth. These communities post their existence on the website, and, in a tacit and standardized manner (for instance by displaying the gender balance of the community) ask people to join in: “We desire to live off the grid but not to seclude ourselves; we want to be part of the greater community". This statement addresses the danger of being dismissed as a fringe element in the eyes of others, at the same time signaling that there is a serious and radical wish for change.

Daniel Robertshaw (paired with Abdullahi Mohammed)

decided that he could change the situation when he still felt fit and strong. He is in his early 50s, no family, living alone, in a good financial situation, but looking ahead towards years of making more money, this did not appeal to him anymore: to die with a thick wallet, and unfulfilled dreams of farming. He searched for farmland, and came by a spot in the region of Vermont that was as flat as Kansas, and was for sale. He struggled for a while with the question of whether land could be owned at all, but changed his mind, saying that land tax implies that land is rented from the state, and therefore not in his possession. He spent the first year living in the barn (at that time the barn did not have walls). A Shetland sheepdog says hello to the car in a jubilant and raucous manner, goats glare at us, a horny and strident flock of young males raised to become food for Somali and Eritrean Americans. Initially, he did not intend to go off the grid; it happened because the regions to the Southeast would have cost $ 45.000. Ironically, he invested $ 50 k in solar and wind power. A freak storm brought down two out of three of his wind turbines; the poles folded because the supporting cables were not tightened enough. The huge battery pack cracked the newly poured concrete floor. He says: "A man behind those trees, has helped him a lot, and he's been off the grid for twenty years – do you see his windmill? – You know, if the lightning would strike these poles, it would hit *me*: it becomes a matter of survival. You think a lot about these things out here. If I'm without power, it is my problem and I have to deal with the consequences on my own". Daniel's new home awaits him on a wagon board.

Abdullahi Mohammed

is a community leader who keeps track of the latest development in Mogadishu. He organizes demonstrations in central Stockholm to alert the government to the situation. He looks after the interests of the Somali group in Husby as well as their meeting place. The space is endangered by those that see their activities as a nuisance, and others are interested in using their space for commercial purposes. During the warm nights in July and August they have kept their place closed, so that no one would find a reason to complain. This is a strategic sacrifice. We first met him as a parental *Nattvandrare* (NightWalker) in Husby, they were wearing thick yellow jackets with a logo from an insurance corporation. Abdullahi asked us to accompany him at a meeting: the “disturbances” and the rumors of an “illegal” restaurant were discussed with a civil servant from the municipality. She knew the story already since most of the Somalis are unemployed and the rent has to be guaranteed by local authorities. Abdullahi’s phone rings without stopping. It is hard to say how he finds Sweden: it was the country that granted him protection as a refugee, but he would like to live in the countryside, perhaps raising goats. Most of all, he would like to have a house in an area with better schools, but the kids are almost grown up by now. He wants things to be less regulated in Sweden, but things are expensive. His work in the association consumes most of his time. We meet him practically every time we are in the center of Husby; he will always introduce us to someone, as we try to find him at the Iranian coffee house. We miss him when he is not around. He recognizes American individualism in Daniel’s statements, but more that that he sees Daniel as someone who has traveled unimpeded; his life changed completely as a result of his own will and desire, but not because of a hostile social situation.

Elizabeth Grades (paired with Sarah Haque)

First time we meet Elizabeth Grades she was by herself; the second time, she was with her boyfriend Dan Robinson where they live in upstate New York State, north of the Adirondacks. During the tourist season they work for the Adirondack Park Agency. She studies at the state college in Plattsburgh; she will drive there in the morning. From a hill on their land one can make calls over Canadian networks. No dog, no cat, just the young couple. It does not seem in any way as a deprived situation, there is no wealth either, except for a lot of work. In the evening there is just enough electricity to run the computer and not much light. They found a plot according to their income as students and outdoors people; they lived in a tent while constructing their first house: a round, cordwood structure. Her arms and clothes are dotted by lime and cellulose. She has been covering the straw bale walls on their new house with this mixture. This house is also round, but much larger and two stories high. Inside the wiggly mosquito door you thud your head into sleeping bags, their latest laundry load and utensils of unknown use. It is as warm and friendly a place one can imagine. In the winter, she says, the stove sometimes makes the confined space so baking hot that they have to open the door, worried that the shift in temperature would make it burst. A stream runs by the back of the house, passing the outhouse and along a path through a thick mass of twigs. It is quiet, the water tastes neutral: you forget that you stand in a particular place.

