

Starting from the Middle— Handshaking in Hökarängen

Art Projects as Working Methods for Producing the City Differently

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This text analyses the project Home Works, an art program that took place in 2015–17 in Konsthall C, a contemporary art center in the Stockholm suburb of Hökarängen. The argument of the article is that Home Works can be seen as a socio-material practice of producing the city differently. I thus propose that Home Works provides an example of how art projects hold a potential as methodologies for enacting versions of the city that connect to contemporary social struggles as well as to the right to the city. The text applies a pragmatist, new materialist methodology and proposes that urban realities are enacted through practices and co-shaped by the spatial and architectural environment. Thereby I seek to discuss with an art discourse that has been preoccupied with defining socially engaged art as communicative (as a layer of reality that can be added or removed) and with a trend in urban studies which views temporary art projects as subservient to urban restructurings driven by gentrification.

A recurring word in discussions today about the role of art in urban spaces and zones of urban regeneration is “art washing” (Pritchard, 2018). There is a complicity between a creative city discourse and the use of art to support the value cycles of gentrification (Ley, 2003). As a result, art is seen to increase the livability and attractiveness of urban neighborhoods when social art projects engage with local communities and thus provide social sustainability, memorable events, vibrancy, and a creative environment on which real estate thrives (Christensen, 2016). This article argues that

what is being overlooked in these accounts is the fact that art initiatives, due to their hybrid, performative *and* material methodologies, may in fact interfere in the social and material realities of an urban environment. By doing this, they are not simply acting on the surface or adding a value to a locality; they are, in fact, contributing to a reconfiguring of the total environment, of the spatial, material relations that make up that location. I will refer to this as a capacity for “ontological politics,” and by using this term I suggest that the methodologies applied in site specific art projects possess a capacity to enact other realities, other social and material worlds (Mol, 1999; Law, 1998).

My analysis will be an examination of the art program *Home Works* that was carried out in Konsthall C, a contemporary art center located 20 minutes by public transport south east of Stockholm city center. Located in a former communal laundry of which half of that space still works as a laundry, Konsthall C is incorporated into the material infrastructures of a post-Second World War housing area. However, before moving on to discuss this project in detail, I will outline the context for my analysis in the field of gentrification studies, architecture and art. I will list the urgencies that it seeks to engage with, as well as account for the methodology that informs my analysis.

Increasingly, art becomes intertwined with processes of urban regeneration. After the turn of the twenty-first century—that saw the restructuring of European urban centers such as Berlin into new epicenters of urban regeneration—a new scheme for urban revitalization and a discourse of the creative city has been sanctioned. Temporary art projects are left with the role of collaborator, intentionally or not, as urban neighborhoods undergo transition to gentrified, high value, lifestyle environments (Colomb, 2012). In a Scandinavian context, this model of creative city revitalization has become normalized into policymaking with urban planning as the standard procedure for transforming cities from industrial production to a new economy based on knowledge and service industries (Thörn & Holgersson, Jensen, 2005). The allocation of the role of collaborator within a hierarchy of urban actors can be observed in the research field of urban studies, where temporary art projects are predominantly seen to pave the way for a commodification process, and for a developer-friendly takeover

of urban spaces (Evans, 2006; Colomb, 2012,). One of the shortcomings of this narrative is the tendency towards generalization, which rarely delves into the particularities of the relationship between a specific art project and processes of urban regeneration. While art sometimes definitely lends itself to speeding up the value cycles demanded by gentrification, it is not sufficient merely to determine that it activates community engagement, or that it injects aesthetic values into an urban location. The premise on which such an evaluation rests is that the nature of the relationship between art and location is seen as one of adding value into an already given urban situation. It does not address the more fundamental, and for a critical perspective urgent, question of the nature of the relationship between a specific art initiative and an urban locality.

