

Project description. Edited October 2, 2020.

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## **Responsive Space: Listening from Within the Material**

I'm seeking a language of intimacy.

As I recognize a hint of winter in the wind. Like a body in the dark, full of warmth, breathing, a pulse.

And I write in space and material,  
for it is in relation to people that intimacy occurs.  
Finding (words) that listen just as much as they speak, or more.  
Perhaps I seek words that only listen,  
that respond, in the way a response should be.  
The way a sound's timbre changes over the seasons.

Fixed meanings feel like a foreign body in my hands.  
(Hands that are coarse from work, hands that are made of muscles, ligaments, bones.)  
They rather feel how material can change.

Some spaces are like magnetic poles, vibrating, between materials, between relations.  
In reality this is conspicuously specific – a sound that fits in my hand, a cord between two chairs.

I would have liked to invite you inside these gaps, we could have spoken together about silence, vibration, implementation and mass. Silently.

Isn't it so that space and time are built from gaps, the way sound relates to silence?

Those of us who are here, listen, our backs to each other, experiencing the situation, together, individually, given our various backgrounds.

let's talk about sound waves  
like bodies in the air  
between  
sender and receiver  
they become a corporeal memory  
I want to rest my forehead against this.

It is in the air surrounding the objects that space unfolds itself.  
In the time between the actions that the decisions are made.

And in between,  
– before the stories, before the narrative, before the words talk more than they listen

space is potent, time is potent, material is potent,  
in relation to people.

## **1.0 Introduction**

Having worked as a scenographer and musician for over a decade, with various constellations of artists, I'd felt an increasing awareness that there exists a potential in the material itself that I'd not yet found a way to employ.

This sense seemed to arise in me first manifesting as a kind of frustration when my work was confronted with a specific limitation, or as a tingling, or as a kind of disruption that I couldn't ignore. "I sense an urgency here – but what do I have to do in order to discover what it is I'm looking for?"

In order to begin an investigation, it feels natural to ask a concrete question within a specific area. I often believe that this is the thing I'm curious about. A ground-breaking. The first real space for opportunity only opens itself once I've been digging for a while. The questions that arise don't lead to answers, but rather to a richer landscape of multifaceted, deepening questions.

In this revised project description, which I'm writing five months prior to the final artistic performance of my project, it seems appropriate to tell my story from this perspective: a story about the landscape of opportunities that have opened themselves through my relationship to the material, space, and time; a landscape that continually leads me to new questions - no answers, perhaps, but a wealth of experiences.

## **2.0 The Starting Point**

Two experiences lay the groundwork for the first questions I posed for myself. The first experience involved time and dramaturgy, the second material.

### **2.1 Time and Dramaturgy**

While working as a scenographer within the area of postdramatic theater, I often felt that there was a kind of rigidity in terms of form and time that differed from the temporal quality of the performance on stage. I found myself working increasingly often on projects where the decisions were made for a simultaneous dramaturgy model. In other words, the dramaturgical framework accounts for a simultaneous adjustment to the surroundings, the audience, random events, improvisation, irrationality, and other temporal factors during the performance. This as an attempt to abolish the predetermined constant, and to focus the experience in the here and now. My experiences as a scenographer and a musician in this environment, led me to want to develop scenography with qualities that are able to respond to simultaneous dramaturgy in the same way that I felt my violin is capable of responding: As an instrument with the inherent quality of being able to respond to the situation with simultaneous variation; so that no performance would be exactly the same, but each creating a space for temporal development that embraces the indeterminate. Scenographic space understood as an instrument, as a facilitator for change, as an organ able to respond to the surroundings, as a structure through which change is possible. In the same way, I wanted some of the decisions regarding the scenographic space to be determined in the moment, and in dialogue with the events that are taking place in the here and now.

While researching into this, it became apparent to me that a kind of internal time - and possibilities for change reside within the material itself. This is of great interest to me from an artistic standpoint. Not as a kind of theatrical machinery, as I was searching for in the beginning, but as an independent artistic expression, and the main focus of the research.

## 2.2 The Material

I have played the violin since I was six years old. When one plays the violin, one holds it – or rather, balances it amongst three points: under the joint of the left thumb, on top of the left collar bone, and under the left jaw. The vibrations from the violin take root in the body, due to the physical contact, and the entire body resonates. For the person playing the violin, this is an intense physical and psychological experience: to feel the wood vibrate among the three points of contact, to feel the vibrations streaming through the torso, and further through the body, through the organs. To hear the same vibrations, translated through the air as fluctuations in the air, as waves of sound, interpreted by the ear. The bow initiates movement as a generator of friction, a manipulator of power, a counterforce and release in a rhythmic dialogue between fingers and bow. One feels the strings under the fingers, colder than the wood of the violin's body, vibrating quickly. Each string as the active agent that, with the help of the fingers of the left hand, can be sorted into innumerable relational constellations to change tone, intensity and vibrations. The wood receives the vibrations in the same way as the violinist's body does - by way of the three points of contact. The smell of resin and wood. The time that stretches itself out. These things together create an intense experience in which differing physical categories meld, where boundaries are rescinded between body, time, space, material, air and sound. All these things together, including the entity of the musician herself, creates a whole.

