A book about the meaning of Work

By the Work A Work Research Group

Royal Institute of Art

Stockholm 2017–2021

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Extended office hours are replaced by working from home. Machines make heavy, dangerous, and tedious Work. We live in the era of After Work. Or do we?

After Work is an interdisciplinary research study using Arts to understand the world of Work.

The gig economy is forcing a non-unionized workforce to sell their labor for low wages. Social media and new forms of publishing texts, images, and films make artistic products distributed for nothing in an economy dominated by likes and ruled by algorithms monitoring our desire. The traditional role of the freelancing cultural worker is merging with a desperate international workforce forced to sell their labor for nothing.

Everything we learned about Work does not Work anymore.

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Front: Pressoperatör. SKF, Göteborg 1969–1970 / Jean Hermansson / Landskrona museum

Back: Konceptualiseringslaboratorium 2018 / Åsa Andersson Broms
AFTER WORK
After Work

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ROYAL INSTITUTE OF ART, STOCKHOLM 2017–2021

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AFTER WORK

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ISBN: 978-91-88241-17-7
AFTER WORK: AN INTRODUCTION .............. 7

ARTIST SALARY NOW! ........................................... 23

STAGE DIRECTIONS ............................................ 43

I AM NOT A ROBOT ............................................. 59

BLACK WORK – WHITE WORK ......................... 97

ON O ........................................................................ 107

THIS VIOLIN MUST DIE .................................... 129

FYLKINGEN FOR SALE .................................... 151

SCREEN SAVIOUR ............................................ 169

*

WORK A WORK: PICTURES,
WORKSHOPS, EXHIBITIONS.............................. 185
AFTER WORK
AN INTRODUCTION

BY KARIN HANSSON
Economic stress under wage-earning has been abolished. Machines and AI have taken over dirty, heavy and tedious work. Money and social injustice are banned. All the technological resources of humanity can be used to reset the global economy to harmonize with ecology. Free citizens can spend their time in leisure practicing music, art and poetry.

Visions of the future are already here. But is it a utopia that we are seeing materializing around us or a dystopia? What will happen to people when nobody wants their labor? Does there already exist a firm border between those who have a job, with all that it entails in social and economic benefits, and the people that are on the other side of the fence – the people that have to sell their work by the hour, and who in practice are modern slaves under apps and SMS?
A division between people who can safely work from home during a pandemic and those who cannot. Is everything for sale? Can you sell voluntary labor? These are some of the questions discussed in the art projects documented in this book.

A *Ruda Road movie* by artist Marie Bondesson (2002), a film about a small town from the Swedish Rust Belt, describes the fundamental destruction of people’s life conditions caused by changes in the economy since the 70s. Today new communication technologies, a more flexible globally distributed workforce, and changes in the western welfare systems are transforming the way we work on a fundamental level. For example, online work in crowdsourcing settings enables a division of labor on an unprecedented scale, which often drastically reduces the individual’s ability to monitor and control the results of their own work. However, the technologies also enable stronger communities and direct relations between consumer and worker, and between workers. Parts of today’s network-based creative economy are characterized by the humanistic values that scholars claim Marx was looking for when he formulated the theory of alienation. For instance, Hardt and Negri (2000) argue that the new economy of affective labor and networked relations amounted to “a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism.”

Artists can be seen as both avoiding traditional work relations and at the same time acting like the perfect worker, as they are both inventing an original product and creating the market for this product where there was no demand before. According to Chris Mathieu (2012), the editor of an anthology of research on creative industries, particular features of the art field make for distinct conditions for artistic production. First, there are no real permanent jobs, but a lifelong competition in which the rules are constantly changing. Moreover, it is not a competition on an open market; instead, participation is determined by the relationships you have, and how close or far the work opportunities are to the production network of relationships. The judges of the competition are colleagues, not some faceless market. A great deal of time is spent not only on making artistic things, but on behaving as an artist and being in places artists are, to be present when there is a new market opportunity.
To follow the ideas of Walter Benjamin (1936), due to the changes in how art is produced, reproduced and distributed, the artist has become the icon. It is now no longer the work of art which mainly has cult status but the artist (Thompson 2008; Thornton 2008). Due to technological transformation the artwork’s aura no longer comes from its unique materiality, but from its connection to a human icon that gives cult value. Today, this process of making the artist’s identity is a work that takes place and is monitored online. Boris Groys (2013) suggests that the role of today’s artists is that of the blogger, as well as all other actors in the arts such as gallery owners, museums and academia, producing the information that confirms that the art is art. These systems that previously provided the artist’s work are transformed, focusing more on producing a persona, as well as the creation of new standards for how artistic work can be carried and sold.

Interestingly, the work relations in the art world are also becoming more and more common in other fields, not only among creative workers. For the so-called precariat, work is something temporary, flexible, contingent, and unpredictable, and it is important to uphold a credible, easily identified persona in order not to get lost in an ever changing market. This precariat is also an expanding class; for example, in Western Europe and the US, a growing number of the labor force now works under temporary and/or part-time contracts (Europe 2020 Indicators – Employment – Statistics Explained 2014; Roenker 2014).

The precariat is however nothing new, rather something signifying urban life since industrial capitalism and described in literature: the observations of precarious urban life in Baudelaire to the idea of “thrownness” in Heidegger’s philosophy – signifying the lack of control over one’s own situation, the sufferings, and demands that one does not choose – to the bureaucratic elusiveness explored by Kafka, or in the description of the human condition by Arendt. However, the vulnerability of the precariat can also be seen as a potential for resistance, not as weakness or victimhood but as a space for engagement emerging from a sense of fundamental openness, interdependence, and solidarity.
The work of artists has counteracted traditional work relations since modernism, often questioning traditional production relations or predicting new ones, as artists have always been interested in, and problematized, the concept of “work”. Take for example Cage’s famous “silent” work “4’33”, where keeping silent is a large part of the work. Or where being an artist is the work, as in Marina Abramović’s performance *The Artist Is Present*, a 736-hour and 30-minute static, silent piece, in which she sat immobile in the exhibition while spectators were invited to take turns sitting opposite her (Abramović and Biesenbach 2010). The value of the artist as a trademark is another aspect of this, and also central in the work of British artist Tracey Emin who sold options on her future work for £10 in the early 1990s (Barber 2001).

Subjecting oneself to external frameworks for work such as time and place limitation is another theme, such as for example in On Kawara’s *Date Painting* that he began in 1966, a monochrome field on which is written the date the painting was executed in the language and according to the calendar of the country where On Kawara was present at the time (Kawara 1992). Another example is Tehching Hsieh’s, *Time Clock Piece (One Year Performance 1980–1981)* a performance where the artist punched a time clock every single hour for an entire year (Andrew Cummings 2017). Francis Alÿs’ work *When Faith Moves Mountains*, in Lima, Peru 2002 (in collaboration with Cuauhtémoc Medina and Rafael Ortega) is another example, where Alÿs had five hundred volunteers with shovels gathered at a huge sand dune on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, and over the course of a day moved it by several inches (Medina 2007). Elin Wikström’s iconic performance work *Hur skulle det gå om alla gjorde så?* (How would it go if everyone did that?) from 1993 also questions the values that govern work. Here the artist lies in bed every day for three weeks, in a bed placed publicly in a supermarket (Wikström 2000).

The exploitation of workers’ bodies and entire lifeworlds is another theme that has often been touched upon in art. Take for example Oscar Bonys’ *La familia obrera* (The Working Class Family), from 1968, which consisted of an actual working-class family seated on a pedestal for eight hours (Vicario 2017), as a manifestation of the basic production unit for human capital. A more contemporary example is Roxy Farhat’s (2009), *Housekeeping*, where the artist
plays the main character as the housekeeper in a music video that both deals with the sexualized laborer and the service worker, and by putting herself in the role of both the artist and the housekeeper, equates these professions.

In this artistic research project, we have continued in this tradition, questioning notions of work from our particular positions in history. This has taken place through an iterative process where the participating artists’ individual and sometimes collective works have been discussed and developed over a 3-year period through regular meetings, memory-works, seminars, film programs, workshops and online discussions, as well as in artworks and texts (see detailed list and appendix). This process has been highly exploratory and developed based on the group’s need for knowledge and exchange, and follows an artistic research tradition of exploring a subject through a collective process (see e.g. Hansson 2013; Hansson et al. 2015).

The project began with an interest in the ongoing changes in the labor market. Various aspects of this were discussed with invited researchers and union representatives, as well as through current research. But quite soon we went beyond the purely political issues and delved deeper into the ideas of work. Among other things, through a collective memory-work (Hansson 2020), we began to examine more carefully our own notions of work, and the ideas and values we ourselves carry. These are often unspoken ideas we reproduce in practice through micro-actions, and which taken together, form the cultural foundation for our common existence. Somewhere here, through everyday duties and values, the choices and limitations are created that structure what we call work. This book presents a selection of the works of art and texts that can be seen as a result of this artistic research process.

Åsa Andersson Broms has in her art examined precisely the collective and long-term work we all participate in performatively by playing and participating in the vision of society. Here she has associatively and comparatively explored visual manifestations of this in the urban space, in images and installations. Today, these places are mostly deserted, like empty stages for our collective work of creating meaning, transformed into archaeological monuments over our common structures (see page 43 – Stage Directions).
These structures are also manifested online, and Karin Hansson has been interested in how work, and humanity put to work, is changed or clarified in digital structures where the nature of the work is defined in clear directives. When old structures – norms, values, practices – must be interpreted and translated into code, we are forced to define values we did not know we were carriers of. Paradoxically, it is through technology that human values become visible, when these values are to be extracted in automated processes, and our expressions aggregated and distorted in algorithmic processes. (See page 169 – Screen saviour and page 59 – I am not a Robot.)

These concepts of value creation and the paradoxical relationship between economic and cultural capital were themes that recurred in various conversations and were taken to their logical extreme in a joint project we call Artist Salary Now! which investigated this paradox through an exhibition and a seminar series. Here we explored the idea of a universal basic income from the perspective of current local public art policy, and proposed as an alternative to both basic income and art policy, an “artist’s salary” for all citizens. (see page 23 – Artist Salary Now!).

A work can be described as a daily performance that we learn and perform a bit like a ritual or play, whether it is about sitting in a box or painting a box. In a number of works, Nils Claesson has been interested in defining the norm or limit for what is defined as art and what is considered a “real” work. As an artist, you are defined both as someone who is outside the real work (the box), and as someone who can never finish their work. By breaking away from or exceeding these norms in various ways, Claesson’s artwork invites interaction and conversation (see page 97 – Black Work – White Work).

In her work about O, Shiva Anoushirvani speaks directly to O, and the conversation is about the emotional work that is the very precondition for all relationships. We learn through imitation, and rules for love and violence are programmed already in childhood. By imitating interaction patterns, we are programmed early with the knowledge to be able to receive and give affection. The idea of O being programmed as an emotional worker raises the question of how to define every detail to control a structure that may not always even exist (see page 107 – On O).
Taking control of every detail is central to the professional musician’s work. Control and discipline start at an early age and create a lifelong daily pattern. At the same time, the musician is the symbol of freedom and play, the violinist who, like the cricket, plays and dances instead of engaging in hard work. George Kentros’ work within the project is a violent and at the same time controlled confrontation with the violinist’s paradoxical professional role. This idea about the virtuoso, which is reproduced constantly in new copies, is distributed globally, and materialized in violin factories, for example in China (see page 129 – *This Violin must Die*).

Control and play are also themes in Per Hasselberg’s work. He has long been interested in the role of art in the national economy and how it is expressed in political practice. The community planners are well aware of the importance of art and culture for the well-being of the community, and to attract the right type of workers. The only question is how these values should be measured and included in the larger economic calculation. These values consist of factors that are not really possible to measure. In the work *Fylkingen for Sale*, the City of Stockholm’s tool Kulturalkylen [The Culture Calculator] is tested on one of Stockholm’s more traditional artist-run institutions (see page 151 – *Fylkingen for Sale*).

This project began with a vision and a concern for the future. Unlike the previous art projects we refer to initially, where the focus was on the essence and the limitations of work, the body of the worker, and capitalism’s exploitation of our entire life-worlds, this project has gone beyond these immediate questions about the notion of work. Instead, we have looked behind this, examined our own ideas and norms about work and reflected on what comes afterwards, after work.

During the project, the world around us has changed, and some of our fears have been realized. A labor market in renegotiation has increased conflicts and led to a questioning of the viability of democracy. A global pandemic has increased anxiety and clarified polarization, while showing us how fragile we are, and how dependent on everyone else. The structures have held us together and kept us apart. Not everything is for sale. Work that is free cannot be bought. The work continues.
The artworks and the texts in this book are some of the results this artistic project has generated. When defined as “works of art” they can act as an expression of the special ability of special individuals. It should be emphasized, however, that these works could not have been created without a large number of people who in various ways participated in the project by generously sharing and discussing this work with us.

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TEGEN2. Workshop with Lars Arrhenius as part of the exhibition “Artist’s Salary Now!”.
Photo: Åsa Andersson Broms.
ARTIST SALARY NOW!
Yes to Art. No to Bureaucracy! Photo: Nils Claesson.
Should we spend our time filling out forms or making art? This rhetorical question was the starting point for Artist Salary Now!, where we performed a think tank and set up a campaign headquarters as a means of provoking discussion at Gallery TEGEN2 in Stockholm. The exhibition also provided space for a series of semi-public talks where the question of a possible basic income for artists was further developed during the month the exhibition was open. The talks engaged activists from the universal base income movement, politicians, researchers, and artists from different fields.

The immediate catalyst for starting the project was the new government report about Swedish artists’ work conditions (Konstnär – oavsett villkor? [Artist – regardless of conditions?] SOU 2018: 23, 2018). It describes how professional artists, while they often have a very long education, also have some of the lowest incomes. The most radical solution to the problems the report suggests is to take 100 million of the 225 million in the arts budget that is earmarked for specific actions, and give to Tillväxtverket (The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth) to support digitalization. According
to the proposal, artists would learn to get better at protecting their copyright and being reimbursed online. From our perspective, this strategy appeared both strange and provocative. It indicated that arts politics is about supporting the art market’s commodification of art as the primary way to get paid for one’s work as an artist. It is unclear how the report comes to the conclusion that this is the purpose of arts politics, and not a goal for the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation.