The intertwinement of art and urban regeneration coincides with a wider transformation, since the 1960s, of the function of art in a service economy under the auspices of “cognitive capitalism” (Sigler, 2017; Rolnik, 2011). Within this transformation, the object status and material dimensions of art have been de-emphasized and the *immaterial* qualities, the discursive, relational, affective, and social aspects of art production have been privileged. Predominantly, theories of site specificity in art have narrated a movement away from physicality towards discursivity and social cooperation.¹ In the twenty-first century a proliferation of new theories and terms that account for relational and socially engaged art practices have reinforced the emphasis on the discursive, communicative aspects of art.² Alternatively, a tradition of art methodologies exists that engages with the production and distribution of urban space. Among the most influential theoretical contributions are Susan Lacy’s coinage of New Genre Public Art and Rosalyn Deutsche’s analysis of critical art interventions in public spaces (Lacy, Deutsche). Spatial concerns are, however,

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- 1 — Among these proponents are: Miwon Kwon’s influential account of site specificity in *One Place After Another*, Peter Weibel in *Context Kunst*, Nicolas Bourriaud *Relational Aesthetics* 1998, Shannon Jackson in *Social Works*, 2011.
 - 2 — Among the most influential propositions are Grant Kester’s “dialogical aesthetics,” Nicolas Borriaud’s “relational aesthetics,” as well as Claire Bishop’s critique of “socially engaged art” and Peter Weibel’s “context art.”

not the focus of Lacy's analysis, which instead concentrates on defining a new relationship between the artist and the public, defined by social and political engagement. Deutsche, on the other hand, focuses on art as a form of spatial critique and, using Lefebvre's notion of the production of space, explicitly addresses the issue of spatial organization and material design as an ideologically contested field. While Deutsche's critique is an important contribution in addressing new, possible, critical roles of art in processes of urban revitalization and in highlighting how redesigns of public spaces are implicated in political and social change, she still operates within the practice of "critique." Urban reality is conceived as something that can be revealed, uncovered by the means of conceptual art practices. Nevertheless, urban reality remains a given. Recently, however, new transdisciplinary research has begun to emerge in the margins of the art field, which, influenced by pragmatist actor-network-theory,³ and new materialist approaches, turns to art and other contemporary practices as involved in the spatial and material reproduction of the city (Laister, Lederer, Makovec, 2013). Contributing to this are also new forms of transdisciplinary research in architecture, which mobilize architecture as a tool to enact social, ethical and political change (Dabaieh & Alwall, 2018; Petrescu & Trogal, 2017, Olney, 2020). It is to these emerging methodologies in art and architecture that the present text wishes to contribute.

Methodology

The methodology that I bring into this text is informed by pragmatism and New Materialism. It is based on a recent shift in urban studies as well as in architectural theory towards multiplicity and understandings of reality, and cities, as unstable arrangements of social and material components (Farias & Bender, 2010; Yaneva, 2017). Firstly, this position implies that reality is not considered an already grounded "out there"; rather, it is con-

3 — Coined by French sociologist Bruno Latour, Actor-Network-Theory refers to a methodological position that contests the idea of agency as limited to human action by insisting that agency is distributed across human and non-human actors.

tinuously being invented through communities of practice. Secondly, from this principally ungroundedness and coexistence of multiple realities it follows that in order to exist, reality must be enacted (Law & Urry, 2004). The following text thus seeks to investigate the capacities of art practices to enact realities. Another implication of a pragmatist approach is that space is understood as relational, as something that comes into being by enacting specific physical, economic and social relations (Massey, 2005). The concept of socio-material working, with which I engage in this text, has been borrowed from architectural theorist Albena Yaneva, whose pragmatist, STS-informed methodology⁴ shifts attention from formal architectural qualities to the ways in which architecture connects things and people in specific ways. Behind the term “socio-material working” lies the assumption that reality becomes co-shaped by social uses of space and the connecting agency of architecture: “reality does not precede the mundane practices in which we interact with it, but is rather shaped within these practices” (Yaneva, 2017, p. 107). This approach signals a shift in how to understand the political nature of architecture and design of urban spaces as well as social practices. Rather than viewing politics as a way to critique reality, to expose meanings and to disagree with meanings, as in Deutsche’s account, politics becomes inherent to the very crafting of reality; that is, it becomes a question of “intra-acting” with the conditions of possibility that shape reality.⁵ It becomes an ontological question.⁶ What is critical to understand in relation to the concept of socio-material working is that it does not suggest that anything can become reality. Enactments of reality are not “a matter of free and creative choice,” they are precisely “workings,”

4 — STS is the common abbreviation of Science and Technology Studies and refers to the often interdisciplinary studies of viewing technologies as embedded in social practice.

5 — For an elaboration of the concept of ‘intra-action’ see Harraway, 2016, p. 60.