This form of presence, which comes into being in relationship to phenomenology and new materialism, forms my "being-in-the-world" as a human and is of great interest to me. In my research project *Responsive Spaces: Listening from Within the Material* I have explored this experience of melding physical categories. I have tried to delineate this kind of encounter and develop works that invite differing variants of such an experience.

Gradually over the course of research, I have noticed that my interest in the foundations of time, dramaturgy and material point in the same direction, and function for me as a key to a specific artistic theme.

## 3.0 Artistic Theme

The exploration of time, dramaturgy and material has led my interest as a researcher away from an approach focused on technological development within the field, and towards an understanding of the thematics as artistic and philosophical material. My focus is on how the works relate to the wider world, and what themes are evident in that process. This focus has given me a freedom regarding media and material, and has resulted in an unexpected oeuvre, in which I have largely worked with installations in hybrid gallery spaces. Though the original entry to the project focused largely on instruments, the work is now oriented more toward ideas than craftsmanship. And it is through the materials, through the intimate attention to matter and the body, in continual dialogue and reflection, I have arrived at the great questions my work poses. This experience of matter-based research – along with the idea that object and subject, body and matter can create a symbiotic whole – tie my work to the new materialistic tendency in contemporary art, where the discourse increasingly turns toward material experience.

However, the primary focus of my artworks always remains on the question of how human beings experience the installation. The works become meaningful in an artistic sense in - and through - the perceptions of the people who are invited in; the layers of meaning are not inherent within the objects themselves. What I am exploring is the creation of a specific mode of listening.

The interpretation of "what it means" is open and left to the person who is experiencing the sensations. I use a scenographic language in my artworks – a language that is traditionally used to stimulate emotion to create a dramatic interpretation of a story. In order to remove the "object of desire", take away the story, and redirect the experience back to the "experience of

experience itself". And in this way, I frame the person who experiencing the artwork as an interwoven part of the artwork itself, with human perception and ability to perceive as a central feature of the work.

This human apparatus: body, thought, senses. Always in relation to its surroundings and its individual interpretation of them. From our birth, we sense our surroundings first as a synesthetic experience and gradually, as we age, we learn to connect experiences into categories and create an automatic relative solution set for them. This is to facilitate an optimal, automatic survival response for the world into which we've been born. Language, structure, semiotic, social codes; all this gives us the ability to operate in the world and create both the fantastic and dangerous structures upon which we base our survival. Without these structures and categories, we would not be able to negotiate the world in which we live. But with the power of this habit-of-structuring, we can also fall into a pattern of rigidity, and lose our ability to adapt. Very rarely do we find ourselves in a situation where we cannot find a category in which to place the "result" of our experience. I believe that in our time there is a potential and an artistic value in generating something new by fostering an experience in which categories meld, collapse, unfold and combine. I believe also that practicing with this kind of open, listening attitude, reminds us of some of the important, inherent qualities of being human, closely tied to empathy and flexibility.

#### **4.0 The research's practical methodology**

I originally described my research project as being a whole divided into three different areas of focus, and that I would concentrate on one area each year during the course of the project's three years:

Year 1: Technology

Year 2: Physics and tactility

Year 3: Interrelation and dramaturgy

This feels now a bit obsolete, because my relationships to the three terms have changed through the working process. Structurally, however, this outline is still applicable, and serves as a framework to describe how the research process has played out.

#### **4.1 Technology**

During the first year of my fellowship I held tightly to the reins, thinking of the production demands. I buried my nose in books, learned to solder, studied MaxMSP through NOTAM and BEK courses, dove into sound design, video editing, and invested in technological equipment. This was all in an attempt to take control of the methods of production so that I would be able to utilize technology as a tool in the same way I can handle a hammer and nail. I also wanted to be aware of the possibilities these technologies afford. And, from a feminist perspective, it was important for me to take ownership of these tools. I perceived a need for more female voices in an otherwise male-dominated area of expertise. I viewed technology as the key to being able to work with the material in dialogue with time. I was very interested in kinetics at this point. It took a long time, but eventually I felt that I mastered the medium well enough to be able to handle it with the same ease as with other material, while working out ideas in my studio. At this point I also understood that it was time to use professional collaborators for technological issues when the projects posed significant challenges. In a year I was able to learn enough to know what questions could be asked.

