Catch Me
If You Can

Chances and Challenges of Artistic Research

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This essay will focus on the chances and challenges of artistic research. A young field of knowledge production, which is still developing its own internal criteria, its habitus and shared habits. This is an ongoing development, which is both an opening move and a call for action. This essay on the methodology of artistic research is divided into three parts: 1) Background and assumptions; 2) Good practice; 3) Open source and the participatory research community.

The basic idea here is to see artistic research as a practice. An engaged practice, which in each context is imbued with the necessary qualities and substance to make it what it is, and also able to apply its own internal logic to deciding between what makes sense and what is invalid. A practice with a defined direction, but with an open-ended, undetermined procedural trajectory. A practice that is particular, content-driven, self-critical, self-reflective and contextualized.

One of the central points and potentialities of artistic research as a practice-based activity is that it is a combination of two kinds of practice: an artistic and a research component. These are components that here, in the particular context of this essay, come together and are materialized through the making and shaping in the contemporary art field of a group show called *Talkin' Loud and Sayin' Something – Four Perspectives of Artistic Research.* The task is not to

divide our attention and to inquire into these practices (i.e. the artist's work and research, in the sense of thinking and articulating while doing and acting) one after another in isolation. The aim is to relate to and reflect on and about them side by side, bringing different ways of producing knowledge into a fruitful clash and collision, analyzing what happens to them, and what, in the end, can be achieved in and through this interaction.

But, yes, before going into the substance of the first part of the essay, let us take a short detour. It is a detour in the form of an appetizer that provides us with three distinct metaphors. These are metaphors that serve as trampolines that enable us to think about what artistic research can be, ought to be, and even should be. Of these three teasing tales, the first two are positive in character, pointing to productive ways of approaching and actively engaging in practice-based research. The last serves as a warning example – albeit that its poetic articulation also allows some hope for the future. Thus, it is to these three metaphors that I will return at the end of the text:

Artistic research is,

1) **Like Trying to Run in Waist-High New Snow**

You sweat a lot, it's rather difficult and not very elegant, but if you keep doing it consistently and coherently, you will get through

2) **Crossing a River by Feeling Each Stone**

The essential character of valid qualitative research is a certain slowness, and in Artistic Research, this means understanding how much time it takes and is needed to get two different views on relating to reality to collide, contrast and cooperate.

3) **Moving like Smugglers' Boats, moving quietly in the night, with no lights, almost colliding with one another, but never quite making contact.**

Research practice requires collective interaction and commitment in a long-term, give-and-take situation

Part I

Background and Assumptions: Democracy of Experiences and Methodological Abundance

One of the paradoxes of practice-based artistic research in both the University environment and in contemporary art is that it is and is not a domain with a short history. This is a complication that has far-reaching consequences. One of the main effects is, in fact, a crucial and very potent one. Since there is not yet even the illusion of a paradigm for or a regime governing the nature of this field, all of us who are active in the field are motivated and compelled to provide contextual, practice-driven definitions for the practice, and especially for the concepts used when doing and describing the research.

This radical necessity for continuously and coherently taking part in the

making and shaping of concepts is extra difficult and potentially confusing, since it has to happen both within the various areas of contemporary art and within the university. It is not only a matter of what version of the combination of art and research a certain artist is pushing, it is also a question of how other artists and institutions within the field relate to and reflect this new activity. On the same note, the process by which contemporary art is becoming a field for PhD studies is partly a matter of striving to generate its own practice and criteria within a new environment, but it is simultaneously about how the rest of the University relates to and reflects the activities of the newcomer.

Within the field of contemporary art, the challenge is to acknowledge and to take further the works and writings of the numerous artists who have done artistic research, even if it was not called by that name back then. The references here are numerous, but one central point of connection is the practices of conceptual artists starting from the 1960's. It must, however, already be noted here that the content of artistic research cannot be based on a particular medium or trend. Its domain is as wide and deep (or as narrow and shallow) as the entire field of contemporary art.

Seen from the other side, from within the wide walls and hopefully high ceilings of a University, artistic research is closely connected with the recent history of and developments in qualitative research. Again, its obvious "newness" is partly a trick of perspective. There has long been a connection between certain artistic practices and, for example, practices within sociology, anthropology or practical philosophy. These connections are now being intensified since contemporary art has also entered into the university framework. But what is more important is that these interconnections are content-driven. It is very common nowadays for artists to use interview methodologies, to do fieldwork or to delve deep into archives, even if the ways they are used and what the end-results look like differ greatly from those of, say, sociology or gender studies.

Another important consequence of the constant need to provide definitions for these concepts is that it forces us to be vigorously aware of the way these definitions are embedded in their site and situation, their time and historical context. In other words, as ever, but in this case with even greater emphasis, what artistic research is meant to be obviously varies from one university's interpretation to the next. It also varies greatly from one historical and political nation-state to another. In this essay, the perspective is explicitly a Nordic one, while at the same time recognizing the developments, for example, in the USA and UK. (See Bauer 2001, Balkema 2005, Elkins 2005, and Rogoff 2006).

But, right from beginning, we have to be very clear about the differences. Due to its educational, political, historical and economic structure, the Nordic system allows us to bypass certain hindrances, and to start up a new type of PhD programme with less of a struggle and less burdened by the weight of the past. This time, the creation of the new programmes reflected a need articulated by professional artists and, as it happened, the universities were indeed flexible about starting these programmes.

The main structural difference is a matter of funding. Nordic universities are tuition-fee-free, and in many cases students are given proper research grants for their work. The artists in the various programmes have a luxurious opportunity (in terms of both finances and time) to focus on a long-term, four-to-five-year project that is content-driven, and not market-orientated. Another significant and more content-based difference is that the Nordic system (my

references here are mainly to the practice-based PhD programmes at GU, Gothenburg, and KUVA, Helsinki) not only focuses on, but prioritises long-term artistic practices, and bases the whole study programme on them. There is already a recognised field of knowledge production, the participants have a background of solid practice and experience (they are not fresh from MFA programmes), their research theme is articulated from within their practice, and is not just stamped on it superficially, but organically integrated into their work as an artist.

