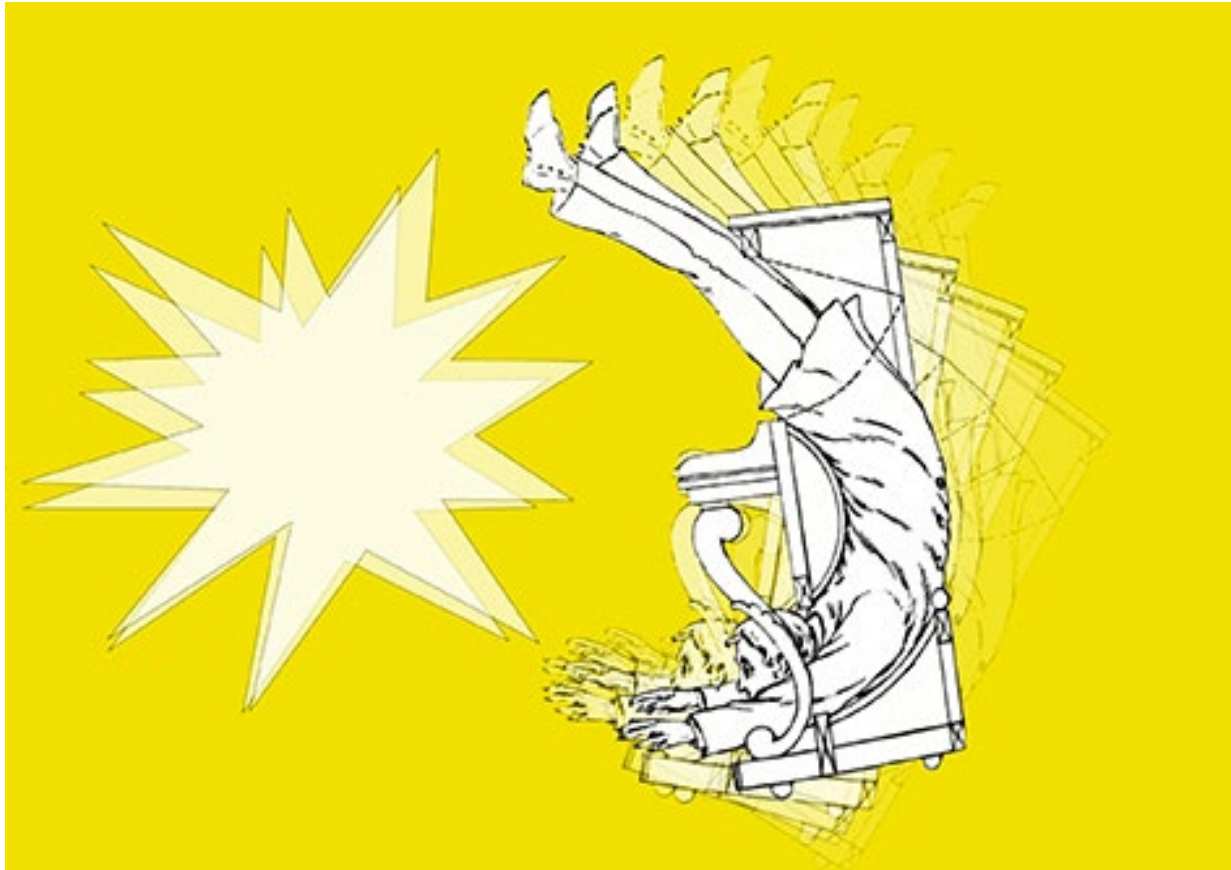


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# **HOW TO DO THINGS WITH PER- FORMANCE**

Editorial

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# How Do We Do Things with Performance?

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Welcome to this 11th issue of *Ruukku - studies in artistic research* devoted to performance and performance as research, and the question how to do things with performance. Not only what should be done, but how it should be done is today a question as relevant as ever. And some argue we should actually do less, and think a bit more, for example how we do what we do. In the research project How to do things with performance, we have been asking what can be or could be done with performance and how.

Much depends of course on our relationship to the word “performance”. Associations related to the term, like “public performance”, “peak performance”, “performing properly”, “performativity” or “performance art”, influence our understanding of what can be done within the realm. In the research project How to do things with performance, we have focused on performance in a broad sense. Although performance is mostly understood in a broad sense as a “doing”, there is a tendency to hark back to the colloquial uses of the word associating to performing arts, and the idea of “showing doing”. This is also the way performance is understood by many of the contributors to in this issue. We want to emphasize a wider understanding of performance as a process, and thus also a more-than-human activity.

