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CATALYSES

Editorial

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Potentials for Change

**HARRI LAAKSO, MAARIT MÄKELÄ AND
SUSANNA HELKE**

The prefix *cata-* (Gr. ‘down’) has an ominous ring to it, of things going badly wrong, catastrophes, cataclysms, of things catapulting us towards destruction. The suffix *-lysis* (Gr. ‘loosening’) does not seem much brighter, alluding to disintegration and rupture and to things falling apart. What good and productive could then be said of artistic research in the name of catalysis? Maybe the use of ‘catalysis’ here as something descriptive of artistic research processes can amount to no more than a case of catachresis the use of a word in the wrong context, a severely misplaced figure of speech?

Since its very beginning artistic research has openly or unconsciously deemed as its reason for existence the task of finding new ways of doing things; namely new ways of researching this world and new ways of understanding artistic practice. For many, artistic research could be defined as the amalgam of ‘research’ and ‘artistic practice’ reinventing and reconfiguring themselves in each other’s shadow.

It has become customary for us to orient this *search for research* according to the figures of difference in tasks that we feel artistic research should undertake in comparison to the other forms of research or artistic practice. Or then we can orient our search in more positive terms, by investigating the practices, occurrences, events and outcomes of such ‘new research’ and seeking for ways of describing them, perhaps employing new language or tropes.

As editors of this issue we most certainly used ‘catalysis’ in that latter way; inviting layered and also conflicting understanding of the term: Firstly, the term could refer to how research activities provoke actions and reactions in the context of a particular research process or the larger social or political realm – that is to say exploring how artistic research acts as a *catalyst for* something.

Secondly, one can consider the way in which some things can accelerate and become catalysts *for the artistic research process itself*. This would entail a different approach and place under scrutiny the framing of artistic research, its *parergon*. This approach would investigate not so much how artistic research requires *different* academic criteria, venues, conference presentation and publication formats (creates, for example, the preference to speak of ‘expositions’ instead of papers) but how that new frame itself acts as a catalyst to precipitate events yet unseen. (See Misa’s report on SAR conference in the Voices-section of this same issue.)

And lastly, and perhaps most importantly, ‘catalysis’ can be seen to ask what it means to place concepts and discussions in contact with the praxis and poetics of art; and vice versa how the materiality of art alters the practices of theory and epistemology. One can then understand ‘catalysis’ as a process of conjuring up latent potentials and creating ruptures and transformations – the merry interplay of theory, praxis and poetics in various worldly contexts. The pressing question would then be: what does theorizing within and nearby praxis and poetics of art put in motion beyond the paradigms and debates on artistic research itself?

The expositions and voices included in this issue of RUUKKU approach the topic and these questions from a number of vantage points:

Scott Andrew Elliott’s exposition “The event of disorientation: artistic methods of immanent critique” explores how the experience of disorientation and the process of reorientation can open a space for critically rethinking our build environment. Elliott explores this via various anecdotes and examples from art installations, which employ methods such as replication of spaces or doppelgängers to disorient the viewer; but Elliott also creates a slight sense of disorientation in the form of the exposition itself - losing us, or more aptly and appropriately for catalysis, loosening our thinking and preconceptions, making room for the “potentials of change”.

The encounter - or rather the immersion or blend of the body with the environment and nature - is central also in Anna Maria Orru’s exposition “Body Weathering - poetic nebular intentions”. The exposition uses clouds as devices (both as the real forms and as metaphorical aids and catalysts for thinking) to experiment with and to create a choreography for a *poethic*, a “poetic, political and ethical - entangle with space”.

Julia Valle-Noronha’s exposition “The body within the clothes” explores the body of the artist researcher from the viewpoint of a dress maker, examining how the maker’s own body could be reflected in the practice of making clothes, could be given a “voice”. This is done via the autoethnographically oriented case studies Dress(v.) and Wear, which make note of the researcher’s personal routine of dressing and wearing as something which informs the creation of the patterns via creative pattern cutting methods.

If Valle-Noronha’s exposition explored the bodily practices of dressing and wearing as the starting points for the making practices Bilge Aktas’s exposition “Using wool’s agency to design and make felted artefacts” takes as its reference point the material itself. The exposition especially argues in favor of acknowledging the material’s agency (“what the material does”) and seeking human-material collaborations with it accordingly.

Tero Heikkinen’s exposition “Searching for Catalysts in the Practice of Drawing” also calls for a transformation or shift in the artistic practice and the ways of knowing. Catalysis in this exposition refers to one kind of drawing accelerating the

development of another kind of drawing. In his exposition Heikkinen also makes an important observation – relevant also to many of the other expositions: that catalysis in artistic research is often unpredictable and creates unforeseen situations, (something quite different from catalysis as it might be understood in controlled chemical reactions).

Causing a productive disturbance and provocation is at the core of Gian Luigi Biagini's exposition "THE BLACK MANA AND THE EVIL SPIRIT OF THE COBBLESTONES". Biagini's avatar, the Anartist is engaged in a "disturbanist" practice of politically tinted subversive interventions, with a touch of the occult. The focus is on installations and interventions made with black cobblestones, a material, which according to the author, are symbolic concentrations of "black mana". In the exchange of between Biagini and one of the reviewers – attached as comments to this exposition, Biagini explains his refusal of making changes to the exposition and the motivations for his art practice and the formulations of the text, as instances of defying submission of art to the capitalist code.

The last two expositions of this RUUKKU issue deal with mapping in the proximity of a university environment, but in distinctly different ways. Anna Kholina's exposition "Maps, Space and Body. Connecting mental representations of space to the production of space" explores the relation of mental maps – the images we hold in our memory – to lived spaces, which she understands, following Henri Lefebvre, as not only perceived but actively produced. In her exposition Kholina analyses mental images of the Aalto University campus in Espoo, Finland, drawn by 37 master's students. Her findings support our understanding of space as an active and transformative process, where movement plays a key role.

Marsha Bradfield's and Shibboleth Shechter's exposition "Mapping Methods of the Millbank Atlas" describes a part of an ongoing collaboration in which Chelsea College of Arts staff and researchers collaborate with residents and others of the Millbank neighbourhood in Westminster, London. In this exposition catalysis refers to the transformative potential of mapping methods and to engaging realms outside the art world and academia, in the construction of "more equitable, sustainable and engaging futures for all".

This issue of RUUKKU also includes several related contributions in the "Voices" – section: the poetic meditation "Lysis" by Juuso Tervo, Riikka Latva-Somppi's short essay "Research Pavilion #3: A place for multimodal essays?" and Stephanie Misa's report on the 2019 Society of Artistic Research Conference "On SAR 10's Productive Gaps, Enhanced Dissemination Formats & Inspiring Failures."

Included also are two lectio praecursoriae: Johanna Lecklin's: "Esitettyä aitous. Osallistavasta taiteesta ja sen etiikasta" and Tomi Knuutila's "Qualities of Simplicity in designing interactive art".

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