This focus on experienced professionals makes a world of difference. On a theoretical level, it allows us to return to the classical Aristotelian idea of good practice that emerges from good practice, which is not seen as tautology, but as an open-ended, self-critical and reflective process. A notion to which we will return in the second part of this essay. This is not to say that, for example, the curriculum at the Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts at Gothenburg University is permeated by Aristotelian ideas and rhetoric. My argument is that the driving principle and the underlying spirit in this programme is not only compatible with, but also very close to the basic tenets of the Aristotelian idea of good practice. Consequently, we can gain a great deal if we think through the implications of the Aristotelian idea of good practice.

On the other hand, the Nordic model involves a major difference of perspective as to what this new type of studies stand for as compared, for example, to the situation in the USA or UK. From an Anglo-Saxon viewpoint, the choice is between three variants. These are between artistic research as: a) a piece of art history; b) a dissertation that is equal to an artwork; or c) a dissertation that is an artwork. (Elkins 2005, 14-17) The idea of a practice-based PhD that I have been referring to is none of these, since it will in due time generate its own internal criteria (in close connection with various interpretations in qualitative research), and will always be a combination of artistic work and a reflection on the themes dealt with in the work. It must be added that this is not an artist studying him/herself, but an artist articulating something through works, and through reflectively writing his/her interpretation of the given research theme within and through his/her practice.

But what do we understand by qualitative research? Methodologically, the view taken here is from the radical end of the spectrum. It is based on the dual principle of: 1) democracy of experiences; and 2) methodological abundance. Both of these are based on the idea of simultaneously trusting and confronting the aspects of experiential knowledge produced in and through a committed, situated long-term practice.

But what are the values and assumptions behind this kind of qualitative, experimental and experiential methodology? Well, first of all, it begins with the realization that no view is from nowhere. We are always situated, located, and contextualized. It is not about what we are, but how we are. This means acknowledging that everything we are or do is contested, conflictual and constructed – while hopefully also being done in a compassionate way. A recognition that is not a reason to despair, but rather the contrary. Since there is no neutral, given, natural or value-free perception, experience or knowledge, this means that all these definitions have to be particular, value-laden and positioned. We leave the land of static hierarchies and enter the turbulent waters of the performativity of concepts. To quote a modern classic: "To say that you can 'have experience,' means, for one thing, that your past plays into

and affects your present, and that it defines your capacity for future experience." (Mills 1959, 196).

Democracy of experiences

What is meant by democracy of experiences? The definition used here is founded on the basic principle that there is no a priori hierarchy of experiences, or of versions of the same or similar realities. This is the democratic part, in which no experience is cast aside, and no experience has a higher status due to its origin or reputation. Experiences compete with each other, and the criteria are based on merit. This definition also strongly accentuates the role of experience. (See Hannula, Suoranta & Vadén 2005)

In this situation, the idea of a democratic relationship between different views and versions goes back to the principle of treating each side equally and of providing an equal opportunity for each individual to express themself. It refers to the ability and willingness to put your works and views out there, transparently to articulate and to communicate what you do. This requires that we have a capacity for reflection, comparison and self-criticism. It is an on-going process, which is not executed in a general way or in the abstract, but always in the particular and the specific. The aim is to articulate your position and viewpoint in words and ways that are close to you, and comfortable for you. The aim is not to become another nice, neat tourist on the road, nor to copy or imitate others, but to give your own situated, value-laden interpretation.

The idea of the inherent potentiality of any experience is just one part of the democracy of experiences. What follows, luckily is closely based on the main starting point. Not only is there a plurality of co-existing versions, but this co-existence places demands on each of those versions. Each type or version of the same or similar interpretations of reality can and should criticize and comment on the others.

What we have here, of course, is again a common type of interactive site, where you have to give in order to get, push in order to be pulled, constantly being affected, but also constantly having an effect.

But why this openness, transparency and comparison? Why the effort of giving and taking? We have to be very careful here. The motivation for doing this is found in the internal logic of qualitative research work. It is not about being or aiming to be a benevolent role model. This is not a Mother Theresa syndrome. Instead, the reason for acting along the lines of a democracy of experiences is nothing but self-interest and self-defence. The fact is that you can only survive by putting yourself into a site and situation of challenges and comparisons, one that enables you to find your focus, your subject and what it is that you want to say.

This specific act and the process in which two different versions meet and collide has a name. In ethics, it is called the third space, and it can also, following the German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1970), be called the possibility of a loving conflict. It is about person A meeting person B, but not on A's or B's terms. Rather, this is a meeting in which both are willing and able to question their own assumptions, and where the common ground is shaped and made during that meeting, through the process of moving into the grey zone where there are no guarantees. Just a collection of colliding views and shifting perceptions held together by being the focus and interest of content-driven, thematic research.

Methodological Abundance

What about methodological abundance? In short, this stands for the plurality of ways and means of being-in-the-world, of reflecting and producing versions of the world. Here the important thing is to see this plurality and insecurity as a part of life, as a part of the fabric of our everyday experiences. You should not box yourself in. Plurality, openness, complexity and uncertainty are not a problem. They are a necessity. The challenge is to face and relate to them – to deal with them so that they make sense to you.

This foregrounding of the principle of fostering a plurality of ways of being-in-the-world also articulates the desire to revisit a certain discussion dating back to the mid-70's. This was then a very heated debate led by Paul Feyerabend with his book *Against Method*, in which he openly provoked fellow researchers by stating that we should abandon the illusion of objective science and allow ourselves to follow the rule that anything goes. On the face of it, and with a wink of his eye, he was calling for a fully fledged anarchistic approach to research methodologies. Feyerabend wanted to get rid of the static model that had become a hindrance. He wanted us to be able to open up to the unlimited richness present in our realities. And for that, he needed anarchism. "Anarchism, while perhaps not the most attractive political philosophy, is certainly excellent medicine for epistemology and for the philosophy of science." (1975, 9)

The historical irony is that this is where the joke got the better of Feyerabend himself, since in the 70's, and too often ever since, his ideas were and are seen as irresponsible and relativistic. But Feyerabend was not a charlatan, he was very serious. He himself very clearly pointed out that, even if anything might be possible, not everything that is possible is meaningful. This is definitely not relativism. If anything, it is the opposite. It is a radical situatedness that, on the contrary, demands site-specific definitions and concepts.