Therefore, our response to the report about the artist’s conditions was simply to propose an alternative solution to the problems stated. We suggested an artist salary, a kind of basic income for artists, as a method to reform and simplify the system. As a way to develop the proposal further, and to use this as a means to explore the arts through this action, we organized a campaign headquarters where we formulated the promise that art can possess. By developing campaign material inspired by the minimalistic rhetoric of election campaigns (as this was during the election year 2018) we were forced to formulate complex notions in simple slogans, and through this aesthetic negotiation the basic premise of the ideas was further developed.

The exhibition consisted of two parts: in the outer, larger, and lighter exhibition room, colourful and cheeky promotional materials were posted on the walls, with slogans like: “Safe and free!” “Food for the imagination”, “Because we paint gold and green forests” or “Yes to a medal but first a real pension. Artist salary now!” In the inner, smaller and darker room, a lamentation was heard comprised of the arguments against basic income, such as:

That some sit and twiddle their thumbs while others struggle to support both themselves and their fellow citizens is a mockery of basic decency.

It is self-evident that such a system would not work because it is too inflationary, too expensive, and encourages laziness. Its advocates think that people will apply themselves to their own businesses and cultural activities, but most would of course just watch tv.
And so on. The arguments were taken both from “serious” newspapers and from more obscure anonymous comments in online forums, which together formed a mumble of negative voices. At the core of the installation an image of a grasshopper is projected, as the symbol of the artist in the fable of the grasshopper and the ant. The art exhibition thus focused on forms of expression and the aesthetics of different norms, and this was also the starting point for a series of talks we curated using the exhibition as a backdrop.

As a result of this discursive process, we proposed an artist salary for everyone: a salary to allow for time to take care of our common and existential issues; a modest salary based on the modest needs of artists. Unlike a universal basic income, it is intended for a specific purpose, our shared society. Since we claim that society is an art, it is up to each one of us to define what society is.


Light installation with crickets at the exhibition Artist Salary Now! TEGEN2 2018.
ARTIST SALARY NOW!
Artist Salary Now! posters in the streets of Stockholm.
Photo: Karin Hansson.
JAG VILL HA ETT TRYGGARE SAMHÄLLE OCH FRIARE KONSTNÄRER NU
Artist Salary Now! posters in the streets of Stockholm. Photo: Karin Hansson.
 ARTIST SALARY NOW!
TEGEN2. Workshop with Maria Lilja as part of the exhibition “Artist’s Salary Now!”. Photo: Åsa Andersson Broms.
36

ARTIST SALARY NOW!

TEGEN

2. Workshop as part of the exhibition “Artist’s Salary Now!”.

Photo: Åsa Andersson Broms.
Gärna medalj
men förs en rejäl pension
Konstnärslön nu!
Photo: Åsa Andersson Broms.
ARTIST SALARY NOW!
The theatre is a place for drama, a place where a play meets its audience. The stage of the theatre is also the place where our surrounding society is reflected and where human dilemmas, politics, and power are made visible. Historically and over time, the theatre has changed, taken new forms, and been performed for various reasons, always in flux, but is still a place where fiction and reality merge together.

Open air theaters today appear as sleeping relics in our cityscapes, like remains from a time when the workers’ movement, but also the state, saw them as an important part of the social construct. Most were built during a time when work was differentiated between labour and free time. The theatre was a political tool, a gesture that underlined the importance of education while also creating entertainment as a sort of repayment for the workers’ diligence. During the 60s and 70s, the political and cultural climate was reformed, which also changed ideas of how culture was to be disseminated. From the people, to the people. But today, the open air theaters for the most part lie empty, as if they have been transformed into archeological monuments. Even though the cities expand and the cityscapes densify, the theaters seem to be left on hold. Even in the countryside, many of the Folk park stages stand unused, minimally maintained in order not to die. Even those are allowed to remain. Left and abandoned to a time that wants something else.
The contours of the amphitheater cut a pretty picture against the cityscape and are slowly transformed from archetype to symbol. A symbol for culture and education, or, if you will, a logotype of appropriated value. As stage elements they easily melt into the utopian picture of our current times, which we have created around us. The tired entrances to the Folk parks and the worn floors of the outdoor dance halls create neither selling silhouettes nor higher attractive value for the countryside. They simply reveal will, endurance, and a hope for resurrection.

Whether the open air theaters and Folk parks were preserved for sentimental reasons, or to remind us of our past, jog our memories and elicit afterimages, phantom pictures of a two-thousand-year history or the welfare state, is difficult to say. No matter the reason, or if there even is a reason, there they stand, quiet and empty, brooding over secrets and memories we cannot see and performances we do not want to perceive. It is as if the air, the space between the stages and the empty benches have yielded, imploded, and devoured their content. What is left is the shell – the orchestra, the stage, and the auditorium.

For me, the empty theaters have served as a sort of space where I have been able to project and research the complex systems and concepts we call “work.” All of the intangible values that work generates, but also consumes, cause work (in all its forms) to form our common narrative, our present and our future. All of the activities we engage in, in order to live and survive, are also those actions that slowly carve out the world we live in.

The photographed open air theaters, Folk parks and film venues might be compared to a series of dioramas. And like the Greek word for diorama, di (through) and orama (that which is seen, a spectacle), the pictures strive to lead the viewer’s sight away from the stage and towards the emptiness in order to glimpse another meaning, other than that we have let ourselves be enveloped in.

The theaters are in any event still there, and the stages are empty. As reminders, as symbols, or as arenas, free to be made use of. Shaping the future is the new labour.
Intervention or performative activism for a fading imagination.
Slussen and Trygg Hansa huset (projection), Stockholm 2019.
The development of artificial intelligence is said to be the next challenge for our Protestant work ethic. The essence of work, as something that in a capitalist society can be alienated, commodified and exchanged, is again being renegotiated. Traditionally, the development of human capital has focused on basic academic skills, the ability to read and write, to count, systematize and sort things into predefined categories. These are all things computers now are programmed to do for us. More progressive forms of education are already emphasizing the importance of developing children’s creativity, independence and critical thinking, rather than memorizing and following certain rules.

Already today it is our humanity that artificial intelligences (AI) wants to access when our consumption patterns are mapped online. Our work online, what makes us valuable on the Internet, is foremost the act of being human. The greatest value is created when people are together with other people, like interacting on social media networks online. Another form of work people do online is called Human computation, a term for a kind of crowdsourcing where the work...
that computers typically are bad at is delegated back to humans. It can, e.g., be comparing seemingly different things, or creating new patterns and categories. ImageCaptcha’s are for example a way to determine who is human and who is a robot online when logging in to an online service, as a way to hinder bots from spamming the system. But while people are using these tools they are also feeding AI with new data by adding more interpretations of the images.

Critics point to how this digital labour, this commodification of our worlds of life, creates an extreme form of alienation (Scholz 2013). Beverungen et al. (2015) argue that understanding the role of user work online requires a focus on work understood as a value production that takes place beyond wage labour in the workplace. The Marxist theorist Franco Berardi claims that this changing nature of labour requires a shift in our thinking about work relations (Berardi 2009): In industrial capitalism, the work is contained in physical objects controlled by the owner of the factory, but in today’s semi-capitalist economy, it is instead one’s creativity and social relations that are under surveillance. It is one’s “soul” which is controlled by the capitalist economy (ibid.). The human labour is, thanks to market monitoring, exploited twice: the technology on one hand enables online commons, while on the other hand the data it produces (e.g. user behaviour patterns) is mined and alienated from the users (Andrejevic 2011; Scholz 2013), what the media theorist Christian Fuchs calls “the total commodification of human creativity” (Fuchs 2012, p. 56). Different aspects of this exploitation have also been studied, e.g. the working conditions of crowd workers (Irani & Silberman 2013; Martin et al. 2016), self-exploitation (Webster & Randle Keith 2016), and social media surveillance practices (Andrejevic 2011). The conducted studies often use methods from the social sciences focusing on economic and social relations. However, the aesthetic discourses in these contexts, as well as the materiality of the work, are almost completely ignored.

In this chapter, I am therefore looking into the techniques and methods used to control our souls, extracting “humanity” in different forms online. I am curious about what this will tell me about this soul work. The method is to explore, in an associative way, the aesthetics and materiality of this value production.
I often feel a childish satisfaction upon signing in on a site when I can prove I am human. To avoid spam from countless robots, users on different online services must generally undergo some kind of test, such as typing the letters on a blurred text or selecting which images represent a “car”, or just clicking a box that says “I am not a robot”, proving you have the cognitive abilities that are specific to humans, which robots have been struggling to imitate for so long (Figure 1). Passing the test, which is used to keep robots outside and people inside, gives me a certificate that I am a real person.

Figure 1. Detail from image CAPTCHA where the assignment is to find a “car”.
These image collections, which were not curated for reasons of aesthetics but selected because robots do not understand them, are like micro art exhibitions that in the absence of clear meanings could easily fit in a modern art gallery. Grainy and foggy images, maybe taken by a Google Street View photographer, with unconventional viewer perspectives like in an Edward Hopper painting, taken by automatic cameras or by mistake: A piece of a staircase, an angled ceiling, half of a red motorcycle, an empty road, desolate urban spaces. I am wondering where all the people have gone. The poor quality of the photos reminds me of images from the early history of photography, where the camera has been directed towards a still standing object as the light exposure took too long to grasp any moving objects. Like in Nicéphore Niépce’s *View from the Window at Le Gras*, where you feel that it is a city landscape, but you barely recognize it, like in an impressionist painting (Figure 2).

*Figure 2. Nicéphore Niépce (1826 or 1827) View from the Window at Le Gras.*
This work, these simple tests I manage as easily as walking, always make me relieved when I have accomplished one. They show that I am on the inside, like being in an exclusive club I feel entitled to (but not totally sure about), that I have a special value in myself that is undetectable and not negotiable. Like being 18, or entitled to vote, passing a passport control, or just belonging to the norm. A basic human belonging, a receipt that I am someone to be reckoned with. Though I clearly understand that it is not my cognitive skills that are specifically demanded, but that my work here is more about the data I might generate, this still gives me a childish satisfaction. I passed!

In real life, it’s not enough to just show you exist by ticking a box. Throughout my life, I have constantly been performing in order to prove myself. I have worked hard to be accepted as one of the children in the group of other children, I have studied to be a good student. I have worked to get the opportunity to obtain work, and then performed well to keep my work. But that is not the case online. Being a human is my primary task here. Or at least to be like a human being. This is the value I add to this economy. On social networks online, it’s all about understanding me, recognizing me, expressing me. Through this self-reflective work, I create my online self, and thus the qualitative data that marketers are looking for. They want to get to know me, my habits of consumption, my friends and their friends. They do not just want me to consume, they want to understand me and they want to be friends with me. I am the center of my own reality show; a show that goes on forever, without special storyboards and dramaturgic grips; image after image of edited life, where everything can be edited to perfection. Since everything can be perfect, the odd and the deviant becomes what is sought after. Photo apps that help us produce our life in pictures constantly add new filters we can use to make this life magical and multifaceted (Figure 3).

It is difficult to fully understand what all this data might be useful for, and maybe all those who mine the data may not understand either what these traces of a human being are good for exactly, but the
potential knowledge that lies there has a value per se that can be switched into other types of potential values in an eternal chain letter where it is important to be first in the chain, and of course the greatest. Today, it is apparently possible to break even with advertising revenue online: for example, Facebook sells more than $40 billion in advertising and Google over $100 trillion (“Facebook: annual revenue 2017,” 2018; “Google: revenue 2017,” 2018). However, many investments made towards the next “killer application” never return any economic value.

Especially in the late 1990s, in the gap between the old economy and the new, many investments tanked. On the other hand, communication agencies grew stronger, in parallel with the emergence of IT companies. Communication agencies develop the very essence of the values created online, where new and globally dominant public spheres emerge beyond national level and control. In this attention economy, it is fundamental to understand the user’s behaviours and motivations, and gain their attention and trust. Therefore, it is important as an actor in this field to know that the users represent real people, not copies, but legitimate human identities.
All these possible values projected on this human data make me think of Gogol’s novel *Dead Souls* (Gogol 1842), a novel that takes place during the break between the old feudal society and the new industrial society, in the tension between a society with clear hierarchies and relationships where one’s position was determined by one’s status and a more meritocratic society where one could create a position for oneself through hard work, impudence and some luck. The novel’s hero Pavel Tjtjikov’s plan is as simple as it is epic. In the Russian feudal society, the serfs were counted once a year, and an amount was then paid in tax for the rest of the year. However, people are unreliable capital: they can run away, get sick, or even die. If something happened after the date of the counting, the landlord was still forced to pay taxes for the dead for the rest of the year. It is these serfs, these dead souls that make up the merchandise that Tjtjikov is interested in, and the surprised landlords are more than happy to give away their dead serfs to this modern entrepreneur who, on paper, becomes a rich man, owner of many souls. Like a Mark Zuckerberg of the 19th century, he has in theory control of many souls, which he can use in an economic game. Tjtjikov has thus quickly identified both the old social codes and the new emerging economic and legal structures. By playing the system, and systematically exploiting a glitch in the system, he creates a whole fortune by buying dead people, in the gap between the old and the new, the patriarchal feudalist and liberal capitalist. Tjtjikov is not a traditional patriarch who lives off what the land gives and provides for his serfs from baptism to burial. He is an adaptive mind, a wolf in sheep’s clothing that acts like a friend but does not live up to the real meaning of this human agreement. Not so different from one of today’s online bots, he nestles into the systems where there is an opportunity.

Pavel Tjtjikov is not a major personality, but with his modest behaviour and his phenomenal adaptability, he succeeds in getting everyone in his surroundings to feel that they have met a soulmate, and he quickly creates a large network of contacts. If he had lived today, he would probably have many friends online. Acting as a human being is in real life something that can take a lifetime to learn. On social media it is seemingly easier to know what to do in order to act as a human being. Everything is given some kind of score, which is
much easier to interpret than subtle social signals. Confirmation in the form of likes and comments is doled out at a rapid pace, but only when doing something that other people recognize and are amused or seduced by. The identity is performative, it is what I do, and how it is recognized by others.

The digital networks are also curated by algorithms, governed by the norms and behaviors the marketers and programmers have defined as appropriately human. Everyone who has used their credit card in disparate places has learned that the bank will call you to make sure that you are where you seem to be, if e.g. you have bought a bus ticket in St. Petersburg today though you were in Sheffield yesterday. The data my consumption generates creates traces. Consumption shows that I am in the real world and, unlike a robot, I buy food and hotel rooms, and I can only be in one place at a time. In countries like the United States, it is primarily your consumption that describes your identity, and it is the only thing that proves your identity in the absence of more centralized records. Having a credit history showing that you are a trusted consumer is everything. The more credit and the greater the consumption the better. It shows that there are many who trust me and that I have a high turnover. My human identity will be vouched for by as many sources as possible, and I should consume well and according to my previous patterns. When the patterns are disrupted, the alarm bells ring.