By focusing on performance, we wish to illuminate the relationships between performance studies, performance-as-research, and artistic research. Performance studies acknowledges performance practices extending outside the realm of art into the everyday. Artistic research extends the academic traditions of performance studies, ‘doing’ what performance studies have propagated but not always realized. In its focus on doing, and its extensive sense of performance as more-than-art, performance-as-research could be seen as situated in the intersection between the fields of performance studies and artistic research. (McKenzie, Lee & Roms 2010.)

Previous research (e.g. Arlander et al. 2018) has discussed whether performance-as-research is something specific, distinguishable from research designated by other related terms, like practice as research, practice-led research, practice-based research, arts-based research, creative arts research, artistic research and so on? Local differences influence interpretation: especially in the United States, people accustomed to what could be called an “audience-oriented-

ontology” feel comfortable with the term “performance as research”. In the United Kingdom, the term “practice as research” is more often preferred. The acronym PaR is used in part because it blurs any distinction between the two.

PaR is increasingly used as one methodology among others within humanities and social sciences, although most frequently in theatre and performance studies. If we understand PaR as a mode of “investigating by doing”, like learning by doing, it can be developed as one research tool, either as part of the qualitative paradigm, or even as a separate performative paradigm, as Brad Haseman (2006) has suggested. Emphasizing the methodological aspect foregrounds performance or doing as a method in producing research material or data, or as a method in sharing research results, or a combination of these. This methodological approach is what PaR mostly has come to mean. PaR can also be linked to developments within the arts, including artists entering academia, research entering art institutions, and a growing interest in practitioner knowledge within the study of arts. Thus, PaR is co-evolving with artistic research, with its roots in the contemporary art world and the legacy of conceptual and critical art, and all the challenges that entails.

The term practice as research has been criticized for separating theory and practice (all practices involve theory and theorizing is also a practice) and for not distinguishing between artistic practices and other practices. The latter concerns performance as research as well; not all performances take place in the context of art. Moreover, researchers working within performing arts often understand performance as the end result (the art work), not as the action or process. Thus, performance as research can seem too narrow, linked to performance as the topic, or too broad, to be specified by the doing in question, such acting, or dancing, playing, writing, singing, and so on – as research.

The ‘as’ in performance-as-research can also be read as ‘as if’: something is not research, but only presented as if it were research. One of the tenets of performance studies as formulated by Schechner (2006, 38) and others is that almost anything can be studied “as” performance, as an active entity. The is/as distinction in relation to performance is an ontology-epistemology binary debated in performance philosophy (Cull 2014), and has been criticized as hard to maintain, as a form of humanist bias (Kershaw and Nicholson 2011, 4).

We could understand research as performative in the same ways that documentation is performative and actually produces what it is supposed to document; how documenting an action as performance art constitutes it as performance art (Auslander 2006, 7). Similarly, in artistic research, documenting or exposing an artistic project as a research project can be argued to constitute the project as research.

For the purposes of this issue of RUUKKU, we propose that sometimes a practice or performance “is” or “is doing” research; sometimes it can be exposed (presented, documented, staged, translated) “as” research; and sometimes research,

whether artistic or not, can be best presented in an artistic, sensuous or experiential manner. These perspectives produce widely diverging ideas of what performance-as-research could be and where it might find its uses.

In the call for papers for this issue, we suggested that an interest in performances, actions, practices, and change is something that artistic research and performance studies have in common. Both fields can be seen as part of the broader performative turn in the humanities and social sciences, influenced by J.L. Austin's linguistic theory of performatives (*How to Do Things with Words?* 1962; *Näin tehdään sanoilla*, 2016) and their development, notably by Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble* 1990; *Bodies that Matter* 1993), in the theory of cultural performatives, identities that materialize through repetition. Although the performative turn began as a reaction against linguistically-oriented structuralism, it has been more recently criticized for placing language and the linguistic at the centre of research. New materialist research (e.g. Barad 2003, 2007; Van der Tuyn 2015) has emphasized the inseparability of materiality and discursivity; and through posthumanist research (e.g. Ó Maoilearca 2015; Braidotti 2013) performativity expands towards more-than-human dimensions and performance as not-only-human activity.

In the context of artistic research, Barbara Bolt (2008; 2016) has recently returned to discuss the performative character of artistic research and has challenged us to consider what artistic research produces and effectuates. Just as Austin distinguished performatives from constatives by calling attention to how performatives do not operate on the axis of true or false, but are felicitous or unfelicitous, artistic research could be seen as performative in its relationship to the change that the research creates in the world. The processes and outcomes of artistic research they "work" or do not work, they cannot be said to be simply true or false. In artistic research performance or performing can function as an object, source, research method, medium, or as research output – any or all of these at once. As in performance studies, performance can also function as a lens or analytical tool, a manner of recognizing, reordering, and shifting our understanding of reality. Of course, this leads to multiple questions: what to do with performance and how? Whose performance, where and why? What is the role of performance as a research medium and what can we understand of this medium through research processes? In the international multilingual context, where words, documentations, and practices are shared via the internet and in the festival circuit, how does 'performance' translate and on whose terms? How, in the most concrete sense, is research done in or with performance?