Feyerabend's intentional playfulness should be seen as a very productive, fruitful opening. It gives us a chance not to be too stiff and uptight about ourselves, and yes, not to be too self-centred or to take ourselves for granted. It opens up the possibility of research as a performative act and the very act of doing things with words.

This is an opening that allows us to shift the focus away from putting things into a box and then using all our energy to keep the box locked, solid and stable. Instead of figuring out finalized descriptions of what we do, we have the chance to focus on ways of thinking-with and of describing *how* we do what we do, when we do what we do. One of the very far-reaching implications of turning things around in this way is the awareness that, regardless of what our aims are, it is not the *what*, but the *how* that counts.

This then is *how* as in the never-ending processes of being-with, of being-in-the-world. It is a messy bundle of questions about relationships, negotiations and compromises. It is about processes of situating yourself and speaking from a position, acting and re-activating yourself critically, yet constructively. In our contemporary-art context, we have to add a word of warning that what I am striving towards here is not relational aesthetics, not feel-goodism. It is not cool&sexy consumerism, it is not lifestyle-product placement, nor wellness training, it is not about metaphysical essentialism, and finally, it does not believe in teleological determinism. It is an ongoing process of sharing in the production of ways of reflecting on our plural ways of being-in-the-world. It is the good old carousel that goes round and round. The essential thing is not to try to stop

it, but to keep it going. Asking: How do we join it and when do we join in – as passionate participants, not as passive bystanders.

And yes, surprisingly or not, through these thoughts and through these confrontations with the assumptions and starting points behind what it means to do proper, valid qualitative research, we open the door to the next section of this essay. We now open the door fully to face the question of Good Practice. A question stated so innocently, but which has significant consequences. Through this simple idea of Good Practice, we are faced with a huge number of follow-up questions. How do we want to understand Good, and what about Practice? What is quality, and who defines it?

But, before dealing at length with this theme, let me finish off the first part of this essay with an anecdote from a world seemingly far away from the practices of artistic research. This is a world in which people are constantly asking the urgent question: What makes a good ice hockey player a good ice hockey player? This anecdote serves here to remind us that this crucial question is applicable to any field involving serious long-term practice within our everyday lives.

It reminds us that – in the midst of our daily hassles and struggles – we ought perhaps to be much more aware of what makes a good cup of cappuccino a good cup of cappuccino, or what makes a good baker a great baker?

But let us get on with the story. It is about a Finnish ice hockey player who made history. Not international history, mind you, but local history. A player named Juhani Tamminen, who later became a coach and also a media consultant. A controversial figure who, in fact, has been able to put his finger on the crux of Good Practice in a magnificently effective and original way.

So it is the story of Juhani Tamminen, who in his active skating days was known as a player with a fantastic wrist shot, played with great skill, velocity and precision from the attacking zone of the faceoff spot.

Tamminen was born in 1950, and grew up and started his hockey career in Turku. It should be added here that there is a personal connection. I grew up just a block away from his mother's old house, playing in the same club at junior level, and getting to know him personally, too.

But the story. It is the year 1971, and our attention is on the traditional international Izvestiya tournament played in a city that was then called Leningrad. The game on the date 17.12 was Finland against Soviet Union. A game in which, against all the odds, the Finns beat the Soviets 4 goals to 2. A result of an ice hockey game that made a big difference. This was the very first time that Finland beat the Soviet Union. In this game, Tamminen scored two goals, becoming a hero of this small, peripheral nation state. Later in his career, he went on to play professional hockey in Canada and Japan. As a continuation of his core practice, he has subsequently been a coach in Finland, Switzerland and Japan. He has written books and become famous again as a sharp-tongued TV-commentator in his home country.

What is interesting for us is that this hero of a small nation has proposed a definition of good practice. The definition came about when he was constantly being asked how to shoot that perfect wrist shot and how to become a great goal-scoring forward. In explanation, Tamminen developed the golden rule that I have dubbed the practice of Sitting on a Bus. Because he is a devoutly practical man, Tamminen defined good practice as doing what you want to do, but doing it all the time. For him, quality of practice is achieved and produced

by doing it more and more, through more repetition and more training. In his case, by working on more shots at goal, more shots in the bottom corner, more shots in the top corner. Throughout the summer with socks on, throughout the winter wearing skates, no pause, come rain or shine. Always with determination and passion, commitment and perspective.

But Tamminen actually gave the example that I am after in a rather funny comparison with the act of sitting on a bus. According to him, if you want to become good at the act of sitting on a bus, the only way you can develop and get better at it is for you really to sit a lot on a bus. You sit facing forwards, you sit with your face to the back of the bus, you travel short distances, and you take the night bus. You keep on keeping on sitting on a bus. And while you are doing that, you think it through, you reflect on what, how and why. You talk to the other people sitting on the bus in a professional way, you talk to the driver, you have meetings with bus manufacturers and tour guides. The essential point is that this is thinking while doing, while acting. This is thinking and reflecting in and through the practice - a practice that cannot happen without practice – without sitting on a bus. Day in, day out, year in and yet another one about to come along. Thus, the promise of a coherent and compassionate act in the form of the art of sitting on a bus.

Part II

Good Practice

Let us now focus on the Aristotelian idea of good practice. What follows will not be a full-scale exploration of the domain of Aristotelian ethics or philosophy, but – yes, well – a practical description (in the context of artistic research) of the idea of good practice and the follow-up question: How do we articulate the goods that are internal to a practice?

Aristotle's core idea is astonishingly simple. According to him, good practice comes out of good practice. This sentence has prompted plenty of sneers, since it can be so easily discredited as simplistic nonsense or empty tautology. But, if the sentence is seen from within Aristotelian philosophy as a whole, it is a very demanding and intriguing thought. A thought that we can with no trouble at all spend our entire lives dealing with and tackling.

When we say "good practice comes from good practice" it is not tautology if and when the given practice – whatever that might be – is seen not as static, stable and given, but as something that is constantly developing, that is open to challenges both from within its sphere and from similar, adjacent viewpoints. Instead of this being a dead-end utterance, it begs that we to get to the point. It is an incentive to go back to the basics of the activity of a practice. Asking: What makes it what it is, and what might help it to become a little better at what it tries to do and achieve?