Obviously, there are many reasons why social media giants want to control who is generating the data. One reason is to ensure that everyone who generates data is human, and the right human, as they want to learn something about humans through this data.

While it is becoming increasingly difficult to prove that robots are not human, it is also becoming increasingly difficult to prove the opposite; that you are human. It started with quite simple blurry letters that were to be interpreted. The so-called CAPTCHA (Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart) was developed as a security tool, showing distorted textual images, to be used to ward off bot attacks and spammers. Because a CAPTCHA is controlled by a computer, as opposed to the Turing test, which is a test by humans to determine if the computer is a computer, it is also called the reverse Turing test. One of the earlier patent applications
for a similar idea details that “The invention is based on applying human advantage in applying sensory and cognitive skills to solving simple problems that prove to be extremely hard for computer software” (Reshef et al. 2004).

As robots become smarter, CAPTCHAs have become increasingly unclear, combining different patterns. It has become more difficult to figure out which characters to write, a v and u or a w, or if an indescribable form is actually an f and an r close together, not to mention all the image CAPTCHAs that make one feel like a complete idiot in a matrix-based factory. As a result, these phenomena cause conflicts not only because people experience difficulties in using them, but also because people with disabilities such as dyslexia or vision problems are having problems solving them. In addition, there is of course a problem with the feeling of distrust that may occur when innocent visitors are forced to fill in the CAPTCHA test over and over again and fail.

Over the years, the CAPTCHA has been improved so much that today it has reached a level where the average user’s input is required only on very rare occasions, and instead of showing (non-suspect) users a test, an empty box is shown where the user just clicks to verify that one is not a robot. Instead of the user’s visual recognition, it is the user’s own patterns that are considered, such as mouse movements, time spent on the site, browser type, other actions, and more, to properly distinguish between a legitimate user and a bot. Newer mechanisms do not interfere with the user at all, even to verify that it is not a bot. First, if the user does not behave like a human being (i.e. a bit messy and unsystematic and unlike any previous visitor), a visual CAPTCHA window will open. That which reveals a robot, what distinguishes it from a human, can be very subtle, and can involve the way the user touches the mouse just before the crucial click.

But no CAPTCHAs really can completely distinguish people from robots; everything can be programmed, even messiness and unpredictability. But they make it harder. It is expensive and difficult to simulate a human being, and there is nothing that can easily be scaled up to apply to more people. Even in a crowd, people are human and totally unique. In order to simulate a crowd, it is important to make every robot special for the crowd as a whole to become credible.
Large resources are thus devoted to the vain ambition of making computers behave like people, in order to make us believe they are people. For why should computers really be like people when there are people? As the Economist described tellingly:

The most obvious problem with Turing’s challenge is that there is no practical reason to create machine intelligence indistinguishable from human ones. People are in plentiful supply. Should a shortage arise, there are proven and popular methods for making more of them. (Editorial 1992)

However, even though CAPTCHAs are no longer useful for security reasons, as they are obviously easy to fool, they can also be used as a way to transcribe large amounts of text and images in digitization projects. The Google CAPTCHA service is free to use and is therefore used by both Facebook and Twitter, among others. In exchange, Google uses user input to help digitize and decipher text. According to the security expert Shuman Ghosemajumder, in 2015 on average 17 person years per day were used towards resolving different types of so-called reCAPTCHAs (Ghosemajumder 2015). According to Google’s reCAPTCHA site, in the autumn of 2018 hundreds of millions of reCaptchas were made. Researchers have estimated that it takes about 10 seconds for a user to make a CAPTCHA (Bursztein et al. 2010). Though the idea of this type of micro-task is that it can be done quickly and for free, you can also be paid to solve CAPTCHAs, as there are companies that want to pay people to spam some sites with information.

On a global level, people are still cheaper than computers. Indirectly, this also means that advertising companies are employing clickworkers to get around CAPTCHAs to reach, for example, Google users’
social networks, while also acting on this social network by creating fake accounts. This creates an interesting circuit in the system: people who pretend to be other human beings to access humans’ information while themselves making up an increasing part of this information. Social media users are not equal; for example, in 2017 Facebook Canada and US users spent almost $26.76 a day in advertising coverage, comparing to the world-wide $6.18 a day and Asia Pacific $2.52 a day (“Facebook: annual revenue 2017” 2018). Some humans whose consumer value is high create a market that attracts human labour (with lower consumer value) acting as if they were part of this market by performing as a trustworthy human (with higher consumer value) for payment. Therefore, it is not always robots that try to resemble people; it is still more efficient to use human labour to act as humans.

Humanity’s unique cognitive and emotional abilities are also exploited in so-called human computation, which is a methodology that outsources specific clearly defined tasks to humans, and allows the computer to coordinate these so-called micro-tasks. One can say that this approach uses differences in abilities and alternative costs between humans and computers to reconcile computer and human abilities. A sort of matrix system where people’s abilities are harvested more efficiently by the system. In the movie *The Matrix*, people were used as a kind of battery in the world of machines, and as a way of keeping them calm and happy; the brains of people were linked to a fantasy world, the Matrix. The infrastructure was managed by computers that helped keep the bodies alive and content.

What then is harvested in the systems of human computation? How can we understand the values human labour creates in this context? Are we soon to be reduced to a kind of emotional batteries without understanding the structure we contribute to? To discuss this, we first need to have a common understanding of how a computer works, and how essentially different a computer is from a person. For example, in order for a computer to draw something, one must tell it exactly how to do it, and it will do it. But you cannot tell it what it should do. Secondly, computer graphics systems consist of precise coordinates and measurements. The values that are “larger than”, “inside”, or “beyond” are completely incomprehensible for a computer. But like humans, computers today can learn from experience,
or rather, from what is being fed into the system. So far, this input is mostly about text and image, and the more that is put in, the greater its ability, as the computer compares new input with old and in this way comes to an understanding of this new input. But for this to be “understood”, people must first encode the material so that the computer not only sees images and text but also links this to more abstract concepts, like a language. The computer cannot learn from 0 but must be fed with clearly defined input data. AI researcher Fanya S. Montalvo (1985) described this challenge for AI development as “The problem of representing, acquiring and validating symbolic descriptions of visual properties”. This sentence describes in its simplicity the extent of complexity involved in understanding a pure image and then describing it to someone who does not understand the meaning of the image based on a living multisensory experience, but in terms of ones and zeroes.

In order for an AI to identify an image it simply compares exactly what is in the whole picture with all the images in its memory. This comparison is made through exact descriptions like pixel position and colour, or if there are some geometrically defined curves that can be represented numerically. It is through this comparison of bits and pieces that other similar images are identified, and the result depends on how these images have been described earlier. You can look at AI as a prisoner of language. Here AI is not so different from people, as we can’t really describe something that is not in a language that other people understand. Thus, there is a conservatism in the system, not that different from people who isolate themselves from other cultures. One recognizes only what one recognizes and has words for. Computers can only incorporate new data through the categories set by the system, and the content of the images cannot be read as a whole, but in detail, row by row, pixel per pixel. Therefore, computers can describe completely abstract images as having an exact meaning, simply because some pixels match up with images that are categorized with this meaning, although the image as a whole shows something completely different, as Figure 4 shows.
Figure 4. Evolved images that are unrecognizable to humans highlight differences between how Deep Neural Networks and humans recognize objects (Nguyen & Date 2015).

Figure 5. Detail from image CAPTCHA where the assignment is to find a “cat”.
Take for example a picture of a cat, which sounds like a rather trivial task to identify (Figure 5). A cat is quite simple to define, it has fur (with some exceptions), it has four legs, it has eyes and a nose. It’s less than a human being. But compare two pictures of two different cats systematically and there are very few things that match as the computer compares pixel by pixel.

Humans are able to quickly and seamlessly identify the environment they are in as well as the surrounding objects, all without much effort or even consciously noticing. These skills of being able to quickly recognize patterns, to generalize from prior knowledge and adapt to different environments are skills that machines have problems with. In order for the computers to learn from the data, it must first be selected and cleaned. For example, when training the AI on faces, one must first go through all of the raw data and make sure each image is a face, and of good quality regarding lighting conditions, colour, tone etc, and then, crop all images in the same way around the face, and line them up so the main features are aligned. This all happens before the data goes into the neural network.

**WORK FOR REAL PEOPLE**

Thanks to the overabundance of images online that lack proper metadata the work of describing these images is overwhelming, even though machines can help out with a rough categorization. There are certain areas where the human touch is especially needed. When looking, for example, into the citizen science project at Zooniverse, the work can be anything from identifying galaxies and stars, as in the Galaxy Zoo project, where human annotations of galaxies are helping scientists. Similar methods using the Zooniverse platform are used to identify debris on beaches, to map the social life of whales, to track changes in coastal environments by identifying marine invertebrates, or identifying different kinds of storms, among other projects (Figures 6-9). Other projects such as OpenStreetMap use a combination of methods to annotate satellite maps, which has shown to be especially efficient in disaster recovery (Figure 10).
Figure 6. Image from the Zooniverse citizen science project Beluga Bits (2018).
Figure 7. Image from the Zooniverse citizen science project Invader ID (2018).
Figure 8. Image from the Zooniverse citizen science project Galaxy Zoo (2018).
Figure 9. Image from the Zooniverse citizen science project Cyclone Center (2013).
Figure 11. Image annotation of satellite images in Figure Eight (Appen company, previous Crowdflower).
Although created for very different purposes, the images have in common a rather poetic mysticism. They are blurry and evasive and what they actually mean is open to interpretation. They describe the world as infinite and unreal, creating a feeling that, despite modern science, there is still so much to be explored: a growing map, the glimpse of some kind of night animal, dried algae shaped like a spiral with a white unidentified object, whales that play in strange light phenomena, some sort of algae that blossoms like red and orange explosions, spiral galaxies and violent cyclones. Everything is up to us to define, categorize, and discuss.

Annotating this data makes it readable by computers and can then be quantified and used for research and machine learning. AI can also often do the initial rough work with annotation and provide suggestions from existing categories. As in Figure 11, the program automatically selects areas based on tone and values, which can then be modified and categorized by humans. Playmate, one of the companies based in Bangalore that uses people in this way, says that they teach machines common sense, but that teaching is labour intensive.

We’ve all heard the old adage, “AI is going to take over our jobs!” That’s not true. Machines are inherently dumb. For them to ever replace humans in menial tasks, they need to learn how to see, think, act and make decisions like we do - in other words, “teach them common sense”. At the core of our solution is that if we show enough possible scenarios, machines will learn to behave like humans. It would take them 1 million images of cats and dogs in order to learn to differentiate them. (“Data Labeling Platform for Computer Vision,” n.d.)

What this company does is thus to provide a platform where people are motivated by money or other incentives to draw and describe what they see in pictures. Or as they describe it on their website, they are “building the cognitive infrastructure to make Artificial Intelligence ‘intelligent’.” The more AI, the more data is needed, and the greater the variation and breadth this data has, the more useful it becomes. Big data and machine learning mean, in this reading, not much of the same data in any kind of uniformity, but many different kinds of
data, annotated in detail to create as much complexity as possible. Here, the work opportunities for people are undeniably endless.

Companies also justify their existence by emphasizing that they create new forms of work, work that can be done flexibly and at any time. Algorithms are not only fed with data, they have become employers as well. There are complicated logistics behind interfaces like Amazon Mechanical Turk or Uber, which is about providing an infrastructure for this labour market for micro-tasks. This has not surprisingly encountered resistance from trade unions and other human rights organizations. The algorithms that on the one hand can be seen as a fair and rational way of distributing work can also lead to devastating consequences for the worker who does not fit into the system but behaves outside of the desirable pattern. It becomes difficult to argue with an algorithm, whose actions can be difficult to understand for both managers and workers, like a huge bureaucracy of which nobody can really have an overview. These platforms create fast-monopoly positions in their markets, so it is difficult to find work outside of this matrix (Rosenblat 2018). Take, for example, Uber, considered by many drivers as relatively fair and transparent, as well as a job that is possible to do flexibly, but which on the other hand can be perceived as unpredictable and unfair, as one sometimes does not understand the rationality behind the different decisions the system makes. If you do something wrong you get excluded from the network and then you completely lack the infrastructure necessary for a taxi driver. Similar trends are found at Amazon Mechanical Turk, where workers have little or no opportunity for an overview of their work. The same may be true of much of the work done online, whether paid in cash or paid as free entertainment or part of consumption, that it is all organized by complex algorithms, and cannot be controlled or surveyed. The technology has turned us into “digital serfs” without property or wealth, with access to a wide range of internet-enabled devices and services but without any control (Fairfield, 2017). Like previous generations of the working class who lacked property and means, the digital serfs still find distraction from their dreary life, but unlike their historic comrades, the opiate of the masses today is not religion but the ubiquitous present entertainment online, entertainment that is peer produced.
FEEDING THE MACHINES WITH REALITIES

In the early 2000s, my students and I got help from the Stockholm police to create an image of a fictional girl using a newly acquired facial composite software (Figure 12). However, it was difficult to create a girl’s face when the database consisted of the British police’s image register of criminals and mainly reflected those in the penal system. Today, the technology has evolved and hopefully this database has become more inclusive. Or maybe not. It is necessary for someone to first see this as a problem, and as long as most of those who are charged for committing crimes are adult men, there may be no reason to be able to create images of girls. But this example shows the impact of data society. What is not entered into the system is not available. The pictures, the presumptions and ideas we feed into the system come back as a result.

Figure 12. From the art project Alias Lova by Karin Hansson. Fictional portrait designed using facial composite software.
We can feed algorithms with any kind of human stupidity and the algorithms magnify it. An example would be facial recognition tools that recognize white men, but have difficulties identifying all others, especially black women (Buolamwini & Gebru 2018). In a study of three different tools, researchers found that gender was misidentified in less than one per cent of lighter-skinned males; in up to seven per cent of lighter-skinned females; up to 12 per cent of darker-skinned males; and up to 35 per cent in darker-skinned females (ibid).