All four editors of the journal are researchers in the research project *How to do things with performance?* (2016-2020). Thanks to the generous funding of the Academy of Finland and the support of the University of the Arts Helsinki, we have organised research days on themes related to the overall project. Some of the contributions to this issue are specifically related to two of these: 8.11.2017 our theme

was “How are things done, produced or effected with performance?”, and 2.3.2018 we focused on “Materiality of and in performance”. Later themes, such as “Performance pedagogy” (16.11.2018) and “Performance and feminism” (20.3.2019), may develop into future projects. All four editors, the members of the research project, have also contributed with expositions, requiring some juggling of responsibilities within the project to ensure fairness in peer review process.

The expositions in this issue span across a wide spectrum of performances. In his exposition “Strategies of Fiction” Stephen Bain relates aesthetics to politics through fiction as a method, splitting fiction into various strategies using the format of a screenplay. These strategies or types are then used as a tool to analyse his own public space performance experiments in Auckland.

Three of the expositions are engaged with musical performance. In “Algorithmic Thinking and Musical Performance” Mieko Kanno examines algorithmic thinking as a performative skill in action and argues that contemporary musicians possess the capacity to process necessary information and tasks algorithmically, consciously or not. Anu Vehviläinen discusses ‘experimentation’ in artistic research in “Quest for a Breathing Performance” and describes how an interdisciplinary collaboration influenced a violin-piano recital through both conscious and unintentional experimentation. Elisabeth Belgrano, in “A Singing Orna/Mentor’s Performance or Ir/rational Practice” presents a series of relations and a beginning of a manifesto, through sharing the intimacy of a research process opening up what is yet to be known.

Two of the expositions include an ethnographic approach. In her study “Practices of Performing at Senegalese Sabar Dance Events” Elina Seye considers how the modes of performance in Sabar dance events can be characterized in addition to the obvious repetition and variation of traditional dance genres, and reflects on the value of practical involvement in performance as a methodological tool in ethnographic fieldwork. In “Indigenous Knowledge, Performance Art and the Faltering Act of Translation” Lea and Pekka Kantonen, examine their experiences of working as artist-researchers in collaboration with Wixárika teachers and community museum planners, functioning as documentarists and translators.

The four expositions by the members of the research project demonstrate the variety of approaches both in how to understand performance and how to do things with it. Hanna Järvinen describes in “Re-imagining: A Case Study of Exercises and Strategies” a case of a historian collaborating with dance makers interested in how contemporaneity could be evident in a past work or how a past work could become contemporary in the present. She distinguishes between reconstruction (re-creation of dance from the archive) and reimagining (working from the present practice towards corporeal relationship to past dance) to argue that any performance holds potential to uphold and conserve as well as question and subvert predominant histories of the art form. Pilvi Porkola explores in “Objects that Matter - Performance

Art and Objects” her ongoing art project that focuses on everyday life objects, contemplating the relationship between new materialism and performance art, and exploring how objects are used in some examples of performance art. Tero Nauha, in “The experience of ‘something’ in performance” looks at that ‘something’ in connection with performativity, economy, and philosophy or a wide articulation of ‘performance with something’. He relates it to notions like ‘aliquid’ by Deleuze, to ‘decisionality’ by Laruelle and to the gnosis of the Gnostics, asking whether it is the foreclosed Real, which cannot be captured in a noun. Finally, in “Return to the Site of the Year of the Rooster” Annette Arlander revisits the site of some performances for camera twelve years later, reflecting on the materiality of the site, on the birches growing there as co-performers, and on revisiting and assembling old works as way of doing things with performance.

Aside from discussing performances and exposing the performances they discuss, all these contributions also perform in various ways. One of the important qualities of the research catalogue as a platform is this possibility to choose the format and manner of one’s research performance to suit one’s own aesthetic, to use the exposition format to add value to the topic, not only reproducing documents but demonstrating what is debated in an experiential manner. The variety of approaches spanning from mainly text-based articles supported by audio-visual material to video essays where the argument takes place within the media to multi-layered website formats, clearly show the need to rethink our assumptions of how scholarly work and artistic research should be disseminated, exposed, and performed. In their modest way, these expositions hint at the diversity of the ways that things can be done with performance, even in a situation such as a journal, where the principal aim is fairly given: to share, communicate, and perform research and thought.

Enjoy!

23.5.2019

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