Sarah Haque

says that she knows a place where we can conduct the interview, not far from her parents' apartment. We pass by a group of people who are playing cricket on a gravel area; the ball darts away in the direction of windows and balconies. She is unsure if she really remembers us when we first call her, and she cannot really understand why we are asking her to see a video and make commentaries. Her intonation is more reluctant than hesitant, but her language is straightforward. She has her school to think about, but she will talk to her parents. We agree to send her the interview with Elizabeth and to talk later. Almost two years ago (in the fall of 2005), we made a number of improvised interviews with eight and ninth grade kids in the Husby School asking them about the media image of Husby as a violent and unsafe place, particularly for young women. She said something that we still remember: working extra hours at *Skansen*, Sweden's most prestigious cultural heritage open-air museum in central Stockholm, her colleges were shocked to find out that she lived in Husby, and asked if they could accompany her on her journey home. She found that amusing. Her father came as a political refugee from Bangladesh and works at the Stockholm subway office; her Finnish mother teaches English at a nearby primary school. Now she says that there cannot be a better place to live in than Husby, and that Elizabeth's house is really nice and in a beautiful area but seems too isolated to her. She wants to be close to her family, and to her friends. However, she tells us that her mother, who at the time was looking over her shoulder, that this is how she wants to live sometime in the future.

Judith Schmidt (paired with Chanchai Sawangphaew)

lives alone in a five-storey house that she built in her 60s, in the Reagan era. It was all tax deductible (an investment from “another life”), so she built the houses by the end of the road she had to construct herself. Here was just a creek, and a small hill in the forest. Chairs, tables, and stairs are cluttered with paper and books: it is a working situation, as a collection of spill. I never sit down, she says, objecting to us having her seated in one of the sofas, that had to be emptied: what am I supposed to do sitting down? She talks about the plants Native Americans collected and favored, and we get stranded in the translation of distinctive features and names of the flora, and bird names. We follow her moving through the hose: she talks us through the workings of the photovoltaic panels, the new refrigerator with an engine on top, the windmill and the batteries, then up the ladder to the top of the house (which is a place big enough for a bed, and piles of National Geographic magazines). Since she does not sleep much any more she follows the deer in early morning through the open windows (which allow you to see in all directions). Through the clearing one can see the Camden hills by the ocean. Outdoors she sparks away: it is a warm day in late September, so mosquitoes and black flies are gone. Twigs climb the walls of the dam.

Chanchai Sawangphaew

decides to offer us a barbecue on our arrival in Husby. It is overcast and cold, the only relief we can find is close to the gleaming coals. He asks us to cook the potatoes. Chanchai is almost always smiling, but mostly he refers to sad events: being left to relatives in Bangkok by his mother who followed his Swedish stepfather. Playing by himself under his bed with Lego blocks, he refuses to leave the room. Later he points to some bushes in a slope where he went in the afternoons because, he tells us, he did not understand a single word people were saying, and felt out of place in school. His mother gave all her time and attention to his newborn sister and he longed for his cousins, thinking of how they played, barefoot on the streets in their neighborhood, pissing on a chosen tree to make it strong. In one of our early meetings he showed us some of his pottery and a couple of photographs that he presented in an exhibition. When he started working at the crafts house in *Husby gård* meant worlds to him, but we haven't talked much about art since then. When we introduced him to the interview with Judith, He also mentioned that he was interested in houses that would preserve enough summer heat for the winter by being submerged in the ground, and has even developed plans for these houses. Sometimes he devotes all his energy to his allotment garden, sifting through the soil to get rid of weeds. The allotment is a long term project; just to get in contact with the local allotment association and then to get a contract for a piece of land took much effort and persuasion. He always wears green. Everything that grows is interesting to him, and he hopes to study to become a landscape gardener. The plans for the future of the allotment – the flowerbeds, the grooves with potatoes and beans, the compost-box, and a corner to sit – are proudly presented on a plaque

David Beringer (paired with Yohannes Abraham)