## 4.2 Physics and tactility

Naturally, the work with technology led me to a phase in which my main focus was on the material, physics and tactility: How could technology affect the material? What kind of material is receptive to technological manipulation? And what is generated by the results of the interrelation? Rather early on I discovered that I was interested in musicality as the main performer in this exchange. Which materials would serve in the production of a specific auditory experience? I began working with the vibrations of strings, with which I am familiar. Through close observation of this material, I further understood that it is the immediate intimacy - the meeting between the effect and the source of sound which generated a feeling of tactility and allowed the boundaries of the different materials to meld in my perception. The specific aspects of this quality interested me. From this discovery, I found my way back to the transducer speaker, with which I'd become acquainted with just prior to my fellowship in 2014, during a collaborative project with my friend, the artist, Jørn Egseth. In the end, two of the main artworks that comprise the research project *Responsive Spaces: Listening from Within the Material* utilized this kind of speaker. A transducer speaker sends vibrations through the object to which they are connected, and then utilize the object's entire surface as a speaker membrane. The unique qualities of the object determine how the sound is manifested and colors both the audible aspects of the sound, and the sound's physical existence in the space. This was a key for me. The direct translation between technology and matter, and how it takes control of the space, of the between-spaces between the object and myself, between my body and my perception and comes into being. This understanding drove my work as it changed direction.

## 4.3 Interrelation and dramaturgy

Just as the research began to take form as specific artworks, the focus turned toward interrelation and dramaturgy. What kind of dramaturgy arises in the meeting of body and material, when the material has its own inherent time and the progression of events is determined by perception itself?

I am interested in what I experience as a space of possibility: the experience of a space's inherent prospect for change to occur. Not a large change - perhaps something more like an offset, a fusion, an altered experience of the simultaneous time. Human beings' experience of time, as with all things, is very subjective, and each person's act of listening also has an individual rhythm. I wanted to move my works out into a space that didn't have an inherent dramaturgic expectation: a beginning and an end. I wanted to develop space that would be open to an individual rhythm. These aspects led the work towards what I would call a hybrid gallery spaces. Gallery spaces that in different ways are open to cross-disciplinary projects, and cater to an audience that is to varying degrees open to the unknown.

The galleries that I have had the good fortune to work with include *Lydgalleriet*, *Henie Onstad Kunstsenter*, *Trondheim Elektroniske Kunstsenter*, and *GalleriF15*.

The people who visit my exhibitions are free to come and go as they please. The people themselves structure their own experience in terms of how long they remain in the gallery space, how they move about the space, and how they relate to any potential social dramaturgy that might play out in the room. In this sense, the artworks themselves aren't fully functional until it interrelates with the viewer in the space. As a scenographer, this is an exciting situation. Making room for human perception as a factor in the artwork's dramaturgy creates new opportunities to explore aspects of time and transformation. Facilitating the opening of a space for individual interpretation, leads to new ways of thinking about dramaturgy. A conceptual model that includes an intimacy more akin to that of an individual's reading of a book, rather than the meeting one experiences watching a large theatrical production. It is also interesting to see how the ground plane of the space functions to a larger extent as a score for the individual reader's experience.

I have also - to a greater or lesser extent - worked with that which is often called “audience interaction”, a term that I, incidentally, am not fond of. I prefer to refer to it as interweaving.

Principles I have employed in this work include:

- Our sensual apparatus as co-creator and producer of sensual experience in connection with interference and simultaneous contrast
- How a surround sound mix can also encompass the spontaneous when the eyes and ears move in relationship to a source of sound
- How our bodies affect the sound and light waves' journey through space
- A direct use of human movement captured by sensors, translated into data that in turn structures an aleatoric composition of sound
- How we, when we believe that a symbiosis occurs according to scientific rules, open ourselves to new perspectives of interpretation, and include a series of “false” symbioses, and in one move dismiss categories of “true” and “false”

I have also initiated situations in which my own artworks interrelate with the work of other artists: In the case of *Interference*, Janne Camilla Lyster composed a poetic score that was interpreted as artist book by Ane Thon Knutsen. Ane Marthe Sørlien Holen composed a percussion piece that she performed during the opening of the exhibition. These artworks, and the sculptural installation *Interference*, were interwoven thematically, and the elements informed one another structurally; their relative distances and undefined connections created a beautiful tension. I believe the tension arises where the in-between spaces - also between/among the various materials - interrelate with the space itself.

In the artwork *Resonance*, which is to a large degree a kind of spatial instrument, I invited three musicians: Jan Martin Smørdal (guitar), Kristine Tjørgersen (clarinet), and Bernt Isak Wærstad (music technician for the installation-as-instrument), and the dancer Magnus Myhr to improvise in collaboration with the installation. The performance was staged in relatively frequent intervals over the course of two days at the *Ultimafestival* in 2019. In this instance, I worked more in the capacity of a theatre director and developed, in cooperation with the performers, a common starting point for the improvisations. Beyond that, I gave them the authority to freely improvise from cues they would receive from the changing circumstances. This project gave me the opportunity to really hone my precision in terms of determining the degree of staging these augmented sensual elements, while preserving the open and honest space for individual perception to maintain precedence.