It is hardly the first time that facial recognition technology has been inaccurate. In 2015, the Google Photo app mistakenly identified a black couple as “gorillas”. Research on facial recognition technology used for law enforcement purposes in the USA shows how facial recognition tools may disproportionately implicate African Americans, as they are more likely to be stopped by the police and subjected to face recognition searches than other ethnicities (Tiku, 2018). The problem here is that the data used has not been representative and multifaceted; it may also involve how the programs are written, and by whom. The tech industry is not known for its diversity. A rapport from Google shows that 69.1 per cent of their employees globally are men, and in the USA, Google’s workforce is 53.1 per cent white and 36.3 per cent Asian, but only 2.5 per cent black, 3.6 per cent Hispanic and Latinx, and 4.2 per cent multiracial (Tiku 2018).

Sometimes this kind of disclosure can be useful, because what happens is that otherwise invisible norms have been programmed, enlarged and made visible. Systems can have glitches: it may be a software-related issue, a spelling mistake or a cultural misconception, which causes norms to be distorted or exaggerated, and therefore allows us to detect structures we otherwise missed. An example of how such a glitch was used as a way to raise awareness is a UN advertising campaign against sexism that utilized the phenomenon that Google’s search algorithms generated a search result hostile to women (“UN Women ad series reveals widespread sexism” 2013). When you post a search query, based on what you and others have searched for earlier, the algorithm suggests a conclusion for a sentence started by the word you type in the search field. If you empty your search history cache, the result displayed takes its data from a general database, and in this case the result reveals the extremely misogynist but
common discourse, which may have always been there and is now documented online (see Figure 13). When typing the phrase “women should”, the search engine comes up with suggestions for the rest of the sentence like “stay at home”, “be slaves”, “be in the kitchen” and “not speak in church”.

![Figure 13. From a UN Women promotion video (Memac Ogilvy & Mather, 2013).](image)

Here, the technology shows the breadth of the practices that set limits for women globally. It shows how we program discriminating social structures through repeated micro speech acts. This is not something you change easily, but big data means we can prove the problem is real and not just a nagging feeling. Google has now removed this “bug” in the system, and it is no longer possible to get misogynist suggestions for how to continue sentences such as “women are”. But this does not mean that the search data that is the basis for this is not misogynist, just that Google has blocked us from seeing this. Since similar things happen continually, Google now monitors this and ensures that we are not exposed to suggestions that are not politically correct and child-friendly. Here, one can say that the “algorithms” protect us from seeing this aggregated image of what people are looking for on the internet.

Another example of how misogyny, racism and other obscure views come to the surface when human data produced online is used as a basis in machine learning is Microsoft’s online robot Tay (Figure 14). Tay was released on Twitter to communicate with and learn from other Twitter users, but she was quickly removed when she developed
into an overly politically incorrect representative of Microsoft, who learned especially from the internet’s more obscure and hateful parts (Hunt 2016).

Recruitment software is another example of how machine learning goes wrong based on the data on which the machines are based. Recruiting is a big and time-consuming job that is tempting to automate. By comparing new applications with old and successful ones, you can exclude a large group of applications, saving time. The

Figure 14. Microsoft Tay Twitter image. Press image by Microsoft 2016
problem is that the consequence of the fact that a majority of men work in the tech industry is that it becomes one of the parameters AI judges the applications against when they are “thinking” themselves (Cook 2018). It is logical: since being a woman does not usually lead to jobs in this sector, it is therefore reasonable to exclude all female applicants. If the data is not representative of what you want the machine to “understand” and carefully curated, the result easily becomes strange, something the artist Memo Akten has explored in his work, for example through feeding neural networks with all the images from an image search that came up when he searched for a famous politician. The software he uses then returns how the computer “understands” based on the content of the search and constructs new images based on this search in the digital memory. Since the images in the database are not cleaned and corrected, and may not always show a human, but a pig or a Halloween pumpkin, the result reminds one a bit of monster images from a horror movie (Figure 15).

Memo Akten’s artworks visually describe how computers make sense of data. The images he generates in this way reminds one a bit of images from the early days of the camera: nearly abstract images that vaguely resemble something, escaping recognition like a memory from a dream you cannot describe.

Figure 15: Memo Akten (2017) Dirty Data.
Another artist who also uses neural networks as work material is Anna Ridler. In the work *Traces of Things* she explores what happens when information is reproduced and recreated through artificial intelligence (Ridler, 2018). She was inspired by insights from neuroscience, that the process of recalling a memory activates the same processes as the act of creating a memory. Thus, every time we remember something we are also actively recreating it.

AI does not exist beyond the reality our language has created. Consequently, human work is needed, at least for a little longer, to feed the digital networks with annotations of images and, in particular, to create new images and definitions that challenge the old ones to prevent the systems from becoming too conservative. Thus, if the data you feed the system with is not representative of what you want to understand, the machines can make it more difficult and harm more than they help, without anyone understanding exactly what went wrong. Most important therefore is the representativeness, complexity and diversity of the data. When the qualitatively created data becomes quantified, the patterns and paradoxes become apparent and can also create new and distorted images, amplifying our prejudices and inequalities in a giant funhouse mirror, where the mistakes in the data create grotesque exaggerations, or brand new images.

It’s complicated to understand what’s right in one context and not in another and to do it in a context online where time and space do not differentiate clearly between different social places. It can, e.g., be difficult to tell the difference between art and pornography. Cultural institutions have also been complaining because of their problems with promoting art through social media because of the automatized censorship on nudity (Johansson 2018). AI’s difficulty in understanding, combined with the amount of data, can lead to unintended consequences. Companies that deal with social content online are forced to hire large numbers of people to ensure that the data does not get dirty and that inappropriate content is cleansed before reaching the surface in large quantities (Solon 2017). The work of these e-trash workers keeps getting bigger, and is often a hidden and low-paid job. Researcher Sara Roberts compares this work with other types of trash work, which is not only given a low value but also something exported to the third world, like much of the western
world’s garbage (Roberts 2016a, 2016b). Like sorters, they go through large amounts of junk to decide what’s valuable and what to throw away. Now, these human cleaning workers not only take care of our material trash but also the garbage from our digital dreams. There are reports of how these workers become mentally ill from these working conditions, where they are forced to see humanity’s ugliest sides (Williams, 2017). Human empathy is what makes this work so difficult, but it is also a prerequisite for the work.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

To summarize this overview of tools and context where our humanity is put to work in various forms: first and foremost, we create data tracks, by browsing, interacting, and consuming media online. We also create images of the world as we see it, we digitize them and we publish the images online. We also understand the pictures, we categorize them and describe in detail what we see in the pictures. We are motivated to do this as a way of expressing ourselves, as a way of communicating with each other, and/or as a means of making money.

This human capital, defined as the skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by an individual or population, is valued online because of:

- Our ability to perform as a human being; a specific person with unique ways of doing things.
- Our ability to create relations with a community of other special persons.
- Our ability to appreciate the odd and the deviant.
- Our ability to identify forms within noisy graphical environments, signals and patterns within an audio, video or animation sequence.
- Our ability to produce and understand complexity.
- Our ability to identify, understand and distinguish
the environment we are in as well as the objects that surround us.

- Our ability to understand patterns, generalize from prior knowledge, and adapt to different environments.

- Our ability to produce memories of something, and as we remember also to actively recreate.

- Our ability to make and understand everything incorrectly, to misinterpret and “queer” the meaning of things and thus enable cultural changes.

- Our talent for misunderstandings and misinterpretations so that the concepts better match our bodies and our wishes.

- The ability to distinguish between art and pornography

- The ability to have empathy.

The way these values are mined can be seen as a form of industry where it is not only the work of our bodies that is being extracted but also, as Berardi (2009) proposes, our souls that are extracted and controlled by the capitalist economy. Thus, like the serfs in 17th-century Russia, it is our human bodies and human cognitive abilities that are the values we contribute with in this economy, but unlike feudal times it is not religion that makes us easy to control, but it is the reflections of ourselves in multiple social media mirrors online that enslaves us in a narcissistic introspection.

This study began from a will to understand this soul work, the “human essence” in people’s work online, by seeing how this humanity is used in new technologies online and what aesthetic expressions this can take. It shows that what is valued online is people’s ability to behave as credible people, thus proving their humanity in different ways by moving around in unique and unstructured ways, as well as producing data that provides a complex image of the world. Furthermore, our cognitive abilities are also used to define these images of
the world in comprehensible categories that make the data possible to systematize. The data that people are particularly good at producing and categorizing is complex, blurry and hard to define. It reminds us aesthetically of the childhood of photography, where blurred landscapes were developed with great effort and without much accuracy. Nevertheless, the photograph was initially seen as scientific evidence. A sign of other dimensions of reality than those we perceive with our senses. A way to look beyond our bodies’ limiting frames.

This is not so different from the trust we today give “algorithms” online. Today, we do not look at pictures as the truth. We are too aware of how easy these are to manipulate. Just like with photography, we need a critique of what images we feed AI with and how we set up the system, and from what perspective. What we put in will come back, magnified and distorted like bad dreams, and constitute what we consider to be our reality; what will become our reality. Marketers would like to sell AI as a kind of oracle, which is understandable. But instead, we must see AI as a bunch of gigantic mirrors in direct interaction with people's different perspectives and prejudices.

Instead of seeing technology as a mirror of reality, or something more than that, we could use it as an aid to identify prejudices and structures. Like a picture, even a bad picture, it can help us understand how these processes take place. It can also prevent us from making things worse, protecting us from our own humanity. Just like industrial capitalism initially suffered from unhealthy working conditions and production processes, to gradually become more and more regulated with respect to people and nature, we need a critique of how these new production conditions create unhealthy and monstrous realities. The concept of hegemony is therefore central when interpreting online communication practices, since as long as human subjectivities confirm hegemonic practices, they are not autonomous. The algorithms aren’t intentionally biased, but the selection of data and the curating of it may enhance differences.

The internet is a huge archive, a collective memory. Every time these memories are brought up and reused they are not only reproduced, but slightly recreated. We can only speculate as to how our memories will be used and recreated through AI, and how this in turn will bring us new memories. However, AI does not exist beyond
the reality our language has created. Unlike computers, people exist before language. We are also often stupid, and we can misunderstand each other or say something wrong; therefore, language (despite the impossibility of being understood without language) can always adapt to our ever changing social and economic reality. The hope for future development is, according to Judith Butler, precisely this ability to misunderstand or mistake the concepts so that they, at best, better match our bodies and our desires (Butler, 2004).

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It will take two hours to paint a black painting in a public place.

Eyes. Words. Best to be calm.

I have to commit to answering all possible questions from people passing by during the performance.

People are coming close to me.

They want a look at the artist and the image.

Some are disappointed.

They expect an image.

They are irritated.

I want that the conversation should go on in a controlled way with no emotional highlights.

I am working.

I am a practicing Stoicism.

I am painting a painting and not lecturing.
My mission is to make a monochrome painting.

You can overcome the hardship of life with monochrome painting.

The future is black.

That is the vision of the Russian futurists and suprematists!

A black square is a door opened to alternative ways of living and thinking. Kasimir Malevitch discovered this in 1915.

Black on black. Black. So black he could.

The color black is still something that haunts art.

Anish Kapoor is an artist with has exclusive rights to paint with the blackest color of black ever produced.

He is challenged by the British artist Stuart Semple who claims to have invented an even blacker black.

Black painting. Painting black on black is an opportunity to talk about the color black and how black in Western thinking is threatening.

Painting a black painting on black will never be a meaningless activity.

Painting black will produce meaning. The black painting is White work.

I will be paid for the work and can pay tax on the income and be part of society.

Blackwork: I will paint a white painting in a public space. I will paint a white canvas white. It takes two hours. I am committed to answering all sorts of questions raised. I will talk about the artist Robert Ryman.
He worked at the Museum for Moderns Art as a technician.

Now his paintings sell for 20 million dollars, all white with no title.

White is good taste.

In Stockholm, many apartments are painted white. It even exists a special form of white that is called Stockholmsvitt (StockholmWhite).

The color code for StockholmWhite is s0502y. The cultural elite in Sweden usually paints their walls with StockholmWhite.

In Swedish tradition, strong and bright colors and bustling wallpaper means vulgar popular taste. The Nordic style of design is connected to an abstract whiteness combined with expensive designed artifacts in steel, wood, and stone. It is easy to use a connection between the idea of whiteness and white shining apartments as a dangerous vision of white supremacy.

Painting white on white will mean the production of meaning.

The white painting on a white canvas is blackwork.

I will have to sell the painting to someone for cash after the performance or barter.

White painting in a black box.

I paint a white painting on a white canvas on a stage.

It takes between 5 to 10 minutes.
Black work White work. The room is transformed by black and white paintings.  
Photo: Michelle Eismann & Nils Claesson.
ON

BY SHIVA ANOUSHIRVANI
Love’s Labour (0,0,0,0,0). Photo: Shiva Anoushirvani.
My research and artistic practice often concerns itself with existential questions where social microhosts meet the surrounding wholes and macro worlds, in which I use conceptual methods to attempt to understand states and situations in which humanity finds itself. These states are often connected to a feeling of powerlessness towards the surrounding world, but paradoxically also to the power to change, or an attempt to understand the powerlessness that results from absolute authority.

My research focuses on finding conceptual methods for showing how love and caregiving can be formed in the shadow of violence, where love becomes work throughout one’s life.

Within the framework of the research project Work A Work I worked on two main projects: Love’s Labour (0,0, o,0, o,o) and About O. In both works, readings are interweaved with projections of moving
The textual work occupies much of the space and becomes a questioning of where the border between statements and poetry lies. Here, poetry becomes a way of accepting things the scope of which cannot be grasped.

In Love's Labour (0.0, 0.0, 0.0) (2019), the existence of love in the proximity of violence is researched, to which the connections between larger societal structures and the private space are central. Can a wage job that enacts violence on body and psyche affect relations, both state and romantic love and that towards our family and friends? Indirectly, the work deals with the class society and its effect on private and family life as well as love across generations. With autobiographical stories about the complex manifestations of violence, a performative conception is formulated. The private space and the work of love is at the center, damaged by wage work. The work is imbued with the query: How does growing up in a world where violence is embedded in the power dynamics affect our life patterns?