The house stands on a slope, with a clearing to the south that they opened before moving in. The house reminds you of Hansel and Gretel: white and blue, and in particular, the curved window frames. Given the majority of box-like houses such as the Cape Cod, Nantucket or Georgian Colonial styles of New England, his house seem unfamiliar. The situation after the election was frustrating; he hinted that were it not for the house, something regrettable could have happened. The walls, core and insulation of the house are made of straw bales. The sheep outside on the field are raised for the wool, so that the children he teaches at the Waldorf School can learn to work with their hands. The small tractor is for days when his neighbor also gets stuck in the snow. They bought land together with other families. The idea was to form a community of separate families that would team up at each other's houses if help were needed. Before they lived in Portland, they walked and cycled to wherever they needed to go; their one car would be parked so long in the same parking that spot it was at risk of being towed. Life in the city was easy, but something was missing. Now, with question of the car on the table, they discuss buying one that runs on grease, since off grid life outside cities, he admits, similar to life in suburbia when it comes to gas consumption.

Yohannes Abraham

came to Sweden, possibly because there was a Swedish mission in the village where he grew up, and possibly because Sweden was known in the 1970s to be a safe haven for freedom fighters, political dissidents and refugees. He worked for many years in a grocery chain in Husby, until he slipped and injured his back. The grocery chain has since left Husby. We met him on the same night-walk as Abdullahi, the men standing in an open, inviting circle outside the library. His small and slender body was almost engulfed by the yellow jacket. On another winter evening we stuck our noses into the premises of the Eritrean association, asking where we find Yohannes, since the phone number we got did not work anymore. We get evasive answers. It is obvious that we have not been properly introduced. We have clearly been spending more time with the Somalis than with the Eritreans. The children in the community become culturally Swedish; friends of his generation who were scattered throughout Europe and North America are now moving back to Eritrea or living there for prolonged periods, to retire or to set up businesses, trading African goods in European languages. Eritreans from Germany have built their own settlement according to high building standards: in Asmara they call it *Germantown*. However, the kids are reluctant to return to Eritrea. They can be proud of their heritage, but their friends and ways are culturally Swedish.

Dave & Sue Oaks (paired with Amona Abobaker)

Live on top of Blueberry Hill. The windmill was running with the brakes on, since the batteries are almost always fully charged. You can constantly hear the wind throughout the house, not howling on this particular day, but you could imagine hearing it. Friends and neighbors live down the slope. You can spot their windmill turning just over the ridge. There is no need for drapes, not even in the bathroom. A flock of wild turkey passes by. In the basement, their son plays with Vikings and Crusaders in a brown plastic castle. They decided to go off the grid after returning from Africa: they wanted to create an ordinary American home but decided to make it sustainable for ecological reasons. They are optimistic about the future: they are enthusiastic about the possibilities of lateral thinking, of being aware without seeing certain problems as impossible. That is what they teach high school students: the possibilities. They believe in community, and they look out for community in the “great outdoors”.

Amona Abobaker

does not reveal anything that would suggest a cultural difference until after the interview, when we need to buy a flower for a friend of hers that has suffered a loss. Suddenly she is unsure: what kind of bouquet would be appropriate for this situation? Roses? We hint at the white chrysanthemum and white aster: save the white lilies for the coffin. She looks at the shopkeeper, saying: it is fortunate that I have Swedes with me today. She does not remember traveling to Husby; she was too small, and she says that she trusted her mother. Family is always present; this morning she overslept at her grandmother's house, who is not in fact her biological grandmother, since the men have many wives. They were talking late, about taboo things and that she would have to wait for the next occasion to get an answer. We knew Amona by her name as the owner to the sewing supplies shop in the center of Husby long before we met her. The former owner, Francina, had told us that she only wanted to pass it on to another woman. We went to see her and met with Nora, her big sister. Starting in the fall she will study at the school of social work and public administration in Stockholm. She wants to guide people, to help people out. There are many responsibilities, but maybe she will meet someone, and she wants a family of her own, then perhaps sharing what she owns together with her sister. She also says that the price of co-ops has been rising, even in Husby.

Nora Abobaker

has been our central point in Husby: she has treated us as family members. We decided not to interview her early on, but asked her if she would be interested in reading citations from related texts, and to be the “voice-over” that introduces the project in the “index film” that accompanies our film work. Nora has supported us in many ways: her stories, her contacts (a constant flow of women of all ages and nationalities with their errands coming to her shop), and her coffee and food. We have spent hours and days in the shop just listening with the cameras in our bags. In Eritrea her family was considered as important, which means that people turn to her with their problems. We decided to meet, but when we arrived at the shop we were told that she had to go see someone that was unwell in another city. She speaks at least five languages. She has traded diamonds. She arrived in Husby with her parents from Eritrea, assuming the role of oldest sibling, staying home to look after her kid brothers and sisters. She was married for a while, but is now divorced.