6 — In arguing that politics should be understood as an ontological question, Yaneva refers to John Law, and more specifically here to Annemarie Mol’s examination of Law’s use of the term “ontological politics.” As Mol demonstrates, the claim posed by actor network theory and related theories that reality is multiple causes radical consequences. It leads to a convergence of ontology and politics in which politics turns into a question of crafting reality.

that is they work from within the middle of the at once open and contested relations that constitute our social and material worlds (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013). It is to this notion of “socio-material working” involved in art practices that I now want to turn.

Home Works

Home Works was a curatorial program that unfolded within the premises of Konsthall C and commissioned by the board of Konsthall C. Curated by Jenny Richards and Jens Strandberg, it took the form of a practice-based investigation into the status of domestic labor and the politics of the home; or, more precisely, how work performed in the home—be it manual, affective, social or care work—could be mobilized as a site of political action. In line with the ideas of New Institutionalism, *Home Works* unfolded as part exhibition series, part research project, part community center, and part artistic laboratory (Gordon Nesbitt, 2003; Esche, 2013). It consisted of eleven exhibitions, two symposiums, several communal dinners, knitting cafés, and weekly cooking groups.⁷ However, rather than a series of exhibitions and curated public programs around a main topic, what *Homes Works* did was to activate multiple formats and public platforms in order to enable a site-specific exploration into practices within the home, of domestic work and of neighborhood activity and action. Whereas in

7 — For full information about the program see Richards & Strandberg, 2020, pp. 273–274. https://www.onomatopee.net/exhibition/home-works/#publication_13913. Home Works was funded through a compound of small funds. These were: Swedish Arts Council, Stockholm City Council, Region Stockholm, ABF Stockholm, Swedish Arts Grants Committee/Iaspis, Office for Contemporary Art, Norway, Nordic Culture Point, Nordic Culture Fund, Goethe-Institut, Schweden, Stockholm konst, Norwegian Embassy, Nordic Culture Fund, Nämnden för hemslöjdsfrågor, Nordic Art Association, Farsta stadsdelsförvaltning, Konstfrämjandet, Kommunal, Stockholmshem (landlord, sponsor for a rent-free space), Stockholmskolan (Konstfrämjandet), Collaborations that generated revenue for the programme: Nordic Art Association, Film i samtidskonsten, Inter Cult, Home Works operated with free entrance to the art space.

its initial stage *Home Works* was a manifestation of “travelling concerns” around domestic work, circulating within an international art community, gradually *Home Works* turned vernacular: it evolved into a multi-faceted, locally committed exploration of new practices embedded in the urban and spatial texture of Hökarängen.⁸ Occupying the former community laundry, for example, evolved itself as a contingent spatial practice of mediating the social and material relations that were already installed there. Thus, what came to define *Home Works* was that it did not move forward by executing a master plan. Rather, it took its direction from the contingency of the process itself, as well as from the unfolding of events in the neighborhood. Another curatorial decision that strengthened the status of *Home Works* as a continuous becoming was the decision by curators Jenny Richards and Jens Strandberg to engage two long-term collaborators: feminist thinker and writer Gunilla Lundahl and the artist Joanna Lombard. The role of these two dialogue partners was to help in facilitating and formulating the ongoing research questions that gave direction to *Home Works*. Right from its establishment in 2004, Konsthall C has been intimately connected with urban revitalization programs and transformations of the area initiated by the City of Stockholm.⁹ Crucially, however, in terms of its constituent legacies, Konsthall C was not founded on the basis of a top-down policy of urban regeneration. The art center opened as an art experiment conceived by the artist Per Hasselberg and supported by the citizen-led, informal community council Hökarängens stadsdelsråd. Nevertheless, Konsthall C was a pioneering manifestation in Hökarängen of a shift in city planning strategies from investment in social provision to a creative city discourse, in which art and culture became instrumental

8 — *Home Works* took its inspiration from previous collective and process-driven art programs such as *The Grand Domestic Revolution* at CASCO, Utrecht in 2012, *The Grand Domestic Revolution Library*, Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm 2014, and the ongoing program *Communal Knowledge* at The Showroom, London.