Quoting the original source: "If we take a flautist or a sculptor or any artist – or in general any class of men who have a specific function or activity – his goodness and proficiency is considered to lie in the performance of that function." (Aristotle 1976, 75) Thus, the focus is placed on the act of doing and of experiencing that act. In Aristotle's terms, we have to ask: What is it that we are doing and what is its meaning? Turned into a process of self-understanding, it translates into the sentence: "A good life is spent searching for the good life." A task that has to be a never-ending search, which cannot be about arriving, but

about how we are able to travel and enjoy that awfully bumpy road. It is about the ethics of the unattainable, about cherishing and respecting the full absurdity of life.

In terms of doing research, this means reversing the expectations. We will not get any clear-cut, all-encompassing answers. What we might come up with are slightly better-articulated questions and contexts, in the form of ways of keeping the process up and running. There is no authentic essence, nothing "real" to hunt down, no *böse onkel* to shoot down. Doing research is not a John Wayne movie, it is a process that has to remain open and be maintained so that it will stay open.

Referring back to Aristotle: "If we assume that the function of man is a kind of life, an activity or series of actions of the soul, implying a rational principle; and if the function of a good man is to perform these activities well and rightly; and if every function is performed well when performed in accordance with its proper excellence: if all this is so, the conclusion is that the good for man is an activity of soul in accordance with virtue." (Ibid. 76)

But this journey has two very important qualifications. It is a slow process, intended to last a complete lifetime, which in itself places it absolutely in the opposite corner to so many of the trends and dynamics of today's universities, not to mention the rhythms and tempos of contemporary art. We are talking about virtues such as being courageous, temperate and noble, in every case about being true to the spirit and aims of the practice as an evolving enterprise. This means that, if a practice is to lead to knowledge, that practice must be done properly. "I have not really learned for myself (taken to heart, made second nature to me) that they have this intrinsic value until I have learned to value (love) them for it, with the consequence that I take pleasure in doing them. To understand and appreciate the value that makes them enjoyable in themselves I must learn for myself to enjoy them, and that does take time and practice – in short, habituation." (Burnyeat 1980, 78).

Secondly, it is a process that must always be particular and contextual. To go back over 2000 years, in Aristotle's example, it is about the way "a carpenter's interest in the right angle is different from the geometrician's." (1976, 77). And to continue with the classic examples: "The good man is the one who performs admirably the activities specific to his kind". (See Wilkes 1980, 343)

All this is fine, but begs the pragmatic question: How? And of course, how and who can define what is "specific to his kind", meaning the expectations and requirements that we have or wish for when we think, for example, of the good of a video artist who does research on the question of narrative self-understanding? This involves a set of complex questions that brings us to the second part of this section. It brings us to the idea of how we define goods internal to a practice. An idea that relates to reflection on the main assumptions and structures of knowledge production.

Goods Internal to a Practice

Let us here play, for a second, with words. If we want to be nasty, and nastiness is indeed often a welcome antidote to self-congratulatory tendencies, we can say that to do research is to do good research, or that to paint a figurative painting is to paint a good figurative painting. I could go on with this litany, but what I am trying to stress is how this "silliness" really forces us to focus on what the "good" is or can be in terms of the particular practice. Thus, we need to ask

who defines it, and in accordance with which rules and habits of the heart. We also need to ask: Where does it come from? How is it defined currently? And what are its future ambitions and perspectives?

Following the train of thought set in motion by Aristotle's idea of good practice that is maintained and developed through doing that practice, it is not all that extraordinary that the criteria and qualifications are closely interwoven with the doing of that practice. We are therefore talking about both the internal goods of a practice and the internal logic of the practice. We ask: What is the virtue of the practice? Meaning what makes it what it is, and how can it be coherently and logically taken further and carried out?

To quote a contemporary, and highly influential, interpretation of Aristotle: "A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods". (MacIntyre 1985, 191)

What this means is that the definition of a good practice cannot stem from somewhere outside it. Each practice must define itself, but not alone, but rather in close interaction with other practices and ways of expression. This is done in interaction and through experience. In a larger framework, it is done through tradition, by developing it, breaking away from it, and then returning back to it. It is again the act of getting close in order to distance yourself, the act of push and pull, give and take. Through this, we are asking the vital questions about power and empowerment: Who is talking and what is he or she talking about, and with whom? An awareness that yet again awakens us to the necessity of participating in accordance with our own views, values, wants and fears in the construction of concepts. And why? Well, as ever, if you are not doing it, you can be perfectly sure that someone else is doing it, and doing it in a manner that goes against your aims and interests.

But let us take a slight side step. What is a practice? Quoting MacIntyre again: A practice is "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended." (Ibid, 187)

Thus, what are the qualifications for a practice? As you might already suspect, they are anything and everything. A practice is any activity, as such, which makes sense, and which is done systematically – potentially like sitting on a bus, collecting fir cones, doing experimental walks in a park while carrying an expressionistic oil painting over your shoulder. A practice that always has a certain past, present and future, but a practice that has to be open-ended. There is no need to close any doors or to decide once and for all on any one set of a priori criteria. What it is and can become is something that only emerges in interaction. And yes, cherishing and maintaining this procedural openness, this content-driven activity, is one of the main ingredients of an adequate, valid research practice. This is a practice that has a very clear direction and theme that it goes towards and addresses, yet not as an abstract principle, but as a journey in which you have to take one step after another – steps that then affect the way the subsequent steps are directed and performed. A good practice does

not exist as itself. It hangs in the air solely as a potentiality, because first we have to do it. Repeat it and returned to it, accumulating knowledge of how to do it, how to define the good and the internal values that exist in and through it.

Part III

Open Source and the Participatory Research Community

The idea of this third part is to continue with our revisit to the potentiality of the Aristotelian concept of good practice and the qualities produced in and through it.

This is practice and qualities in the form of the goods of the practice, in a non-teleological, non-essentialistic interpretation of that practice, based on a situated and committed context-bound version of the practice. The scope and content of a practice that is always contested, conflictual and constructed – and hopefully also compassionate. Thus, as already outlined at the beginning of this essay, there are no neutral, given, natural or value-free perceptions, experiences, or knowledge. Any type of knowledge production is always particular, value-laden and positioned. The point is how and why these research sites and situations are shaped and made.