Bill McKibben

Silent march in Montpelier, Vermont. The need for another electrical grid, linked up, but similar to the Internet. Bill McKibben talks about necessity and the need for being social. In other words, the community. He describes the township meetings where ideally every town member will show up and state their case, and decide down to the last cent what the taxes will be used for. If you know an your neighbors, then politics will function differently. He says, “we recognize that conflict is the driving engine in a society, conflicts that rise from differences. But it is better to have an energy-consuming neighbor, than no neighbor at all. And better than being off the grid is being hooked up in a local, distributed system where you will not need as large toxic battery pack in the basement, but you rather use your neighbor as your energy reserve, since they live in a windier spot, whereas you get most of the sun”.

Shana Hanson (paired with Hooman Anvari)

really has no time off, but she leaves the windrower, a machine that sort berries, when we argue that it is too noisy. She shows us a place on the grass to sit down, but first she needs to pee. We go in different directions. This is paradoxical; everything what we have here is free to the extent that it is no longer appreciated, unless spoken for, and made into a fetish, of body, nature, existence even. Houses are dropped on a hillside for “hydroponic people”. There is no scent of desperation; it is a pleasurable day; however, she predicts apocalyptic scenarios of empty shelves at Hannaford’s, and streets with no cars. Do you believe this will happen? What if you have never talked to your neighbors and the food is getting scarce? Her co-worker, Laurieanne, is an Appalachian Abenaki. Shana says her tribe was deemed extinct in the 19th century; a handful of survivors got scattered over Maine. Laurieanne works constantly – she only stops, without turning her body away from the crates with berries, to say “hello” and “goodbye”. One day, Shana says, she was raking blueberries on a field and a tiny white frog came to sit on the brim of the bucket. Was it an albino? How could it escape being hurt? They looked at each other and she knew that there is no such thing as empty land: every square yard is up for grabs and cleared for development has already a population of thousands. She looks at us to figure out how much of this we can take before shutting her out.

Hooman Anvari/Husby Unite

wears a yellow and blue t-shirt to our first meeting that reads: *Yes to Football – No to Prostitution*. It is just before the world cup in Germany 2006. He is comfortable with the microphone and the cameras, enjoys a good argument. He has worked for a long time with the *Husby Unite* organization. He is engaged in countering media stereotypes of Husby, to ultimately undermine the landowners' argument for not maintaining the buildings and blaming it on the tenants, as well as excluding them from the decion-making process. Since fall 2007 his life has been hectic, rallying tenants and outside support against the forced renovations. Hooman believes that social change can shatter the image of the silent immigrant. *Husby Unite* is important because few established politicians are interested in listening to their opinions—or even consider them as having opinions. He describes his parents as belonging to the professional class of the Iranian society that came to lose their position, if not their jobs, after the revolution. They live at a walking distance from his apartment. Most of the apartments in Husby are designed for a the average Swedish family; two parents and two kids. Hooman occupies one of the rare two room flats with direct access from the stairs, keeping it empty in as a bachelor would, only including some leaflets spread out and a megaphone: things seem to happen in the area around the computer.

Ed & Karen Curtis (paired with Francina Dalmulder Larsson)

were modern professionals, applying specific skills, doing high-end jobs for the aviation industry. They were possibly at the point of becoming nerdy, living in neighborhoods without knowing their neighbors, working weeks on end coming up with better solutions to technical problems. No kids, rarely cooking at home, two engineers celebrating the ideal of perfection. This was then. A career made possible, the aptitude for mathematics worked well in a society rattled by the Sputnik blip. The career came to a sudden end; Ed became unwell, burned out, desk empty. The 4x4 Ed drives a few hundred meters from the house to feed the sheep is covered with dust, inside and outside. Working in a homeless house, which he now never leaves; this is the reason for Karen's bed and breakfast. They learn the techniques of building safer jet engines and making yoghurt, followed by maple syrup, honey and vegetables, enough to become self-sufficient. A high-end off grid house in a setting that would make a real-estate agent drool over a predicted profit. Are their lives the happy results of corporate America, or the bitter fruits? If no one told you, you would not notice the cabin inside the house.