9 — *Konsthall C 10 år – en ofullständig historia*, pp. 8–9. See also Borén & Young, 2017 for a discussion of the role played by Per Hasselberg and Hökarängens stadsdelsråd as actors in cooperating with Stockholmshem on the urban restructuring process in Hökarängen.

as official strategies for raising the attractiveness of an area (Kindgreen & Gunnars, 2015). The common kitchen in Konsthall C was thus used as a space for meetings between consultants representing Stockholmshem and local resident organizations in a large-scale urban revitalization project, *Hållbara Hökarängen* (Sustainable Hökarängen), which became the spearhead of a gentrification process that was to reconfigure the valorization of space, communal livelihood and the composition of residents in the years 2011–14.¹⁰ From the outset, Konsthall C was conditioned by a temporal coincidence with this new city-branding discourse and the practice of using art to rebrand an area, commonly referred to as “art washing” (Pritchard, 2018).¹¹ These sweeping changes of the ideological grounding and rationalities informing the management of space and conditioning the livelihood of the community in the surroundings have made up the immediate horizon of Konsthall C since its inauguration in 2004. They signal a dramatic shift in the public discourse around housing from a “social problem” to a private concern in the discourse of creative place-making. It also dramatically shifts the terms through which the question of social reproduction can be accessed, from issues of democracy and community practice to issues of livability—and to community as an amenity for a privileged group of citizens. *Home Works* set out in the wake of *Hållbara Hökarängen* and from its outset it addressed, and critically opposed, the political shift from thinking of housing in terms of collective solutions to housing as an individual concern. Occupying this ambivalent position, unintentionally feeding into the value cycles of gentrification, was the condition of possibility for *Home Works* to work in the area. It should be

10 — The degree to which *Hållbara Hökarängen* worked as a “greenwashing project,” inventing new narratives of the area and attracting investors and resourceful residents, is still contested. Whereas Kindgreen and Gunnars argue the call for making Hökarängen more sustainable was a branding strategy, others argue that *Hållbara Hökarängen* also supported independent citizen-led initiatives that did not fit under the umbrella of gentrification. See *Konsten at sätta en Plats på Kartan och Konsekvenserna därutav*.

11 — For a discussion of the shift in Sweden to a city-branding discourse committed to the goals of “blandad by” and to neoliberal strategies of urban regeneration, see Thörn & Holgersson, 2014.

noted, though, that a strong collaborator in the *Home Works* programme was Hökarängens stadsdelsråd, which simultaneously functioned as a local collaborator and as an information center.¹² Stadsdelsrådet does not have a formal municipality status as a city council. Nevertheless, it forms a constituency by functioning as an umbrella organization for local associations. A continuous aim of the stadsdelsrådet has been to strengthen bottom up democratic urban development and to promote Hökarängen as a model for urban development driven by citizens.¹³

The Suburban City as a Reproductive Unit

In order to provide a framework for how *Home Works* connected to, and enacted different versions of, Hökarängen, I will briefly elaborate on the charged status that reproduction occupies in the context of Konsthall C and Hökarängen. As a historical term, reproduction is intimately connected to Marxist accounts of capitalist society in which it appears as complementary to production. Reproduction thus designates all that is not included in production, which amounts to human activity that is not directly enlisted as an accumulation of surplus value. Today, however, reproduction has moved center stage as part of a service-oriented, global economy that has effaced the distinction between production and reproduction. This means that what was earlier evaluated as non-work, such as relational, affective, and creative labor has now become the epitome of capitalist valorization (Siegler, 2017, p. 17). As a model housing project conceived by modernist urban planners in the 1950s and as a location for twenty-first century gentrification processes, Hökarängen is charged with conflicting

12 — As expressed by Jens Strandberg in a conversation with the author, March 2016. As directors of Konsthall C, Strandberg and Richards were assigned a seat in the board of Hökarängens stadsdelsråd, thus gaining access to a network and exchange of local knowledge facilitated by the council.