The guiding assumption here is that each particular research practice has a lot to learn from the others, and that this learning and exchange should be structured on the basis of the open-source idea. The connection with the Aristotelian idea of good practice coming from good practice is emphasised in the notion of what kind of practice we are after and what version of practice can survive and serve as a fruitful platform for the production of knowledge. A situation and a platform that has to be open-ended and inviting, which fosters internal commotions and conflicts in order that the process in a given practice has a chance to evolve and to give the participants a long-term perspective on a continuing context. This practice constantly has to remind itself of the need to laugh at itself and to share its views and opinions with anyone who is interested in the development of that practice, with the aim of gaining mutual respect and reciprocal recognition.

In short, the open-source principle, which is familiar from other fields of knowledge production, stands for the necessity and possibility of defining and using knowledge as something that is openly available to everyone; and that means everyone who in turn makes their findings and knowledge open to everyone else to share and take further. The open-source principle turns the principle of copyright into the idea of 'copy left'. All knowledge is to be shared, but shared with respect and mutual recognition of achievements and ideas. It has to be added that sharing is not a virtue in itself. We need to acknowledge that in each case and practice some parts of the processes and aspects of knowledge are not translatable or compatible. Thus, one of the main questions in each piece of research is: What is so specific that it remains and ought to remain solely within the given field? and What can be meaningfully shared with other researchers?

The aim here is to think through the possibilities of the open-source principle as a motivating force for shaping and defining what artistic research is and could be. This deliberate comparison and hoped-for spillover focus on the idea of social innovation in the form of commons-based peer production.

To cite Yochai Benkler's description of one type of open-source phenomenon, free software: "It suggests that the networked environment makes possible a new modality of organizing production: radically decentralized, collaborative and nonproprietary; based on sharing resources and outputs among widely distributed, loosely connected individuals who cooperate with each other without relying on either market signals or managerial commands. This is what I call "commons-based peer production". (2006, p. 60)

And to continue with Benkler: "It is the feasibility of producing information, knowledge, and culture through social, rather than market and proprietary relations – through cooperative peer production and coordinate individual action – that creates the opportunities for greater autonomous action, a more critical culture, a more discursively engaged and better informed republic, and perhaps a more equitable global community." (Ibid. 92)

Thus, this type of research (regardless of the field of expertise) sets out to define and analyse good research practice, what makes for a beneficial, functioning research culture, and how we can achieve social innovations. And for that we need to take a closer look at what the open-source principle implies and accentuates.

On the face of it, it is again actually quite amazingly straightforward. Open source means that whatever it (as in knowledge) is, it should be free for everyone to make use of and develop further. There is no inherent property value for the person who comes up with a new invention or new ways of combining existing knowledge, it is all "left" for anyone to make the best use of it. The idea is closely founded on commons-based peer production, which is characteristically radically decentralized, collaborative and non-proprietary. Thus, it is about sharing information in order for all of us to be able to do what we do when we do what we do in a slightly better and more meaningful way. Even if it is not about making a short-term profit, the principle stands for long-term benefits and profits that are by nature accessible to many, and inclusive, not exclusive.

Funnily enough, even if to some people the open-source principle can sound like a rather moderate, and yet still awfully scary version of communism, recent developments have shown that open source is completely compatible with the rules and regulations of a market-driven capitalist structure. There is a mounting body of evidence that implies that businesses founded on an open-source framework generate results in the form of products that are more reliable and better functioning.

Our example is provided by Benkler, and is that giant of industry IBM. According to Benkler's study, recently, IBM has made twice the profit from free software based on open-source ideology that it has from old-style copyright products that bring in licensing fees and royalties. IBM's strategy has not been an either/or one, rather it has learned how to be non-exclusive, using both approaches. The company's patent record is the best in the industry and, what is most interesting for us, whereas, in 2000, the volume of open-source business was still close to nothing, by 2003, so-called "Linux-related" services amounted to double the business based on intellectual property rights. (Ibid. 46-47)

But then again, what we ought to be wondering is: Why? The background is the radical change in the environment and conditions for knowledge production. There is hardly a field left that is not a highly complex one that is strongly interconnected with and dependent on other fields of knowledge production and other practices.

In short, today, almost any field of human interaction is so specific and so

complex that nobody can survive alone. The idea of a master of the whole field is the stuff of children's storybooks. What we are dealing with are the results of something called the information society, whose structure is one of inter-connected networks, and not top-down hierarchies. In the words of Manuel Castells: "Networks are open structures, able to expand without limits, integrating new nodes as long as they are able to communicate within the network, namely as long as they share the same communication codes (for example, values or performance goals). A network-based social structure is a highly dynamic, open system, susceptible to innovating without threatening its balance." (2000, 501-502)

Therefore, as a pragmatic consequence, instead of even trying to do it all and know it all alone, we have a need and a necessity to create an environment for a collective, give-and-take site and situation. This is, in fact, the only way to survive and to do what you want to do in a meaningful way. Rather than taking refugee in the la-la land of woolly-minded good will, open-source and copy-left ideologies are motivated by the clear, direct self-interest and self-defence of the individual and the group of researchers. What is more, through sharing and giving and getting, the research process becomes more enjoyable and fruitful – both intellectually and socially. We get closer to the pleasure principle, which is something that should not be neglected, but carefully fostered if we want to generate productive research and research atmospheres.

Translated to our field of knowledge and our practices, in the form of plural, inter-connected networks, how should we do this? Or even more precisely: What are we supposed to do? My aim and vision is to generate a version of the open-source model for artistic research. Not in the form of some strange cultic illusion or abstract dream, but a highly down-to-earth, pragmatic working solution for moving towards an idea and a goal. This is a goal in the form of social innovation: commons-based peer production. An innovation through which we can create platforms for sharing strategies, information and, in general, help each other to generate a context for ourselves as artists, curators, writers etc.

In our case, we need to move away from software to our version of hard-ware, away from computer programmes to artistic practice. Thus, the question is: What happens if we do a swap here, and replace market signals with the art market in the form of a gallery or a museum, and managerial commands with the work of curators.

Or what if we do something radical and, instead of talking about something abstract that is out there somewhere, we find our way to the right *here* and concentrate on a current exhibition on the theme of artistic research? Thus, the questions that arise are: a) What kind of exhibition is it?; and b) How is it different from any other thematic group show? In short, what kind of good practice is this?