Francina Dalmulder Larsson

retells what a friend once said to her: “when your husband was buried, you climbed up from the grave”. You get the impression that Francina has lived two completely different lives: first as a housewife and mother of three, and then as the proprietor of the fabric shop and the dressmaker at Husby square. The step was not entirely unforeseeable: after being fired, her husband was thinking of opening a shop for dog lovers, or a kennel somewhere out of town. You can hear Francina’s bird chirping in the kitchen. After the shop was taken over by Nora Abobaker, she is now entering a third stage in her life; she is reaching the end of her widow pension and getting close to her formal retirement. She keeps a small place to work at Husby Gård where she still sews, including sewing her own clothes. She uses mostly traditional materials, preferably undyed linen. When clothes began to drop in price, and the fabric she offered went out of style with Husby’s changing population, she reckoned that those materials that would sell would alienate her from the reason why she opened the shop. A friend has offered her a studio and a place to live far up in northern Sweden, close to the annual craft market she visits every year. But not now, perhaps if the rents rise as a result of the renovations, or maybe she will just find a smaller apartment.

Jerusha Murray (Paired with Ishmael Fatty)

says that it always comes down to local relations. Her employer would pay her to do a MA in Economics, but she is not interested. She is a Catholic single mother, who grew up on Peaks Island; she takes the ferry to Portland for school. There is a low-level, tacit resistance that is bound to change that what is experienced, that will follow an irregular itinerary. Jerusha stays out of politics in the sense that she does not find an alternative in what are the usual alternatives. She would be happy working for a non-profit relief and development organization, taking care of their investments. Will it be able to change anything important in this way? Will the problems be resolved by resistance bound to a non-aggressive tactic? What can you do by yourself in a day out here? Is it true that what is felt, as a presence in the community will become void the moment it is outspoken as a formula? Does this mean that there is neither an arrival of the political, nor an example that can be abstracted from its original context? That there can be no politics that is not also spatial, a discussion over a space necessarily recognized as common. There is a fine line of self-definition that she wants to respect, and if to change it, it would be because the neighbors need something from her. The good arguments, the words, will come and has to come to an end. Just listen to the thrushes.

Ishmael Fatty

Mother from Gambia and father from Senegal, working at odd jobs to support his family. He came to work for the tourism industry as a lifeguard, talking to people and learned how to speak English – his fourth language. Almost every young man was trying to emigrate; to Germany, to USA, to the Scandinavian countries. He left Dakar for Paris, by train to Stockholm, and then to Husby, where he lived with his wife in her apartment. Some years later they divorced; he used to just sit in the sofa watching television, doing nothing. But he had to stay: his family needed his support. A girlfriend said to him: “You are the most boring person I ever met”. He began to hang around with artists and started doing things himself in his kitchen, which spread to the bathroom: the new friends encouraged him to go on. Then pushing hard in the local council to establish a Craft House in Husby. It almost happened, the money was there, but suddenly all preparations were cancelled. Husby is home. One by one the Swedes moved out and immigrants started moving in, after which the services in Husby diminished. When his daughter comes to visit she says: “How can you live here? You have to move to some other place!” When frustrated he says to himself: “I am going to leave!” But the feeling is only retained as far as the airport, then he starts to long for *his* neighborhood. Back in Gambia, he no longer know the names of his brother’s and sister’s children, and doesn’t really understand what is going on. So when he’s there he feels homesick: ”When I try to do the same sort of things in Gambia as I do here, it just doesn’t work”.

Husby Gård

early on we were told that if we were interested in the situation for local artists that there was a place on the edge of the Järva field. The premises are housed in a 19th century farm; it looks straight out of a film of an Astrid Lindgren fairytale: red with white trim. So we went there and talked to the administrative team about our project and the time frame. They walked us around the three buildings: the studios, gallery, and Husby Konsthall. It does not play a role in the Järva uplift gentrification process the way Tensta Konsthall do, so it still first and foremost serves the needs of the local artists. We were told how the association was formed and recognized, and about their struggle with the local municipality over the budget. We were introduced to people working there and met people attending classes in croquis drawing and pottery. If we need a break we have a coffee and sometimes lunch there, cooked by an Iraqi Kurd.