In Love's Labour (0.0, 0.0, 0.0), the work grapples with current and future developments in which robots are designed to cure loneliness, where the work seeks the point of intersection between the programmed patterns and in relation to all living things. In About O I seek definitions of caregiving, what it means, and how it reorients caregiving, both towards oneself and towards others. The work is imbued with the query: How does growing up in a world where violence is embedded in the power dynamics affect our life patterns? The work is imbued with the query: How does growing up in a world where violence is embedded in the power dynamics affect our life patterns?
THIS IS AN ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN O

O is an unpaid occupation

A wound that needs to be healed

A cadaver that must be whole again

A question without an answer

A robotic Sisyphean machinery

O is an obsession with having to define each grain of sand to feel a security that doesn’t exist.

The obsession of knowing in order to change.

Outside of O, humankind finds herself in the dream, the recurring. She dives down into an ocean where the seaweed sways in the water flow, time stands still but the events continue. Hands slowly touch the leaves and her eyes study every millimeter of the underwater life. Suddenly she realizes that she is far below the surface and that she will not make it up before the oxygen runs out. The seawater fills her lungs and she notices that she can breathe underwater.
Relief

O does not exist in the dream. O is wholly absent underwater. O is not among the trees in the forest, in the moss, in the marsh or among the plankton.

O is not navel-gazing, even if it might seem that way from outside. It is an eternal including of all actors, all questions, a continuing troubleshooting apparatus beyond the navel.

Violence is central in O. Violence sometimes saves the human animal from the violence itself. When the human animal has experienced violence, it will to a certain extent avoid violence. A parrying behavior. To parry contributes to some degree to our ability to breathe underwater. To parry the violence is not the same thing as accepting the lies.

O is a necessary evil. O is constant work. It is primarily conducted by those who find themselves on the edge of the social framework. O is an attempt to breathe in water.

Helplessness and dependence cause humankind to create systems and rules. O’s task is to find paths to survival.

O lies latent like a fungus. O only breaks out with the right preconditions.

Some become dependent on O as a way to survive. Some do not think of O at all and do not even know of its existence. Some bear the weight of O heavily, others so lightly that they hardly notice they are carrying it.
Bearing is a large part of O, like a horse that carries bodies, with its thin legs consisting of an intricate muscle system. First, the horse revolts, then she accepts the carrying. Perhaps she accepts it at the same moment she understands that she can receive something in return.

Or does she give up?

Humankind’s bearing is comparable to the horse’s.

In contrast to the horse’s bearing, the human animal should not expect anything from this bearing.
The human animal bears that which previous human animals have borne.

The bearing in O, like a weapon, one of the oldest.
The bearing in O demands a strength from the roots, one that vibrates underground,
One that abides as long as she falls.
The point of bearing is to put an end to O, which has become mechanical.
The point of bearing is to show the human animal the path towards justice.

The human animal, a system of nerve endings, blood circulation, a pulse, an obscure model where contrasts battle. Signal paths drawn all the way down to the earth’s minerals and magnetic fields up to the star constellations in space.

Hubris, inferiority complex.

O is there to make itself extinct.

It is said that O should not be necessary. O is the ineluctably necessary that exists for some bodies, in spite of its Sisyphean characteristics which, when they appear, can strangle the human animal.
What O consists of is not wholly unique. O exists in bodies with similar experiences. O’s work is troubleshooting and asking questions, to continually attempt to solve everything that comes in its path.

O is part of a larger structure. An incomprehensibly programmed system.

If you have not yet noticed what this text is about, I would remind you that the text is a method, a line, an exertion, an attempt to make clear what O can be. All who are not named in this text are spectators who surround the text. Spectators are those who watch and cannot help all that much. What spectators can do is comment. They have an answer to all that should happen, as if this were a story of creation that they have heard since they were born, an excerpt from a holy text that they have memorized. They sing in a chorus: The human animal must learn to “stand side by side with themselves” in order for others to “stand side by side with them.”

The human animal knows how she should stand side by side with others, but has no experience of others standing by her side.

The herd is central and O relates to it.

The human animal that is deep inside in the service of O has an inherent feeling of being cut off from the herd.

To be cut off from the herd is painful. To not be accepted by it is even more painful.

In order to study the state of not being part of a herd, O constantly creates situations that cause the human animal to travel to the moment in time where the pain has been most powerful, to meet what once happened, to understand. To have her security taken away, to be forced into exile, to be abandoned, to walk on shaky ground.

To find the uglybeautiful in what once was.
Recurring visits to the past are what create the feeling of Sisyphean work.

O could by this time be an installation by the artist Mona Hatoum called “+ and -.” When plus has created patterns in the sand, minus erases it. A perpetual motion machine. One pendulum makes a mark in the sand, the other smooths it out. Minus smoothes out everything that Plus has laboriously built up.

The pendulum that propels O is stable. It revolves like an old meat grinder, one tat insists on never breaking. It revolves and grinds everything that crosses its path.

O is always asking:
When? How? Where?

O tries to sort everything out, for itself and others, for the sake of the truth.

Love’s Labour (o,o, o,0, o,0). Photo: Shiva Anoushirvani.
O’s aspiration is to find the point of departure of the story of the human animal, to burn the counterproductive elements, to allow humankind to breathe in water, to rip the animal out of the human.

O is wholly eliminated when O has ended the human animal’s connections to her identity.

It is a lie that has created O. Lies are those simplifications that society has created and continues to create. Paradoxically enough, lies are the only way for those who bear O to finally escape O.

O can be likened to a robot after a longer period of recurring activities. A robot whose strength is repetition.

A *labouri* that has gotten stuck in the middle of renewal.

The absence of O can also make robots out of people. It is a very fine line.

The robot carries the lie with relief.

In a deserted landscape all this spinning about O interweaves, O’s factory smokestacks are transformed into “something else”.

*Time is short*
For O
For the human animal
For humankind
And
The mortal robots

That which is born must be given back and it is there everything comes to a halt.
O is born of the ashes, dies in the ash and rests in the sea.

O will end when everyone can breathe in water.

The sea is a forgiving maw.
OM O

DET HÄR ÄR ETT FÖRSÖK TILL ATT FÖRKLARA O

Ett obetalt arbete

Ett sår som ska läkas

Ett kadaver som ska bli helt igen

En fråga utan ett svar

Ett mekaniskt sisyfos-maskineri

O är en besatthet av att behöva definiera varje sandkorn för att känna en trygghet som inte finns.

Besattheten i att veta för att kunna förändra.

Utanför O befinner människan sig i drömmen, den återkommande. Hon dyker ner i ett hav där sjögräset gungar i vattensvallet, tiden står stilla men händelserna fortsätter.
Händerna rör sakta vid bladen och blicken studerar varje millimeter av undervattensliv. Plötsligt inser hon att hon är långt under ytan och att hon inte kommer hinna ta sig upp innan syret tar slut. Havsvattnet fyller lungorna och hon märker att hon kan andas i vatten.

O existerar inte i drömmen. O är helt frånvarande under vatten. O finns inte bland träd i skogen, i mossan, i kärret och bland plankton.

O är inget navelskåderi, även om det kan se ut så utifrån. Det är ett ständigt inkluderande av alla aktörer, alla frågeställningar, en pågående felsökningsapparatur bortom naveln.


Att parera våldet är inte samma sak som att acceptera "lögnen.


Hjälplösheten och beroendet får människan att skapa system och strategier. O:s uppgift är att hitta vägar till överlevnad.

O ligger latent likt en svamp. O bryter enbart ut under de rätta förutsättningarna.

Vissa blir beroende av O som ett sätt att överleva. Vissa tänker inte alls på O och vet inte ens om Os existens. Vissa bär O tungt, andra bär O så lätt att de knappt märker att de bär.

About O, performed by Shiva Anoushirvani and Rebecca Chentinell. Photo: Ylva Sundgren

Eller ger hon upp?

Människodjurets bärande är jämförbart med hästens.

Tvärtemot hästens bärande bör inte människodjuret förvänta sig att få ut något av bärandet. Människodjuret bär det som tidigare människodjur burit.


Människodjuret, ett system av nervtrådar, blodomlopp, en puls, ett svåröverskådligt schema där motsättningarna krigar. Signalbanor som dras ända ner till jordens mineraler och magnetfält till rymdens stjärnsystem.

Storhetsvansinne, mindervärdeskomplex.

O finns till för att utrota sig själv.

Det sägs att O inte ska vara nödvändigt. O är det ofräknomligt nödvändiga som existerar för vissa kroppar, trots dess sisyfosegenskaper som när de uppstår kan strypa människodjuret.

Det O består av är inte helt unikt i sitt slag. O finns hos kroppar med liknande erfarenheter.
O:s arbete är att felsöka och ställa frågor, att ständigt försöka lösa allt som kommer i dess väg.

O är en del av en större struktur. Ett obegripligt programmerat system.


Flocken är central och O förhåller sig till den.

Människodjur som är djupt inne i O:s tjänst har en inneboende känsla av att vara fränskilda flocken.

Att skiljas från flocken är smärtsamt. Att inte bli accepterad av den är ännu smärtsammare.

För att undersöka tillståndet av att inte vara del av en flock skapar O ständigt situationer som gör att människodjuret färdas till det ögonblick där smärtan varit som starkast, för att möta det som en gång hänt, för att begripa. Att bli berövad på sin trygghet, att tvingas till exil, att bli övergiven, att stå på skakig mark.

Att hitta det fulvackra i det som engång var. Återkommande besök till det förflutna är det som ger känslan av sisyfosarbete.


O frågar ständigt:
När? Hur? Var?
Försöker lösa det mesta för sig själv och andra, för sanningens skull.

O:s strävan är att hitta utgångspunktens i människodjurets berättelse, att bränna de kontraproduktiva delarna, att låta människan andas i vatten, att slita djuret ur människan.

O elimineras helt när O har gjort slut på människodjurets kopplingar till sin identitet.

Det är lögnen som har skapat O. Lögnen är de förenklingar som samhället skapat och fortsätter att skapa.

Paradoxalt nog är lögnen det enda sättet för den som bär O att till sist få slippa O.

O kan liknas vid en robot efter en längre tid av återkommande sysslor.
En robot vars styrka är upprepning.

En labouri som har hakat upp sig mitt i förnyelsen.

Frånvaron av O kan också göra robotar av människor. Gränsen är härfin.
Roboten bär lögnen med lättnad.

I ett öde landskap möts allt detta virande som handlar om O, Os fabriksskorstenar transformeras till “något annat”.

Tiden är kort
för O
för människodjuret
för människan
och
jordlivets robotar.

Det som föddes måste ges tillbaka och det är där allt stannar av.
O föds ur askan, där i askan och vilar i havet.

O tar slut där alla kan andas i vatten.

Havet är ett tillåtande gap.
About O, performed by Shiva Anoushirvani and Rebecca Chentinell. Photos: Ylva Sundgren.
THIS VIOLIN MUST DIE

BY GEORGE KENTROS
It takes a long time to become a violinist. (It might take even longer to become a new music violinist, which is what I happen to be.) Becoming a classical violinist entails working with the instrument from about the age of 7 or earlier, well before we are capable of making informed decisions about the future, or even what the meaning of the word future might be. So the impetus for becoming a violinist, while perhaps informed to an extent by one’s predilection for and/or interest in music, comes mostly from exposure to the instrument as well as moral and financial encouragement from the adult world. The main reason that violinists start early is that we must deform our arms and bodies so that the exceedingly unnatural position of holding the violin becomes organic, a process that takes many years of sitting alone in a room and playing exercises for several hours a day. All this is done well before one even performs in public, and it sounds pretty horrible, making the process a very private one with no connection at all to either art or music. In fact, the choice of the
particular instrument which one plays is usually dependent upon external social factors more than a particular “call” to the instrument. Many people choose instruments much later, when they have more of an idea about what kind of instrument and/or music they want to play. The problem with the violin is that in order to be able to make the decision about playing professionally, one must first have spent some years deforming the body in order to be able to begin playing it at all – if you begin deforming your body at the age of 15 or so, it takes quite a long time to be able to do what is necessary to make the violin sound the way you want, and at that point your musical sensibility is more well-developed than your technique, so it becomes both physically and emotionally painful to learn to play the instrument. But even then, when at some later date, maybe in one’s early teens, a more informed decision is made about whether to try to “become” a violinist, this is based primarily on one’s experiences while performing for others along with the extent to which one is encouraged by one’s peers and teachers. Basically, if you can get a hot date because you are good at playing the violin, you tend to continue working at it. And from that point on, the violinist must practice alone in a room even more, from about 4 to 8 hours each and every day, in order to create the minuscule muscle memories that will allow one to play the standard classical violin repertoire in competition with other violinists. These hours alone in a room take place during one’s teens, when other kids are out there playing games, hanging out, making stupid mistakes, living a life. After this, if you do exactly as your teachers say, you will be able to play certain pieces of music for an audience, purportedly revealing deep secrets about existence through the interpretation of well-known works of art. Exactly how a violinist is supposed to know all these things about life is not covered in the textbooks, but it is assumed that it just happens somewhere along the line while we sit alone in our rooms. And in the end, surprisingly many violinists become violinists for no other reason than that people told them they were good at it. So becoming a violinist requires both a faith in one’s elders and a desire to perform what people want to hear so that they continue to say that one is good at it. Becoming a new music violinist entails all of this, but after that questions must be asked: Why this sound? Why this music? Why even play? Were
all those elders actually correct about *everything*? It is not really the answers to these questions, but the asking of them, that determines what kind of violinist you end up becoming. And the asking of these questions also means that you must make informed decisions about when not to have faith in others, who for the most part would like musicians to do anything but play new music. The sort of new music that I perform consists of questioning the established practices around playing technique, concert forms, and the ways and reasons that sounds are produced, which means that one has to begin from scratch every time one learns a new piece, trying not to play in a certain way simply because it has always been done, but isolating each sound and making decisions about what role the sound has in the larger whole of the piece, only then making that note sound the way it is supposed to in that context. So in effect, to become a new music violinist, one must do exactly as one’s teachers say for about 10 or 15 years, after which one must do exactly the opposite for about as long.
The story of the Grasshopper and the Ant is one of Aesop’s better known fables, and describes how a hungry grasshopper begs for food from an ant when winter comes and is refused shelter. This is because during the summer, the grasshopper wasted its time with music while the ants worked hard to save food for the winter. The original moral of the story is something along the lines of: “There’s a time for work and a time for play.” What interested me about this fable was that in almost all the versions of this story, the grasshopper plays the violin. Here is an English version of the original:

During the wintertime, an ant was living off the grain that he had stored up for himself during the summer. A cricket, fiddle under his arm, came to the ant and asked him to share some of his grain. The ant said to the cricket, ‘And what were you doing all summer long, since you weren’t gathering grain to eat?’ The cricket replied, ‘Because I was busy playing music I didn’t have time for the harvest.’ The ant laughed at the cricket’s reply, and hid his heaps of grain deeper in the ground. ‘Since you sang like a fool in the summer,’ said the ant, ‘you better be prepared to dance the winter away!’