Talkin' Loud and Sayin' Something

When trying to get closer to the specific elements of good practice in this given case, let us first address the core information and aims of the project. The *Talkin' Loud and Sayin' Something – four Perspectives of Artistic Research* group exhibition will focus on the positively controversial and challenging theme of practice-based research carried out by visual artists. The event will be the first comprehensive contemporary art show that deliberately and openly seeks to combine artistic expression with the means of research, bringing about a

productive, thought-provoking collision. The exhibition will present four individual cases of artistic research in and through each particular practice. The participating artists represent a wide variety of artistic strategies, working coherently and systematically with research aims and methods.

Of the participating artists, Sopowan Boonnimitra was among the first three to graduate from the practice-based PhD programme in Lund, Sweden, in 2006. Jacqueline Donachie has spent five years working with a Professor of Human Genetics from the University of Glasgow, mapping the story of how certain genetic diseases get worse from generation to generation. Heli Rekula is currently doing her PhD project at the Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki. And Annica Karlsson Rixon (in this project working with Anna Viola Hallberg) is doing her PhD studies at HFF, School of Photography at the University of Gothenburg.

The core theme of the exhibition is critically yet constructively thinking through what artistic research is and can be. Our aim is to reflect on the chances and challenges for presenting and representing the research processes embedded in a work of art in an exhibition format. The task is not to solve the problem or to provide an answer to the dilemma. Our aim is to take seriously this particular way of working within inter and trans-disciplinary frameworks and platforms. Thus, our aim is to produce an exhibition that is both intellectually and visually inspiring and inviting, provoking and demanding. And yes, that is precisely why in our title we are linking ourselves with that famous shout from the one and only James Brown, but we do not just copy it, we twist it around and change it. Not a lot, but enough for the original comment *talkin' loud and sayin' nothin'* (recorded first in 1970) to turn into the positive, and even semi-provocative claim, "talkin' loud and sayin' something." (See and *hear* Brown 1993)

The exhibition at Gothenburg Museum of Art combines installations and moving images (Boonnimitra & Karlsson Rixon/Hallberg), photographs (Karlsson Rixon/Hallberg, Boonnimitra & Rekula), video installations (Karlsson Rixon/Hallberg & Rekula) and spatial works and drawings (Donachie).

The participating artists do not first and foremost represent any institution. They stand for themselves, and more accurately, for their specific, individual projects, which will be developed and displayed at this unique event. However, even if each participant stands for their own works, there is a collective element inherent in the project. It is a collaborative process that includes artists and a curator. A process in which we will be talking loud and proud, forcing and luring our own concentration onto the content of the work, to its potential substance and quality.

We will neither illustrate nor instrumentalise. We do not explain, we articulate using the means of contemporary art, in the form of spatial interventions and visual interpretations. We are looking and searching. We are not against, but *for*. We are *for* new ways of working as artists, and also *for* analyzing and investigating alternative ways of being-in-the-world.

Thus, when asked how this will be different from any other thematic group show, the answer is that it will not be structurally different, but it seeks to be very different from run-of-the-mill exhibition activities on the level of content and the domain of practice. As regards structure, we do not pretend that we can or want to re-invent the "wheel". We are visual artists and a curator within this particular field. That is what we do when we do what we do. This is our practice, here and now. And that is what we try to do as well as possible.

Nevertheless, the content-driven difference is shaped and made within the practice and, I would claim, also clearly visible on the exhibition site. This is a meaningful difference based upon how we do what we do when are doing this particular exhibition. We do it slowly, we do it carefully, and we do it together. We deliberately do not hold back or sit on our knowledge or our views, but share them; we put them out there to be commented on and discussed. Not as assertions, but as ideas leading to works of art, based on their internal logic of good practice, not on external qualifications or ramifications.

The process started with all of us getting together, seeing and feeling, experiencing the space, holding discussions for two days about what, how, when and why. We shared views and knowledge, and the aim of trying to make a group exhibition in which the whole is truly much more than the sum of its parts. This is a strategy that follows a particular route from a neutralized space towards a specific place.

What this chosen start-up (meetings, discussions, give-and-take arguments about the theme of the artistic research and the space, and about the shape of the exhibition) means or implies is not rocket science, but it is the backbone for the whole effort. We came together to discuss what it means to do a group show with four very different approaches and projects that are created and generated with a clearly articulated research focus and interest. We all shared a strong interest in and commitment to the chosen theme and the new project initiated around it, bringing artistic practice as research into a contemporary art exhibition. A project that, from the very first moment, did not want to stress shared, general points, but prioritized and focused on the particular positions and strengths of each individual project. It chose the route from specificity and particularity (of each of the artists and their works) towards having them happen within the same framework and in interaction with each other on the exhibition site, which has been turned from a neutral space into a unique place.

The initial meeting gave rise to sufficient common ground (a notion that we have to face and treat with care, since if the idea of common ground is not constantly and vigorously recreated and maintained, the lack of it, or its superficiality backfires rapidly with dire consequences). In this particular case, the common ground was that we agreed on the structure of the exhibition, its thematic priorities and core ideas. The aim was that, from the very beginning, everyone would be on the same level, starting from the same page of the project. Then we returned home, or wherever each of us was working at that time, keeping in touch via e-mail and phone calls.

Thus, the good practice created and generated while doing that practice was achieved through the following steps and elements. We took the time to think the project through before starting to run with it. We agreed on the all-important assumptions and based the common ground on that. Then we had what we needed: trust. Trust and a functioning communication set-up that, between the initial meeting and the one at which we all got together to envisage and mount the exhibition, were mainly kept up by the curator staying in touch with each project individually. A relevant question arises here: Is it enough to meet as a group only once? Well, obviously it depends, and since, if and when we deal with professionals in any field, it is a given that everybody has enough to do and already has plenty of other commitments. The second structural fact is that here the participants all live in different countries. The main points are

the strength of the framework, the initial meeting, and also the duration of the project. If this exhibition had spanned a longer period, it would have been necessary to meet sometime in between. But here, there was a time gap of a little over half a year, which is still manageable.