I am currently working on the piece entitled *Sediment*, which will be constructed from layers of concrete and acrylic one, and first exhibited at *Galleri F15* in 2020. In this work, the perspective shifts to that of the material's inherent time, and how this inherent time can affect the perception of time in the humans who encounter it. Time, which is evident in the results of the casting process, initiates reflection around the material's internal time, and shifts the potential for dramaturgy and change to inner processes, both within the individual person and the material. This is one of the last artistic projects developed during my research fellowship, and therefore hints at something beyond the framework of the research project itself.

## **5.0 Scenography in a gallery space**

My artworks are always site-specific. The space, atmosphere, context and relationship to the audience's perspective is always a deciding factor in the development of the works. The interplay of processes within the research, discoveries connected to the material, and the exhibition spaces have resulted in a unique language that I would describe as scenographic artwork in gallery spaces. At first, I was somewhat anxious to introduce my artworks to the gallery space. I was concerned that when the artworks were viewed in the gallery space they would be perceived as objects, rather than surroundings. I was also concerned that, by creating

artwork with the purpose of instigating sensual experience, my work would be perceived as speculative in the context of the visual arts. I was not certain that my artworks were appropriate for this arena. However, as these works have appeared in the spaces and confronted a real audience, I have come to a new understanding of my work. It is in these spaces, and in these confrontations that the artworks themselves really take form and I gain a new understanding that these artworks first and foremost are about perception, time and dramaturgy. Even though this is also an aspect that is used in various traditions within the visual arts, perhaps especially in connection with minimalism, I feel that it reaches back to my scenography background and thus outlines a thematic whole for my various artworks.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

This research project has stretched over several years. My fellowship began in October of 2014 and I will hand over my critical reflection in May of 2020. During this time, my personal life has changed, both in terms of the inevitable changes that happen with the general passage of time, but also specifically regarding the birth of my children Ingeborg (2016) and Åse (2018). The world around us all has also changed dramatically during this time: especially regarding the increasing awareness of climate change and other environmental concerns. I am already considering these aspects while working these months preceding my final exhibition. I am casting a critical eye on my own works in terms of these current realities, and I am confronted with burning questions regarding the possibilities for my work in the future. I will be taking a deeper look into these questions in my critical reflection, both as a conclusion of this work, and considering these as terms of entry for my continuing praxis. I experience my artistic praxis as an all-consuming process. Not necessarily a process that ends or finds an answer in a gallery space - nor is it something that can be explained and explored fully through a text. Art lives on within us as an experience that propels us forward. I hope that the artworks and my reflections developed through this research function as a kind of catalyst for deeper consideration - differing considerations. As a bridge between hand & head, action & consequence. I believe that the questions that will sit with me, once I move on from this research period, to be the most valuable results of the research. My hope is that the artworks – in their interweaving with individuals along the way – will have generated a kind of ripple effect that leads to new ideas in body and/or mind. My responsibility now, as I see it, is to manage the questions that have crystallized from the research as resources in dialogue with the everyday and the future.

## 7.0 Central works

All the titles of the works are relational. Having borrowed terminology from physics, all the titles relate to one another in various ways. The terms encompass an aspect of change over time, an aspect of movement, and an aspect of dramaturgy. In the beginning, I thought the titles referred to the artworks themselves, but I see now that they describe both the artworks and the action of our perception.

### *Resonance*

Exhibitions at *Ultimafestvalen/Hennie Onstad Kunstenter* in 2019; and (forthcoming) at *Galleri F15* in 2020

### *Interference*

Exhibitions at *Lydgalleriet* in Bergen, Norway in 2019; *Trondheim Elektroniske Kunstsenter* in 2019; and (forthcoming) at *Galleri F15* in 2020.

### *Convergence / Affinity*

Exhibitions at *Alliances & Commonalities* at *Stockholm Konstnärliga Högskola* in 2018

### *Sediment*

Exhibition (forthcoming) at *Galleri F15* in 2020.

## 8.0 Final Artistic Presentation

The final artistic presentation of the work will be exhibited at *Galleri F15* the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of March in 2020. The exhibition itself will be shown from February 1<sup>st</sup> through March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020. On the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> dancers and musicians will stage interventions in the installations.

## 9.0 Documentation and reflection

Documentation of the artworks will be shared as part of an exposition at *Research Catalogue*. This exposition will also include reflections, as well as a comprehensive overview of the exhibitions, collaborative projects and other work associated with the research project. The exposition will be completed after the final artistic presentation.



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