To this point in my life I have practiced alone in a room for about 45000 hours. This is in addition to all the hours spent in front of audiences, where I am putting those hours of practice into, well, practice. When I practice the violin each day, I begin with a couple of hours of “normal” violin technique, whether or not the pieces I am working on use these techniques or not. This is so I can feel like I have control over the instrument, and can be likened to a story I heard once about Willem de Kooning where he apparently began each day by drawing freeform circles for an hour before he started painting. In fact, it may be more important for a new music violinist to practice “normal” technique than it would be for an ordinary classical violinist, simply because very little of what I play is written in a way that lets the audience know that I can actually play the violin. But a well-honed technical base informs a performance subliminally, giving a stable
foundation to the works that I perform that gives the pieces their best chance of succeeding. In effect, everything I have accomplished artistically has taken place while I play a violin. The concert concepts I create and the pieces I choose to perform are obviously a product of my artistic bent, but the playing itself while I am onstage is so dependent upon muscle memory that it is difficult to separate just how much of my public work is a result of technical training and how much is my collected artistic and intellectual knowledge. How much of what I do is just playing the violin, and how much is a product of my experiences, the books I have read, the relationships I have had, the art I have seen, the friends I have, in short, how much depends on me and not on the hours I have practiced? These hours have also made me somewhat blind to my own processes in that I have worked so long with the violin that I do not find details about the way I work at all interesting, if I even notice these details. For this project about work, I therefore tried to isolate what aspects of any eventual artistry I possess and techniques I have learned that would remain if I took the instrument out of my hands, so to speak, instead working with sounds created through the destruction of a violin. By documenting the processes I went through in order to create this project I hoped to draw distinctions and parallels between this process and the way I work when I play the violin, as well as reminding me of what my ordinary processes are. In order to do this I worked with the composer and programmer Fredrik Olofsson to create a new sort of instrument: a computer program in the Supercollider language that would record the sounds a violin made as it was slowly smashed and then play them back according to predetermined parameters that allowed me to steer the way the sounds developed over the course of about 30 minutes. In this way I hoped to isolate my musical knowledge from that which was specific to the hours of practice alone in a room.

There have been an extraordinary number of different versions of the Grasshopper and the Ant throughout the centuries, with startlingly different morals. For example, in Marie de France’s medieval version the grasshopper says that its work was ‘to sing and bring pleasure to all creatures, but I find none who will now return the same to me.’ The ant does not seem to be a music lover and says
‘Why should I give food to thee/When you cannot give aid to me?’

Around the end of the 15th century, Laurentius Abstemius writes a similar fable about a gnat and a bee. The gnat asks the bee for food and shelter in winter and offers to teach her children music in return. The bee’s reply is that she prefers to teach the children a useful trade that will preserve them from hunger and cold. The grasshopper becomes even more of a cancer on society in the French revolutionary Pierre-Louis Ginguené’s version from 1810, “The Grasshopper and the Other Insects”. Here the Grasshopper tries to get the other insects to follow his example of constant artistic activity, but is told that the only justification for poetry is if it is societally useful. And it turns out that the word for the grasshopper in the French versions of the fable, “cigale,” was used to describe women who use their sex appeal to live parasitically off of rich men. (Which is sort of what artists are accused of doing, except that we purportedly use some version of highbrow artsy voodoo to milk money from the state and private donors.).

The preparation for this project was surprisingly similar to the way I prepare for a concert with new music, with the obvious difference that there were no notes for me to follow at the start. I needed instead to create the material that could be likened to the notes I usually work with. I began by smashing a violin against different objects in my rehearsal studio in order first to find out what sorts of sounds could be produced with the body of the violin. This was obviously tricky: the sound a violin makes when striking different kinds of hard objects is quite loud, and the microphone had to be adjusted so that it did not clip while recording these sounds. I also had to find ways of hitting the violin that would be useful in the final version without unnecessarily breaking too many violins before I was finished researching. There were seven main variants of useful sounds that were produced by this process: the wood hitting the surface; the strings resonating inside the body of the violin after impact; the sound of the bridge moving; the strings detuning during the course of the different impacts; the incidental sounds coming from the strings as I held the violin in order to swing it against the surface; the strings hitting the fingerboard when the bridge finally gave way; and the sound of the wood creak-
ing as it was being crushed. I made short recordings and sent them to Fredrik in Berlin so that he could test some of his ideas for sound treatments, and we communicated back and forth for some months. After landing on a group of sounds that I thought would be useful, much as I do with written notes, I then worked on finding ways to create these sounds that I found useful in a controlled and repeatable manner so that they would only appear at the times I wanted them to. This finally took the life of one violin – I had to hit the violin harder and harder to see how much force was needed to actually break the body of the instrument, after which I took the opportunity to research which sounds were possible after the body was broken. Then I took these different methods of creating the sounds back to the programmer and we began researching how these aural results could be kept and treated to create different sonic atmospheres. This entailed my showing him the ways that I produced the sounds and finding the best methods of preserving them, after which Fredrik developed different ways of treating the sounds that I could try out and amend. We hit the violin against different surfaces as before and checked how well the resulting recorded sounds reacted to the treatments. We created a simple order of events, where obviously the first sound would be the first impact, followed by the sounds that worked best while the violin was still more or less whole, and then proceeding to the sounds that could only be produced with a broken violin. We also decided upon two main parameters: the recording would begin playing about 1/8 of a second after impact to minimize the percussive effect of the first wood on surface (which tended to take up too much mental space) and the recording buffers would be 4-second long loops that could be treated in different ways. The treatments, which we called “players”, consisted of different sound filters and manipulations of the raw sounding material. Player behaviors included in which direction and how fast to progress in the captured sound buffer, when to play and for how long, with which envelope and how loud, how much transposition, and so on. Some of these players used granular synthesis techniques while others were scratching and jumping around in the sound buffer in more or less unpredictable ways. These players would allow me to develop the different recordings in ways that gave me as much control as possible over a process that was intrinsically impossible to
control, given the randomness of the way the violin would fall apart under the sort of treatment it would receive in a live context. (Perhaps this desire for control is a remnant of the paradigms I took for granted as I learned to play the instrument: I have always preferred to know exactly what I am doing when presenting something for an audience, and the thought of not having control over what is being presented is to me a form of disrespect, both for the recipients and the art form. If this was to be something worth doing, it had to be done in a less haphazard way than the way each violin actually fell apart.) Alongside this, Fredrik developed an interface using the program Max MSPJitter that would allow me to see as well as “play” the sounds on an iPad.

There was also a simple mixer built in which allowed me to modify the quality of the total sound output. The three sliders delay, sustainer,
distortion are simple wet/dry controls for global effects, while the other sliders freeze, fire, industry, chaos, air are more complex and control several effects and behaviors. For example, freeze will take the sound from all players and smear it out by removing transients and pitch shifting copies of the sound up/down in octaves. Thanks to these computer programs I now had an instrument on which I could practice, as well as repeatable sounds that I could practice on said instrument. This part of the process took about three months.

There have also been several right-wing debaters in the US who have adapted the fable to attack the welfare state. In one version from 1994, the grasshopper calls a press conference at the beginning of the winter to complain about the socio-economic inequity of the American political system and is given the ant’s house as compensation.
This version was meant to satirize the Clinton administration’s social programs during the early 1990s.

When the basic sounds and treatments were decided upon, I had something akin to the building blocks for a new piece of music: 8 different buffers for 7 different categories of basic sounds, all produced through the process of breaking a violin in stages. Now I needed to find a way to order these blocks in such a way that it followed the stages of the destruction while allowing for a musical form. I recorded each primary sound, from 1 to 7, and all of the players were applied to them so that I had an idea which players worked best with which sounds, and how to shepherd the different ways that the aspects of the violin destruction could take. This led to some decisions about the way I should go about smashing the violin: first I would hit it when it was tuned normally, then once more as it detuned after the first episode, supplying a drone-like quality based on the four open strings GDAE of the violin that felt like a necessary backdrop for the violence of the recorded sounds of impact. This tonal center was a bit like climbing inside the instrument itself, an effect that was enhanced by the projected film showing the violin on the stage floor. After this I would begin the process of allowing the violin to fall apart, progressing from the bridge moving to the incidental string sounds through to the cracking of the wood. Each of these sound files were kept throughout the course of the piece so that I could go back to them later if something was missing from the soundscape.

So after all this, I finally had something that I could practice just as I practice a piece of music: by finding natural ways of repeating my motions so that more or less the same sounds could be produced in different environments, listening to the sounds being produced, and doing it over and over until it felt organic and repeatable and, quite simply, sounded the way I want it to almost every single time. For example, the first sound created had to be powerful enough to trigger the recording but not so powerful as to cause the recording level to clip. The slamming motion itself also had to look organic so as not to distract the listener from the focus of the piece. Apart from memorizing the actual strength necessary to keep within these...
parameters, this also entailed experimenting with different ways of holding the violin as it smashed against a floor or table as well as finding different materials for the surface against which the violin would be smashed. After finding the most reliable surface and “slamming” technique, I had to perform the task hundreds and hundreds of times in slightly different circumstances in order to feel comfortable that the beginning of the piece would work every single time when performed live in front of an audience. This has of course certain parallels to the ways that a violinist practices notes, and the process took a few months, just as it would if I were to learn a difficult piece of music. But to be honest, this part of the work was a great relief to me: I had previously not had much experience with making sounds on computers and the whole process up to then felt rather foreign; but when these building blocks were in place I had finally come to a point where I knew how to progress with my work by using the practicing techniques I had amassed over the course of those 45000 hours. I just had to apply them to a different context. So from this point on, I was more or less home.

Armed with this experience, I traveled back to Fredrik in order to spend a week developing the final version of the program and interface that could be used for the first performance. We also made a dry run of the different steps involved in the program in order to isolate things that could go wrong, which it turned out were plenty. Apart from continually making small adjustments to the coding, which further enhanced the sound quality and the reliability of the complex array of programs that were interacting, there were several things that when put into a linear context simply would not work. Some were prosaic things such as how to position the violin at the start so that I could easily grab hold of it and slam it onto the surface in one motion in order to maximize the initial effect on the audience. We had to choreograph the steps of turning on the film, arming the recording interface and grabbing the violin without unnecessary movement. There were also questions about where to put the violin between impact episodes. There were ergonomic questions, since it turned out that sitting on the floor was conducive neither to audience effect nor to the health of my back. This led to questions about the height of
the table and different ways of positioning the iPad interface so that I could easily reach it without losing contact with the violin itself. The solutions to these questions allowed us to make a test performance of the entire show from beginning to end, sacrificing another violin in the process. Following this, we analyzed the film and recording, looking for weak points or sections where I might lose control, and Fredrik programmed new players and treatments that I could use to minimize the damage when sections began getting away from me. In turn looked at what I was doing both with and without the violin to see if there were personal tics unrelated to the performance that I was unconsciously showing the audience so that I could work on erasing these. Again, all this is related to the sorts of problems one encounters when learning pieces of music that do not follow established performance praxis, so these steps were quite familiar to me. I do not have to look at video recordings of myself any more when I play the violin, but since I had no built-in muscle memory of these motions I had to redo things like this that I did 30 years ago while still learning to be a violinist. Now the final version of the piece was decided and I had a couple of weeks to prepare the first performance, following the same procedures outlined above, just as if I were playing the violin. And if all this detail seems boring to you, I can assure you that it was extremely boring for me as well. It always is.

From around 1800, there began a backlash of sorts that seems to have originated in France where the rightness of the ant began being questioned in the morals. Jean-Jacques Boisard ended his version of the fable with a moral that criticizes the arguments of the ant by musing that since we must all die in the end anyway, “Hoarding is folly, enjoyment is wise.” In his Fables from 1851, Jacques-Melchior Villefranche wrote a sequel in which the ant loses its hoard and asks a bee for help. The bee then reveals that it has already given the grasshopper shelter and invites the ant to join him, since ‘All who are suffering/Deserve help equally.’ In a more modern version by Françoise Sagan, the ant boards food all winter but still has too much left when spring comes, so the ant urges the grasshopper to invest in her stocks. But the grasshopper does not need that much to live comfortably and tells the ant to hold a discount sale instead. The French playwright
Anouilh wrote a poem, "La Cigale," in which the grasshopper is a female nightclub singer who enlists a fox as her agent, and hints at the attitude of laymen about artists as he prepares to cheat her:

"Madame," said he, "I have the greatest respect
For your art and for artists.
Money, alas! is only one aspect
Quite trivial, I would say very sad,
If we did not all need it,
From the human condition
Money demands care.
It must not become an embarrassment...
Sign this little white-sign
And do not worry about anything."

Smiling with bonhomie,
"Believe me, Madame," he added, "I would like,
To be able, just like you, to sacrifice only to the muses!"

Another Frenchman, Pierre Perret, wrote a song with a similar cast of characters which gives more cynical advice to aspiring artists:

Never forget this lesson/ It's better to be an impresario.

So now we are getting somewhere. The way one interprets the fable appears to be a litmus test for the sort of politics of redistribution one prefers, and from the 19th century it appears that societal attitudes towards art and culture enter into the mix alongside charity and generosity.

The final preparations for the actual performance were also strikingly similar to the way I usually prepare for a concert on the violin. (A tour in which one plays the same piece over and over each day is of course a bit different, where the process described below is instead compressed into a couple of hours before each performance, but the first concert of a tour follows roughly the pattern described here.) The last few days before a first performance is spent practicing, and,
when the violin is not in my hands, visualizing the concert situation and the beginning of the piece. I am terrible company during these days – withdrawn, absent-minded, lacking in empathy. But not irritable. I am lucky enough to think that what I do is important and feel a calm that encases this energy when I am zeroing in on a show. By the day of the performance I am a bit too prepared – all eventualities have been covered during the rehearsal period – so that I never have to worry about a lack of time with sound checks (which are always late) or pragmatic problems with light, food, and so on, and can instead work on channeling a sort of energy the can be used towards the performance. There is a feeling of pent-up nervousness that I try to nurture, an energy being collected to point towards a certain direction at a certain point in time. This is what allows me to project what I need to onstage so that the parts of the sounding material that I find interesting have the capacity to find recipients. I had always thought that this had to do with the violin technique that I have worked on, but I found while preparing for this project that this is only half the truth: although I did not have to use any playing techniques that I had worked so long to master, I was using the preparatory techniques that I had always used before so that I would be able to freely manipulate a context where I did not need to play on the violin. I imagine that I use variations on these techniques any time I do anything in public, from holding a lecture to giving a speech at a wedding; it is just that I feel an added urgency when no words are involved.