13 — The work by architect and urban activist Lars Malm was seminal in establishing the Hökarängs Archive, now housed in Konsthall C. The archive contains documentation and protocols of urban revitalization schemes for Hökarängen as well as debates and writings by Lars Malm on the politics of Stockholm's housing policies.

practices around reproduction. On the one hand, Hökarängen manifests a pronounced awareness in postwar planners and architects in Sweden of the reproductive agency of the build environment. These reformist architects embraced rationalist planning ideas of “the functional city” which came to define urbanist discourse in the early twentieth century (Mumford, 2009).¹⁴ In this scheme, reproduction serves as a support structure within the overall productive apparatus of the city.¹⁵ At the same time, however, the international planning practices that took form and came to influence urban development in the early twentieth century also engaged with architecture as a site for co-shaping social practice and implementing social reform. One of the strong concerns of reformist architects was the question of how to design housing units that fostered human interaction and encouraged community building. The American urban planner Clarence Perry developed a scheme for “the neighborhood unit” which set up criteria for face-to-face meetings, shared community functions, such as schools, churches, or libraries. Perry’s design criteria also came to impact the physical design of Hökarängen. What became pronounced in the Swedish variant of welfare state housing policy, as it took form in the 1940s, was an awareness of housing and architecture as an integral part of building a social and democratic welfare society (Nyström & Lundström, 2006). Politically, the social democratic welfare state project was closely identified with the notion of the “folkhemmet,” a term coined by Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson (1885-1946) and translated into urban planning by urban planner Uno Åhrén and the sociologist Gunnar Myrdal. The “folkhem” (The People’s Home) was an important political concept in the building of the Swedish Welfare State, signaling that the state was like a family home in which everyone looked after each other.¹⁶ Hökarängen

14 — See Mumford (2009), “The Prewar CIAM Vision of the Functional City.”

15 — De Angelis (2007), “Production, Reproduction and Global Loops,” pp. 65–75. Harvey (2013), p. 8., Mumford (2009), p. 166.

16 — Influenced by Lewis Mumford’s *The Culture of Cities*, Åhrén and Myrdal co-authored the seminal *The Housing Question as a Social Planning Problem* in 1934, which formulated strategies that came to play a vital part in the large-scale restructuring of Swedish society by postwar social democratic governments.

is an outcome of such social reformist and democratic ideals. The small-scale neighborhood was to cultivate democratically active citizens, taking an active part in community life, and these ideas came to inform housing programs in Sweden for decades to come.¹⁷

Working in Hökarängen, Art Research as Socio-Material Workings

The central term that I will seize upon in relation to *Home Works* is the notion of responsivity, and what this notion might entail in terms of enacting realities. Responsivity came up as a major idea and curatorial method when speaking to Jens Strandberg and Jenny Richards:

I suppose the essential thing in all this is that it is based around people and social relations. It is based around being open to new connections, and relationships. We try to be as responsive as possible, so if someone comes to us and says, oh could we do that, then we listen. If we think it can be developed in a meaningful way and we can find a supportive framework for the suggestion, we try to find a way to incorporate open proposals into the program. So, there is not a specific form of “this is how different elements in the program begin or interact.” It’s more organic. It comes from a political position that aims to be responsive to the context we are working in despite the way in which funding structures work, and to hold on to being able to grow a program and work more spontaneously. So, you cannot identify a strategy that is fixed per se. It’s more a strategy of openness and sociability. Finding ways to collaborate with who lives here and to listen to what concerns and activity are relevant to this locality.¹⁸

What becomes accentuated in this statement is that being sociable, making connections, is a vital part of how the program developed and related to the local environment. So, what are the implications of this emphasis on sociability and responsivity as a key tool in building the program? Obviously, the

17 — See also, Andersson, Ola, “Utan självklara möten ingen vi-känsla” in *Texter om Stockholm och andra städer 1996-2016*, Dokument press, Stockholm, 2017, pp. 87–92.

18 — Conversation with Jens Strandberg and Jenny Richards April 14, 2016.

act of making connections, of establishing relations, makes up a basic skill of the curator as a mediating figure, so to a certain degree responsivity is a feature that resides within the profession. However, in the above quote, responsivity is highlighted as a key methodological conduct determining the direction of the program. I want to argue that the statement above is evocative of a more fundamental ambivalence within the program of *Home Works*, an ambivalence that is intimately connected to the somewhat uneasy seating of *Home Works* within a context of urban regeneration. On the one hand, responsivity, an openness to form new connections, is a cardinal virtue of an entrepreneurial spirit—and thus can be associated with the flexible service worker who adapts to needs and delivers collaboration and communicative networks, fitting into spatio-political arrangements already at work (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007; Virno, 2001). On the other hand, responsivity may signify a political stance—an ethico-political practice of relating and working from within relations—from within socio-material arrangements. It is the latter interpretation of responsivity as a situated politics of action that I will argue became critical to how *Home Works* evolved as an art experiment. In order to unpack how responsivity came to work as strategy, to enact and reconfigure socio-material relations from within, it is necessary, however, to provide some background and to turn to a seminal event in the unfolding of the program.