But, yes, next on the list of what makes this practice good practice is that, since we all knew and understood the basic structure and logic of the project, the number of nasty surprises was kept to a minimum. Without doubt, plans change, they are adjusted, and there are always various conflicts involved, but the transparency of the project allows each participant to think ahead and to make the best of the situation. It allows us to start from the same position, and then to go on and take it individually in whatever direction and for whatever distance necessary. And this is what paid dividends when we finally returned to the exhibition site and started putting up the show. We returned to the site, which we had left with a few ideas and a lot more anticipation, and we arrived there to make a show together. We hung around, waited for the paint to dry, got bored, got anxious, but during all of this, we talked, we argued and we changed and chased a lot of thoughts and ideas about what it means to work professionally in our field. During this period, we shared a common ground, a common goal and frame of mind that made everything possible and enjoyable: mutual respect and reciprocal recognition.

This set-up is wonderfully un-spectacular. There is no glory, no hurrahs, just a determined focus on and enjoyment of the process of making a show together. A hands-on, no-frills set-up with a pragmatic structure that seeks to serve the theme, along with both the show as a whole and each individual work of art on display, as well and as beautifully, and in a way that is as visually and mentally engaging as possible.

It was never any secret that, at the end of the process, we would have an exhibition of visual art. We did not want a laboratory or a reading room, or to hold a seminar on the exhibition site. We all agreed not to have lengthy texts on the wall. The point being: there is no theory behind this enterprise. Instead, there is the practice of some artists and a curator, and the idea of setting up a well-functioning group show that will be and become more than the sum of its parts. This is a multi-layered, open-ended process that is cultivated and fostered in interaction.

By the end, we had hope. Hope that we could give the works a chance to be what they are intended to be on that particular site that is about to become a place – and, at the same time, to give viewers a chance to put themselves into this challenging interaction. That is, an invitation to be, to feel and to think with a group of fantastic works of art. And, yes, if we have managed to succeed, that is already quite enough. It would also in itself be very different from the majority of today's thematic group shows, which struggle somewhere between over-articulation and under-performance.

Thus, to sum up this part of the argument, what we did is not in itself any different from other, similar events, but our deep-seated claim is that *how* we did it absolutely, definitely and positively is different. The difference is that, through all these small steps and small gestures, when made coherently, openly, self-critically and reflectively, the whole process counts as valid and adequate productive research – something that is revealed, reflected and documented right here and right now, in a version of collectively conducted practice-based artistic research.

At the end of this section, let us return to the details of the theory of an open-source practice that is self-critical and open-ended, constantly evolving and developing. What this means and what it requires from a practice is that it has both a clear vision and direction, yet at the same time an openness and unpredictability as regards what happens next. Thus, we are not asking what ends and purposes the practice and its procedurality serve, but instead, we have to pay attention and stay with the internal and external conflicts and collisions that take place within the sphere of this given practice. The point here is that a practice is not what it is meant to be, and not what it wants to be, unless it knows that it must maintain and foster a plurality of views and visions. To quote MacIntyre: "It is through conflict and sometimes only through conflict that we learn what our ends and purposes are." (1985, 164)

The necessary task of being open and of inviting criticism, influences and comments from both inside and outside is one of the very few guarantees that a practice will stay alive and evolving. It at least offers a chance of smoothing the edges when any kind of practice is constantly subject to doubt and trouble. In terms of Aristotelian thinking, this is called an epistemological crisis. This is a situation in which the previously valid questions no longer seem relevant and the normally functioning, taken-for-granted connection between what seems to be and what actually is starts to become loose and even to break down. (See MacIntyre 2006, 9)

The task is dealing with these smaller or larger-scale epistemological crises in a self-reflective, productive way. And yes, that means fostering and encouraging different views from the inside in, and in comparison with other practices. It also means having the ability to laugh at yourself – and being able to do this both as individuals and as institutions. For this, we need a collective agency that provides a self defence and an ability to "aspire to achieve some relatively self-sufficient and independent form of participatory practice-based community." (MacIntyre 2006 b, 155)

We need this collectivity, and we need our own acknowledgement that we are part of a past, a present and a future. We are embedded and anchored, structured, but not chained. We must question and doubt, yet not in an abstract sense, but speaking from a contextualized position and speaking with a specific other.

The theme and issue at hand. "Any feature of any tradition, any theory, any practice, any belief can always under certain conditions be put in question, the practice of putting in question, whether within a tradition or between traditions, itself always requires the context of a tradition." (MacIntyre 2006, 12)

But then again, we immediately face the same question, the same point of departure and endless return in and through our practices. The question is: How? How can we do this within artistic research as individual researchers and as a group – or, as here, as a temporary research collective organizing an exhibition together? How do we understand knowledge and how do we deal with knowledge?

I do not have an answer, no solution or all-embracing model and, what is more to the point, I can't have them if I want to stay true to the particularism that is needed in the search for good practice. What a procedural principle has is a direction and something for which the Germans have a magnificent word: *Die Ahnung*. A word that stands for a hint of an expectation, for intuitive thinking about what to move towards. What I do have is the knowledge and experience gained through practice that there is a very clear aim towards which

I want to move. This is a goal that keeps slipping away in a trick of the light, but a goal that keeps my interest and attention transfixed. It keeps me asking questions, in terms of my own activities, and also of the activities with which I am related: What is practice in a particular given field?

How in this site and time-specific practice can we define what is good, what is quality, what is its internal logic, and yes, vitally, what defines failure, both productive failure and the negative variety?

As we near the end of this essay, let us sum up. We have focused intensely on two inter-twined concepts of good practice that comes out of good practice, and on how this idea can be achieved by following the principle of an open-source activity performed by a participatory, practice-based community. This then implies a research practice in the form of a localized, long-term activity that is articulated through the particular experiences that are created and gene-rated within it. A practice that deliberately and transparently moves towards something, opens up, leaves a trace, and is credible, accountable and solid. A process that comprehends its radical need to situate itself, to contextualize, and to participate in the context. A process that is committed, coherent and syste-matic, respecting and demanding the particular responsibility for and freedom of interpretation.