The version that is the baseline for modern interpretations of the fable, however, comes from Walt Disney. His cartoon version, The Grasshopper and the Ants (1934) came in the midst of the Great Depression, where the concepts of work and money were at the forefront of politics in America. There is little doubt on which side of the debate Disney’s version falls. The Grasshopper’s irresponsibility (he “could only think of fun”) is underlined by his song “The World Owes us a Living”, which incidentally became a Shirley Temple hit later that year. The moral of the story shows the folly of laziness, and the need for “useful” work, which was probably the biggest problem that politicians on the right saw with the New Deal:
There once was an old grasshopper
Who could only think of fun
He looked on work as something too
Unpleasant to be done
He loved to sit in the summer sun
And fiddle all day long
While dozing there he played this air
And sang this little song
Oh the world owes me a living
Deedle dardle doodle deedle dum
Oh the world owes me a living
Deedle dardle doodle deedle dum
If I worked hard all day I might
Sleep better when in bed at night
I sleep all day so that’s alright
Deedle dardle doodle deedle dum

Then winter comes, and the freezing grasshopper is rescued by the ants. In this version they allow the grasshopper to stay, but she must play her fiddle in return for room and board. The grasshopper finally learns that she needs to make herself useful, and in the end she changes the text to:

Oh I owe the world a living....
You ants were right the time you said
You’ve got to work for all you get.

When I checked this song on for example YouTube I found dozens of comments lauding the work ethic of the ants, calling it an eternally important lesson for our children. We apparently do not live in 19th-century France anymore.

The actual performance turned out to be quite similar to what I do when I have a violin in my hands. I basically stand there on a stage and do the best I can, playing sounds that I, after a period of preparation,
still find worth playing for people. I concentrate on directing the
sounds outwards to the recipients like so many messages in a bottle,
using knowledge gleaned from the combination of a life onstage with
the preparations I have made alone in a room for months in particu-
lar and years in general prior to the performance. The accumulated
experience of a long period of preparation with short-term concen-
trated energy combine to create a content that has the possibility of
being found worthwhile. What this content is not primarily meant to
do is to entertain, neither the audience nor (especially) myself. It is,
in short, not fun.

And this gets to the crux of my reading of the fable, this idea com-
mon to almost all the versions that the grasshopper is sitting around
all summer having fun, and the only thing she can do to earn room
and board is to aid in other people in having fun as well. There is a
still photo of the end of the Walt Disney film where the Grasshopper has seen the folly of her ways and decides to play for the ants: happy faces all around, nodding time, holding hands, stamping feet, feeling safe in the idea that there is something that is possible to understand, feeling like everything is going to be OK in the end. As if things could be OK. As if there is an end. I can certainly see the argument that there is nothing useful about doing that. Yet this is the accepted role of the musician, to grease the machinery that makes our world turn. And some people appear to be quite jealous of what they assume is a life with less suffering than theirs, or at least suffering of a different and somehow less important kind, and these people would like nothing more than to see artists punished. Where is the role in all this of the violinist that plays new music, the kind of music that does not reinforce the idea that we know anything, or that what we already know could ever somehow be enough, the kind of music that nobody wants to hear?

My own version of the fable would begin in the same way: ants would be collecting wares for the winter while the grasshopper sits around playing the violin. The grasshopper would be in a soundproof hole somewhere, repeating the same exercises again and again, occasionally going to see a physiotherapist for those shoulder woes that never seem to quite go away, honing a work of music until it was worth presenting for an audience. When the winter came, she would be freezing and starving and the ants would take her in. Upon hearing what the grasshopper had been working on, she would be instantly expelled from the colony, which consisted of the Queen and some 10000 ants. Of these 10000 ants, exactly five of them would then secretly contact the Grasshopper and ask for lessons on how to produce these sounds, unlocking a door to a small room that they know of in the outer reaches of the colony to which no ants ever go during the winter. There, the Grasshopper would work and perform more concerts for these five ants, accepting food from the enormous stores that the ants possess, food that none of the other ants would ever miss. When the summer came again, the grasshopper would be let out to go back to her hole and practice. The next winter, the process would repeat, but this time there would be seven ants wanting lessons
and concerts. After about 2,500 years, more than half the ants would want lessons. After 4,998 years, even the Queen would be a part of the underground.

There once was a violinist who could never play for fun
He thought of mainstream music as too pleasant to be done
He worked all day with no goals in mind
He practiced all day long
And though the list’ners never came
He sang this little song

Oh the world is complicated
Fiddle dawdle doodle fiddle dum
Oh the world is complicated
Fiddle dawdle doodle fiddle dum
If I just played normal songs I might
Sleep better when in bed at night
I play all day so that’s all right
Fiddle dawdle doodle fiddle dum
THIS VIOLIN MUST DIE – BY GEORGE KENTROS
FYLKINGEN FOR SALE

BY PER HASSELBERG AND INTERVIEW BY SUSANNE SKOG
Fylkingen for Sale, Per Hasselberg pitching. Photo: Dan Lageryd.
ne evening in the Spring of 2019, an audience sat in a half circle at one end of the black box that is Fylkingen, a formation at the center of which was an easel with a large block of papers filled with handwritten numbers and diagrams, and one person held sway over both the pedagogy and the felt-tip pens. He was preparing a market rate auction of the venue Fylkingen, under the fitting headline “Fylkingen for Sale”.

The event was part of After Work, a show under the auspices of an artistic research project focusing on the concept of work. One of the participants was Per Hasselberg, artist and head of Konstfrämjandet, the People’s Movements for Art Promotion. Now he was standing here, to sell Fylkingen. At an auction. This interview stems from that performance.

PER HASSELBERG: This research group decided to put on an evening at Fylkingen. I treated it as a normal invitation to an artist, and began to ask questions like: what kind of context is this, what kind of place – what is there to know? What is Fylkingen today?
And so this is the situation: their rental contract expires in two years, and that is the big worry. But this is at the same time a general problem, and I always find it interesting when a local context can signify a universal problem. When something in the air can be attached to a physical space – that is when it can be really seen, that is when you can start to poke at it. So I began asking around, and found this analytical tool at Stockholm’s Cultural Administration.

Susanne Skog: “The Cultural Calculator”.

PH: Yes. Katrin [Behdjou Arshi] at the Cultural Administration is working on this communications problem, and is trying to create a way to translate the value of cultural institutions for market actors, for example property owners, who might not understand this. That is why they are creating this Cultural Calculator.

On Stockholm’s City’s home page for Business Support Services and Cultural Steering there is a pink information box about the analytical tool called The Cultural Calculator: “The tool can estimate the social, societal and property values that are created by different cultural activities in a place. The Cultural Calculator can be useful for among others cultural workers, property owners, city planners, architects, and the city’s administrative services that want to establish new activities.”

When Per Hasselberg began his research during the spring of 2019 while preparing the work at Fylkingen, the tool was not yet completed. At this moment, in February 2020, the situation is unchanged. In response to an email, Katrin Behdjou Arshi wrote: “We are working on a test period for the tool right now and do not plan to disseminate it until we are finished with this phase”. It is unclear when it will be launched. But Per Hasselberg went ahead anyway and, on the advice of Katrin Behdjou Arshi, contacted the consulting firm Evidens, which was engaged by the City of Stockholm to create this translation tool. He asked if he could test drive the tool on Fylkingen.
PH: The point of the Cultural Calculator is basically to be able to describe the value of culture for capitalists. This has always been distasteful from the perspective of cultural workers. They think, Jesus, what an American way of thinking, to involve money, yuck, how dirty. But this is what excites capitalists. They live their lives in the capitalist world: OK, what can I make money off? That is what is interesting for them, nothing else. It eliminates everything else.

And Evidens was happy to test their tool, to the point that they had developed it up to then. The idea was that it would be free to use. The point is to bring together, to mediate, the discussion between culture and capital when it comes to the way this city is to be put together.

The capitalists have understood that they can profit from culture, they figured that out a long time ago. But culture is always at a disadvantage – and culture has also figured that out.

SS: How did the sale of Fylkingen take place in practice?

PH: Well … everything starts with a sale: as soon as a sale takes place, you get a measurement of what the market is prepared to pay. Is the market prepared to pay more if an apartment is situated next to a park? If so, how much more are people prepared to pay for the feeling of living next to a park? Or of living next to a cultural institution? How much does the value increase? Companies that work with this sort of thing collect enormous amounts of metadata. A lot of their work is about collecting knowledge. So how much does Fylkingen raise the value of its surroundings? Evidens took that into their calculations in the same way as they would the waterfront view, for example.

Fylkingen abuts a “Million Program” neighborhood, an ex-Swedish Housing rental area that was converted into private housing and sold as co-ops. Using their statistics, Evidens could posit – they have extremely precise numbers – that being situated next to Fylkingen raised the value of these apartments by 124 crowns per square meter and year. These are the types of statistics that power the Cultural Calculator.
ss: Was the valuation of Fylkingen made in relation to this area (Ludvigsberg)?

PH: No, in practice I disregarded that part of the calculation since Fylkingen will never be able to negotiate with these co-ops. It is impossible to squeeze a single crown out of them. Instead, I took these statistics in relation to AFA Housing. They own the Munich Brewery, 50 000 square meters of office space, where Fylkingen is situated. So how much does Fylkingen being there affect the value of the building? That number turned out to be 2.4 crowns per square meter and year for the office spaces.

ss: How did you come to that number?

PH: Statistics. What does the market value having as a neighbor? Evidens did not have any real statistics about cultural institutions, but they can see several meta levels and used things such as the number of restaurants; whatever you give them they can count it, even if it is sometimes a bit “one size fits all”, a ballpark estimate. But companies like Evidens make a lot of money doing these sorts of analyses, answers to questions such as: what does the market think about this, or about that? Dare I invest in this or not? A bit like a seer…

ss: It just feels more real?

PH: Yes. Or, you could say what Dror Feiler [who was in the audience the night Hasselberg presented his work] said: “Ah, I don’t believe that for a second. Fylkingen is impossible to understand, it is ugly art. If there were a spa here it would generate more money, it would make the office spaces worth even more.”

But I feel that, if you get to the number 2.4 crowns per square meter, then you can calculate that Fylkingen creates more than a million crowns a year [50 000 x 2.4 = 1 200 000 crowns]. If you then think of what Fylkingen pays in rent ... Looking at this, Fylkingen could easily ask to not have to pay rent at all. AFA would make a profit from Fylkingen anyway. They could give the venue to Fylkingen for nothing. Which is the case for Konsthall C. We have never paid any rent.
Konsthall C is situated in what was once a central laundry house in Hökarängen, a suburb south of Stockholm, and has long been one of the city’s most vital art venues. It was founded in 2004 by the Hökarängen Suburban Council (an umbrella organization for local associations) and Per Hasselberg, who is still on the board of the gallery.

PH: In order to make something like this happen I have to be able to explain what it is that we can only accomplish through art. When I first came to Hökarängen, the attitude was: “What, excuse me? What rock did you climb out from under? You are a... culture snob. An elitist artist. People out here in Hökarängen, they have no education, they aren’t interested in culture. Forget about it.”

That was how the regional housing company Stockholmshem reacted to the idea of Konsthall C. So it was actually through political decisions – that the city hall decided that we should invest in the suburbs, and the regional housing companies should be a part of this – that they were forced into it.

ss: When it comes to Fylkingen for Sale, you calculated a theoretical value using that tool. But there also exists a real-life market, that functions as a market. How would you reach that?

PH: My idea was that if you want to talk about valuation in this way you have to engage an auctioneer. If you have calculated a going price that shows how much money this cultural institution generates, that is one way to find out how much property owners are prepared to pay to house it in their properties.

The actual auctioning off of something is rich with associations... I mean, we used to auction children.* Social services function in this way. People bid when they buy a home, and those bids are based on how much you can squeeze out of the middle class, who are the ones that dominate the housing market. And suddenly, every house costs 8 million crowns.

* The poorhouses in Sweden held auctions where children were auctioned off to those who asked for the least amount of money from the state to take care of the child. The practice was forbidden in 1918.
It is a normal way of evaluating prices, to let people bid against one another. The value that appears then is the marker that shows what the market can and wants to pay. So I thought, this auctioneer, that is where it’s all happening.

Through contacts, Per found a person at the Stockholm Auction House, an experienced auctioneer with a great deal of knowledge about art, and through this he had access to the market that is necessary in these situations, but one that few practitioners within the art world have. Most artists have little or no contact with a market. Even the gallery world exists within an entirely different market. But Per Hasselberg found his auctioneer, who also felt it would be interesting to see and value Fylkingen as a work.

ss: Aha, so Fylkingen would be sold in this context? As an artwork?

PH: Yes. And to explain this to him, I had to once again begin with the example of Konsthall C: it is both a work of art and an art institution, but was also started by Hökarängen’s Suburban Council. It has about 10000 shareowners who want this art hall to exist as a tool in their political capacity. It is a way to renew city boroughs. One can view the art hall as a physical space for thought, and this is often where we see the democratic potential of art. It is here we share thoughts, it is here we can think freely. If we keep everything to ourselves, nothing happens, but when we begin to share, that is when we begin to connect our minds. It is only then that we can move forward. It is itself the central act of democracy, and this is why the arts are so important.

This sort of thing is really difficult to explain to the Sweden Democrats (Sweden’s anti-immigrant populist party), even if they too know that this is how it works; for them, this is precisely why venues like this are dangerous places.

But it was no problem at all getting the person from the Stockholm Auction House to understand this. We put in a bunch of factual parameters, and I said: OK, you see how Evidens has valued the the work that is Fylkingen itself, you see what Fylkingen is and its
activities, and also Fylkingen’s soon to be 90-year-old history – can you measure some sort of artistic threshold for Fylkingen? How strong is this institution?

It was a bit like looking at Fylkingen as if it were a company. What is the stock valuation? Are they active, or are things going downwards? And what would a landlord be willing to throw in so that Fylkingen would continue to raise the value of the property?