WE ALL BE G
IN THE GARDEN
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EGGROLLS • DUMPLINGS • RANGOONS
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MAINE
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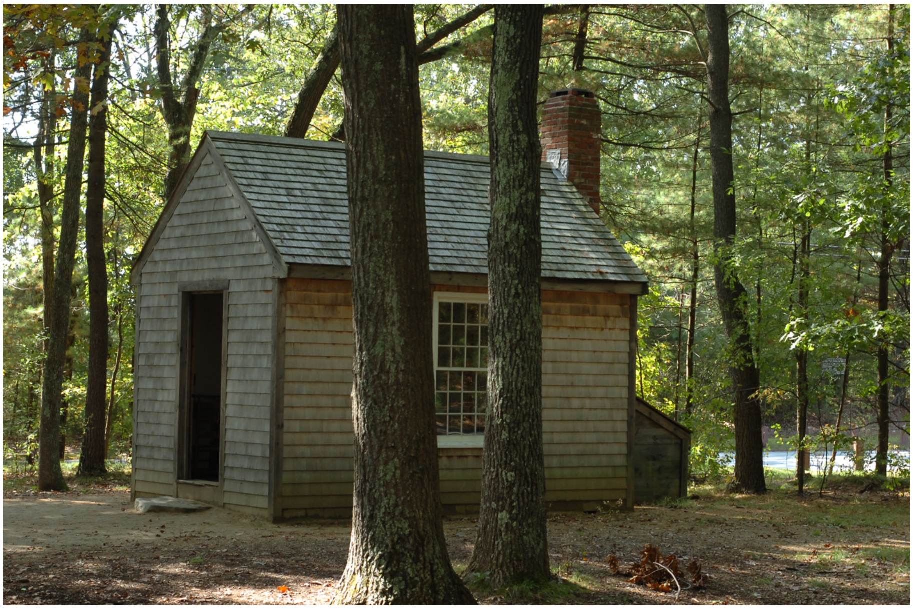
Common Ground 2006

On our way to the Common Ground fair we start from Hope, pass through Unity, Freedom and then Liberty. Closer to the fair, there was a significant buildup in traffic congestion. Just before turning left at the sign of a policeman, we see Pro-Life demonstrators holding placards depicting aborted fetuses. The market begins a couple of miles outside the entrance on a field where we park our rental car. Everything is soaked with heavy rain. We find Judith at the Christian Science tent, and talk to her for a moment, as there is not much business on this corner. It is more of a “marketplace for ideas”, than a regular market. It is a place for moral support, if the rows of cars with out-of-state plates are any indication. Some details: bookstands with Marxist literature, bumper stickers making fun of president Bush, three women giving advice on natural birth control, a few tents hosting healing sessions, political and religious stalls are side by side with a small time cattle market. In one of the larger tents we find Native American arts and crafts: tiny baskets and necklaces made out of colored stone. When we find our new hosts, Ed and Karen, they told us that they went there in the rain and bought a goat.

Tenstabo 06

Across the Järva field from Husby, the renewal process of the “million programs” is presented as an exhibition, just before the general elections that fall, with the intention of sparking debate on “housing politics, cultural differences, the million program and different issues in the suburb” (tenstabo06). The exhibition includes a number of completely renovated and decorated flats. A “replica” of an apartment from the early 1970s was one of the must-sees of the exhibition. In the windows across the courtyard, you can see the tenants looking at the stream of inner city architecture and black-clad design bureau professionals. Two look-alike comedians, known for their TV-show that makes fun of the royal family and inner city brats, added splendor and credibility to the “inauguration”. There is perhaps an idea of tightening a fractured society, linking people with the help of the refreshment of space, but underlining differences by way of insiders irony or, unwitting, contextualizing people as if they were living in the past only because of living in the same, unchanged apartment since first arriving here.



Walden 2006

is first of all a parking lot: jump out of your car and you get to see a replica of Thoreau’s cabin. A bronze sculpture represents him in a middle of a step, carrying a bicycle bag over his shoulder, looking at the palm of his left hand: on the move, but self-reflective. The cabin is kept open. Inside you can see objects and utensils, described with text excerpts from *Walden* on a plaque in front, and a guest book for the “pilgrims” to sign. The replica stands on the far side of the parkway as seen from the pond, down to which several paths following the. The October day is more hot than mild and we sweat as we walk towards the site of the cabin he built in 1845: there are people on the small beach, and a bobbing head is out there on the water. To the side of the site, that was “Discovered Nov 11 1945”, is a pile of rocks, left as tokens of reverence. There is a stone saying that beneath it “lies the Chimney Foundation”, another stone plainly states “Site of Woodshed”.

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