All this reminds us of the core principles of critical hermeneutics (See Bleicher 1980). The idea of articulating subjective views that are comprehen-sible, communicative, and coherent, honest and systematic, credible and mea-ningful. Views and opinions that are not generalizations, not universal, but always insist on being particular and personal. Thus, the classic idea that, when we are and act as subjectively as possible, this is as close as we can get to being objective. This is the road from the details to the whole, from nuances towards the overall framework – and not the other way around.

This is a principle that has a very clear order of priorities. Critical herme-neutics is based on the idea that, in any kind of relationship and encounter, what is required of us is first to give the other a chance to articulate what he/she wants to say, and to do this on his/her, not our, terms. After that comes part two, which involves our trying to relate, critically yet constructively to what has been said, and to what that says to us about our life. This is an act that can be defined as an ethics of listening, or as an anthropology of the near, which is based on a commitment to a close engagement with everyday-life situations, generating chances for encounters, and perhaps even dialogue. (See Back 2007, 9)

But yes, finally, at the very end, let us return at full-length to the three metaphors thrown into the air at the very beginning of our argumentational journey. A reminder of the fact that whatever we do, we are constantly telling stories. Stories that have a double character. They have a certain direction, a certain genre with its own internal expectations and assumptions. Then, at the same time, in order to be a meaningful story, what happens next, on the next page, or in the next scene is and has to be partly unknown. The direction is there, but the vital nuances are unknown. We have no way of knowing what happens on the next page if we are to keep the element of surprise alive and breathing, evolving and changing, challenging and chasing us.

Thus, in a list, the three metaphors from the beginning:

1) **Like Trying to Run in Waist-High New Snow**

2) **Crossing the River by Feeling Each Stone**

3) **Moving like Smugglers' Boats – Moving quietly in the night, with no lights, almost colliding with one another – but refusing any contact with or recognition of the other.**

Here are the rhetorical origins of each of these.

Like Trying to Run in Waist-High New Snow
This is a saying and a metaphor that goes back to a Finnish track-and-field athlete called Voitto Hellsten. He specialized in the 400 metres, running in the 1950's, and enjoyed his best result at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, where he came 3rd in the 400 metres. Hellsten lived his whole life in Turku, where he also died in 1995.

Hellsten was an athlete on an international level in times when not that many people were able to earn money in sport. Hellsten was no exception, and he made his living as a metal worker in Turku dockyards. After his athletic career, he was never really active as a coach, but remained a recognized name and local personality until his death.

Hellsten did not intend to formulate a catchy metaphor for anything. The saying that I refer to was his way of explaining how he and his friends used to practice for their sport. Again, these were times long before fully air-conditioned training facilities. So Hellsten and his colleges had to train outside, and especially back then, during the winter, there was at least enough snow around. They thus invented a rather peculiar, but very effective way of training for their distance. They went to open fields that, for most of the winter period, were completely covered with snow, often over one metre deep, and they ran across those fields. Fields of snow where the frost was not so strong that they could not run on the snow, but where their feet went straight through to the earth, running up and down, falling and getting up again, with the soft assistance – not unlike a cushion – of the snow.

For me, this metaphor fits well with a discipline like artistic research that as yet has no specific past and no clear path to follow. The metaphor stands for the necessity, in this phase of the discipline, of keeping the doors open, of taking risks, of trying out new ways of producing works and knowledge. In short, of experimenting and being innovative. This is an activity that very definitely often feels like running through a field waist-high in snow. You run and push through, and you fall, you get wet. It does not look very elegant, but you are going somewhere that you have not been before, learning how to take the falls and how to get up faster and better. And yes, if you keep doing it consistently and coherently, you will reach the other side.

Crossing the River by Feeling Each Stone.
This is a very old Chinese saying that I came across some 15 years ago in a newspaper article that compared the different ways the two large, developing economies of Russia and China were reacting to the challenge of embracing market-driven capitalism. The Russians opted for a fast and furious crash course, while the Chinese decided to do the opposite.

My intention here is not to say something about this economic transformation or how successful or disastrous it was in either of these nation states. Instead, the saying serves as a metaphor that helps us find the necessary focus on the activities involved in artistic research. Activities that try to keep two different ways of creating knowledge and relating to reality in the air at the same time. For me, this Chinese phrase provides a fruitful starting point not only for keeping these two balls in the air, but also for generating situations in which both sides influence and learn from each other, generating that extra something else in and through their interaction.

For me, this saying translates into the motto: Speed kills. The reference is

here not to some chemical or other, but to the need to slow down, and to advance carefully, with enough time and with the intention of enjoying the slowness, just like crossing a river feeling each stone on the river bed. This is slowness not as passivity, but as an active attitude that understands that things have to have time to evolve, and that research in particular takes its own time. It is an activity that must not be rushed through, but which has to be slowed down. An activity that is often very remote from the common habits and rhythms of contemporary art.

This metaphor also allows me to stress another main defining characteristic of interesting and meaningful research. It is not just about slowness, but about the need to appropriate concepts and strategies from other fields. The task is not to copy or to imitate, but to make these different ways of describing reality your own, to work on them through your own views, values and practice. In the end, the task is to provide site-specific definitions, your interpretations of what it means, for example, to do artistic research.

Moving like Smugglers' Boats – Moving quietly in the night, no lights, almost colliding with one another – but refusing any contact or recognition of the other.
This is a saying that I heard just recently in Istanbul, Turkey. In the present context of Turkish society, it serves as a description of the ways the various members of civil society in Turkey relate to and deal with one another. It is a saying that describes the unfortunate current situation with its sad lack of collaboration, and yet, nevertheless, it makes the first move - in the hope of generating greater co-operation and solidarity between the participants in wider civil society.

It is a saying that in our context of artistic research also works both ways. It is a reminder of the negative potentiality of a research field in which the participants are unwilling or unable to come together or to generate sites for sharing knowledge. On the other hand, it reminds me of the opportunity and necessity of striving to achieve meetings that take place coherently and continuously. The task is there, but unless we face it and do something about it, it pretty evidently is not going to happen.

The task is to find modes of collaboration in order to create and maintain sustainable conditions for knowledge production for all of us working as professionals within the field of contemporary art. Not as free-floating avatars, but as professionals committed to a certain site that is always both physical and discursive. A site that can, for example, be, and perhaps even ought to be, a version of the way artistic research is done, conducted and structured in the universities in which we work.

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