If any landlord would actually be interested in buying Fylkingen and placing it as a functional component in their part of town or housing group, then this landlord would also have to believe in her investment. This was a rather difficult point for the auctioneer as well... it is somewhat of a suspect investment: Fylkingen, what is it? It is about 300-400 members that think up a bunch of stuff.

ss: Yes, but they have been doing it for a long while.

PH: Yes, Fylkingen will likely survive, it has been through a lot of crises over the years. Fylkingen has, to speak capitalist language, a pretty good “business model.”

So, ok, what kind of opening bid can we imagine? Say that Fylkingen gets free rent, plus a contribution of about SEK 500 000 during the first five years... something like that is conceivable. It might well have been the result of an auction like this. But then the auctioneer didn’t show up. He bailed out the same evening that the auction was to take place in front of an audience at Fylkingen.

ss: He just didn’t show up?

PH: He just didn’t show up. And I realised at that moment that I needed to cover for this somehow, something had to be done so that the audience would understand the work: I had to become the auctioneer.

Although I do not like being onstage. I have no experience with it and I can’t think in that situation. In my works, my method is to always take one step back, to create for myself a sort of overview. For me it is much more fun to look at the entire process as an artwork, so for me the lack of a real auction was a loss. It became a lecture. A little like a slapstick skit.
ss: But there were not actually that many true potential customers in the audience that night at Fylkingen, were there?

PH: No, in any case it would only have been halfway real. And I think that is what he felt, too, the auctioneer: am I just going to stand there like a clown and expose the entire world of auctions? There has to be a zealous audience, someone who bids for real, for him to put on his show.

ss: That is understandable.

PH: Yes. That is about as far as you can take it. But it is still about meetings, human meetings: what are you prepared to pay with this fake money? How do you value society’s activities?

ss: You did not get a realistic market value for Fylkingen that night, but you wouldn’t have been able to anyway while at Fylkingen? In order to do that you would have had to be at for example the Stockholm Auction House; it would have had to be for real.

PH: But in principle, Fylkingen would be able to do something like that. If Fylkingen as an entity thought: here we are with our landlord and they don’t really understand what we are worth, is there anyone else who gets it? Almost all businesses have these questions: should we move or should we tough it out? It is really difficult to move, you are stuck as if you are in a marriage. It is really a lot of trouble getting a divorce. The landlord can use this fact to raise the rent quite a bit before people give up.

Fylkingen is also a meeting place and workplace: a venue with a bar, office and an in every way professional stage space, where the public sector has invested lots of money. Fylkingen went through a thorough rebuild that finished in 2013, with money from both the Swedish Inheritance Fund and the government in the form of the National Board of Housing. It was in connection to this that Fylkingen signed
a ten-year contract with AFA Real Estate, with a defined rent level and successively diminishing rent rebates. This security and predictability was what the landlord contributed to the renovation.

Today, 58% of Fylkingen’s governmental support goes towards rent. It is this contract that runs out in 2022. That is when anything can happen.

The page on the Stockholm City website where the information about the Cultural Calculator can be found is otherwise about something called Cultural Piloting. Its purpose is described like this: “You who are involved with a cultural activity and would like to establish yourself or relocate an artistic activity in Stockholm City can receive advice and service from a cultural pilot. The cultural pilot can help you develop your concept so that it becomes possible to implement.”

Further down on the page are formulations such as these:

We apply a selection process to judge what kind of advice and service we can offer you. Your needs and prerequisites steer which of the four levels of piloting we offer…

1. Activities that are seen as planning future organisational changes, re- or new establishment that are still in the idea stage…
2. Activities that are judged to have well developed strategies and a high level of implementation. The activity should have come a long way in its processes…
3. The activity is judged to have a high possibility of implementation with well integrated strategies…
4. Specially prioritised and long-term establishments and relocations.

What I want to direct attention to is not the actual content of the cultural pilot process, but the cloak of language: a sort of business prose that Stockholm is of course far from alone in using among the counties in Sweden.

It is not obvious that a person who is an artist or a cultural worker feels comfortable describing their activities in these sorts of terms. It can feel insurmountably strange and filled with conflict: should one enter this ballpark at all; define one’s activities in this way, with this
language, appropriate this method of argumentation? Apart from it feeling foreign one can also ask if this would not entail a sort of capitulation. If one on the other hand doesn’t do this, perhaps one just... disappears.
PH: Yes. And this is precisely where we have arrived. The Cultural Administration apparently feels that they need to create this sort of translation tool. Of course there is a sliding scale here: how far should we really go to meet this capitalistic world? But we are already sitting in the mud. My purpose with *Fylkingen for Sale* was actually: OK, let’s turn the knife in the wound. Let’s auction off this baby. Shall we go ahead and give it a value right now? What happens then?

SS: In two years, Fylkingen risks being put in a real, precarious situation when the old contract runs out. Would Fylkingen seriously be able to argue in this way, do you think? Really?

PH: I think of it this way: the landlord is not stupid. If you want to understand the other player in these games, they most likely have a certain requirement for a return from the building. In that case, it would be good if you can give them arguments that can incentivise their investment in the cultural sector. The Munich Brewery has had a strong cultural identity since the 1970s, but this has shrunk. It is not that esoteric artsy place anymore. Fylkingen still being there secures that identity for the building.

Fylkingen should not have too little self-confidence. It is a really strong brand. Not everyone has been there, but very many people know of it.

It only took one year from the start of Konsthall C before the first apartment listing showed up using the argument “close to Konsthall C.” One might ask what that had to do with anything for a person about to buy a condo or a house, but here you have the so-called Cultural Calculator effect. If the landlord were to take away Konsthall C, that brand, from the house, then they are *stupid* capitalists.

So I think that even if it were to come to something as bad as Fylkingen being driven out, then there are lots of building developers who do not have the legacy of the Munich Brewery. Fylkingen would easily be able to continue on. If that happens then the landlord, and all the others who have invested money and resources in the venue and the activities, everyone would lose what they had invested. All of it.
ss: Fylkingen needs a large, good stage space, it can’t function otherwise.

PH: Yes. It would be a catastrophic divorce. But somewhere there is also a limit to just how much one can take.

ss: We have mentioned that a very large part of Fylkingen’s income goes towards rent.*

PH: Yes. And no other operation would accept those levels. Which of the other tenants of the Munich Brewery have this situation? One can argue from the point of view of percentages. Fylkingen is working pro bono, for the landlord.

When it comes to Konsthall C I look at it this way: we can’t pay any rent. We work for the general good. The general good of art is known. So we have to help each other out with this. The landlord’s power is that they have a house. That is the only thing they have to do, have a house. Then we take care of the rest. It is a community service that is fantastic.

One has to study these contexts, so that for example Fylkingen isn’t treated like a spa. If one were to compare Fylkingen with other actors in the building: “But they pay!” Yes – but how much do they earn? Look at it as a percentage instead: “How much do they pay compared to their turnover? We can take the same percentage!”

That the People’s Movements for Art Promotion can have its office here [next to Mariatorget on Södermalm in Stockholm] is because the landlord, Folkets hus och parker, has an attitude centered on the general good. They are a company, they have to make money, but there is still a sort of understanding that society cannot consist solely of capitalists.

If you have that basic attitude, which I think that even other landlords have, then Fylkingen has a chance… I think too that Fylkingen has a lot

* In an email, the cashier for Fylkingen clarifies the available numbers for 2020: Rent is 57.6% of the total permanent grant sum. If one counts the total income the percentage is 37.6%, but all forms of income are counted here. Of these, many cannot be used towards rent, since they are for example earmarked grants, or income from member productions that are paid back to the producing member.
to gain by working on this problem publicly. Such a negotiation has to take place in the open. One can’t just lay down and die quietly.

ss: If one doesn’t feel one has the language, or the position, to negotiate, and the gut reflex – when one for example reads formulations like those on the Stockholm City web page – is that one cannot and will not go there, then one becomes quite vulnerable. One feels forced to stand there with hat in hand. But for some people, that friction can be part of why one chose to be an artist at all: because one cannot, or will not, relate to that sector of society.

PH: Sure, but it can also be good practice, or therapy, against this fear. To throw around that kind of language and satirize it. Of course, that may be a little dangerous too, to move one’s own positioning. But it is good to understand the opponent, the other player, and to do it as openly as possible. Stockholm City has created this calculator because they have to. They cannot assert the interests of culture for the property developers if they do not create a translation tool so that the world of property can understand the value of the arts. I mean, there is nothing evil about the Cultural Administration.

This is where we begin discussing the Art Communications Bureau. Per Hasselberg says that since certain counties, and certain countries, nowadays define art from everything that they are against – one sticks on a label saying “art,” or uses epithets like menstruation art* – the People’s Movements for Art Promotion is in the process of starting a communications bureau.

PH: We in the art world have an everyday problem in that we are bad at communication. This is an acute problem: we become redefined,

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* “Menstruation art” first referred to Liv Strömquist’s artworks that were shown at the subway platforms on the Slussen subway station during 2017-18. On the walls were women ice skating in classic princess outfits and lithe pirouette poses, where deep red stains on their underwear shone at the viewer. The term was used later, especially by the Sweden Democrats (SD) in the county of Sölvesborg in 2019, to describe art that they deem has no place in the public space: “challenging social artwork” that should not be bought by the county. SD’s Rolf Hans Berg put it this way in the Swedish Television’s Cultural News programme: “The population in general likely does not want menstruation art.”
shut down from the outside. We have to find a way to somehow put up some kind of resistance. The Art Communications Bureau is meant as a sort of think tank together with the Arena Group, which is a member of The People’s Movements for Art Promotion. We artists, like researchers, couldn’t care less about the third task. [Editor’s note: Within universities, there are three defined tasks: education, research, and dissemination.] We haven’t done our job there, we don’t even try to be understood. And then we become very vulnerable. This is where the Art Communications Bureau comes in. The idea is that we take on a job that no one else does, and answer questions about for example what difference art makes in our society. What kind of biotope is art? And we explain the alternatives: If you say menstruation art in this way, then you throw away all the progress that has been made in this area in our society. It is in fact the world outside that makes art political. We are on a battlefield already. To be honest, it is already too late, so we have to start now. We can’t wait.

ss: But to be precise: art’s communications bureau. Is the idea that artists will be able to turn to this bureau and get help with their public communication?

PH: Yes, exactly.

ss: Will they be able to afford it? My first thought is that if an artist even wanted to engage a communications bureau, they would have to forget about it for economic reasons.

PH: Yes, absolutely, it is important to build it so that it becomes possible. No artist would be able to afford this service on the market. But when for example the Sweden Democrats and the [right of center] Moderate parties start going out and defining what art is, a counterforce that can answer this immediately is needed.

ss: That knows the language.

PH: And that can just keep doling out knowledge, arguments, and information. What does art do in society? What is it about? Can you
just replace art with commercial stuff, like we are seeing more and more examples of? There is a stupidification that is taking place in the debate and it has to be met. One has to believe in the idea of a form of mass education.

The Art Communications Bureau should have an analysis ready about where the battle is right now. Who is throwing dirt on whom? Where do we start? What sort of meaning does this have? Building up self-confidence and understanding... The difficult thing is that you can’t really begin by going into the advanced discussions, even if that is what you are longing to do. Right now, the homework we did not do before is the mission: We have not made ourselves clear enough. It will be too easy to shoot us down if we keep on doing things this way. But I think we can handle it. In any event, it will be interesting turning it into politics. Since it already is politics.
SCREEN SAVIOUR

[LOOPEED ANIMATION]

BY KARIN HANSSON
The animation *Screen Saviour* consists of a collection of images whose common denominator is that they are difficult for artificial intelligence to interpret and understand. The images are from so-called human computation contexts such as the citizen science portal Zooniverse, where the human ability to create meaning and interpret unclear images is put to work on a large scale.

I think that just like people, who sort and process their impressions through dreams, robots also need endless dreamtime to figure out these diffuse images. In my mind’s eye I see how the robots, at night when they are not engaged in human activities, perhaps in sleep mode, half asleep/half awake, take the time to reflect on these incomprehensible images in detail. I imagine they try to find patterns and similarities between the pictures, visual associations between seemingly different images. The result is a bit like slow clouds in the sky, or a screensaver from the 90s. But unlike screensavers, whose dream-like designs once existed to save the screen and make sure all the pixels on the screen were working, these animations have nothing to do with saving technology, but are about saving the robot’s vision from becoming obsolete due to pre-programmed norms and pre-imaginations. Or perhaps they are looking for a saviour?
Following pages: Stills from the video, The Screen Saviour, Karin Hansson 2019.
WORK A WORK
PICTURES
WORKSHOPS
EXHIBITIONS
2017–2021
2021


Hansson, Karin (2020-2021). Lectures about the artistic methodology used in Work a work, in different contexts such as Stockholm University, The Royal College of Music in Stockholm and Stockholm University of Fine Art among others.

2020


2019


Hasselberg, Per (2019). Roundtable talks on broader recruitment to the artistic programs, Stockholm, Oktober 18.


2018


Kentros, George, Mattias Petersson, Qarin Wikström, Daniel Boyacioglu (2018). “Så som det alltid har varit har det aldrig varit”, interpretations of Carl Michael Bellman by the group reBell, March (re-bell.se).


2017


Hansson, Karin (2017). “Presentation format as goal or means”, presentation in the artistic research conference at Stockholm University of the Arts, November.


Hansson, Karin (2017). “Art as research methodology”, project presentation in the workshop Perspektiv på digitalt driven forskning inom humaniora, Royal Institute of Technology, KTH, September 15.

Hansson, Karin (2017). “From (x)actory to Work-a-work Art as research methodology”, project presentation in the context of participatory methodologies in the seminar Participatory Design.


Hasselberg, Per (2017). Lecture about creative work methods, Gerlesborgsskolan, Bohuslän, April 19.


Kentros, George, Mattias Petersson, Lisa Ullén, Henrik Olsson, My Hellgren, Anna Svensdotter (2017). Tour of Sweden with ensemble Gahlmm, premieres of several new works for sextet, November.

Kentros, George, Mattias Petersson (2017). First showing of the work w314z, at the Sound of Stockholm festival, November.


Kentros, George, Greta Christensen, Camilla Sorensen, Ingvild Burkey (2017). Preparatory work on the concert/sound installation “Perpetuity” in Berlin between January and June.
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Love, Body and Work

exhibition at Konstakademien

27/3 – 9/5 2021

curated by Sara Arrhenius
Through Ivan’s intimate video and work About O, emotional work and social context come into focus. The vote in calming down, evading punishment or behind. “
After Work

A BOOK ABOUT THE MEANING OF WORK