Touch Sanitation—Maintenance as Spatial Connecting and Making Visible

As part of their opening exhibition, *Maintenance Art Works 1969–1980*, and in order to present the thematic frame of domestic (reproductive) work, *Home Works* presented the performative project *Touch Sanitation* (1977–1980) by Mierle Ladermann Ukeles (FIG. 1).

Ukeles engaged in this project to call attention to the invisible maintenance work carried out by sanitation workers in the city of New York. The artist set out on a quest to shake hands with every sanitation worker in the city district of New York—saying “Thank you for keeping New York City alive.” Concerned as she was with a feminist critique of the denigration of domestic labor, in connecting to the sanitation department Ukeles connect-



FIG. 1

Installation view, *Maintenance Art Works 1969–1980*, Konsthall C, 2016

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ed the sphere of the home with the sphere of the city. In both cases, Ukeles' project demonstrated that maintenance was being taken for granted. Travelling around the city, greeting and thanking the sanitation workers, Ukeles called attention to the fact that cleaning and maintenance, even if it conditions life and the production of value in the city, is not valued in its own terms. She thereby pointed at a founding aporia of modern society: the systematic devaluation of care work—of the work, whether carried out in the home or in the city—that provides the condition for capitalist production. Central to the realization of Ukeles' *Touch Sanitation* is the physical act of the handshake, as a performative ritual, and this was echoed in the exhibition at Konsthall C, in which images of Ukeles shaking hands



FIG. 2
Installation shot from *Maintenance Art Works 1969–1980*, Konsthall C, 2016.
© Konsthall C

with sanitation workers in various parts of New York made up the visual communication of the project (FIG. 2).

As a performative enactment, the handshake enables human contact and responsivity. It could even be conceived of as a gestural emblem for a primordial disposition towards others; a mode of relating defined by responsiveness.¹⁹ At the same time, Ukeles' handshaking ritual performance enacts a spatial practice—a way of enacting the city, calling into visibility the trajectories—the spatial practices of the sanitation workers as well as forging new networks of solidarity. “Hand to hand. A hand-chain to hold up the whole City. Or a web, spun hand to hand. Circling the city, bound round and round until it's all woven together.”²⁰ Finally, the corporal and spatial act of making contact, linking one node in the city with another, is also a political act in the sense that it connects struggles. Thereby it claims another way of making the city intelligible, thus calling it into being. It calls attention to the city as a structure of dependence, thus disturbing the no-

19 — See also Athanasieou and Butler's discussion of responsiveness as responsibility and “a disposition towards others” in *Dispossession*, p. 105.

20 — Press Release, 1979.

tion that agency and value creation belong to the visible and highly valued production of the city. In the exhibition at Konsthall C, *Touch Sanitation* featured as a conventional piece of exhibited artwork, thus establishing a thematic correspondence to the issues raised by *Home Works*. At this stage in the program, thematics and locality were merely connected through the assertive utterance of the exhibition. Its connection to Hökarängen was of an assertive nature and was established through explicit curatorial address. The reason why I dwell on this initial exhibition of Ukeles' sanitation work is that I want to argue that handshaking as a methodological strategy came to play a seminal role in the gradual transition of *Home Works* from what could be said to be a "generic exhibition practice" to a locally embedded series of socio-material enactments. *Home Works* evolved as an experimental research project in which exhibitions took on the function of forming questions, presenting artistic investigations of the home, and an extended public program introduced the formats of communal dinners, cooking sessions, collaborations with groups and organizations, and commissioned art projects engaged in collective production. Whereas these formats, since the emergence of New Institutionalism in the 2000s, are well established also as institutional behavior (Esche, 2013), in the case of *Home Works*, I want to argue, these research and production strategies were applied as a means to enact new realities of the city, thus opening up alternative modes of configuring local co-living in Hökarängen. As I have argued above, responsivity, apart from a curatorial position, can be interpreted as a fundamental disposition to others, an alertness and openness to relate—whether to human beings, a material arrangement, such as the physical site of Hökarängen, or to social situations. An image for such a composure, I have argued, was present in the gestural language of the handshake. The unfolding of *Home Works* took place as a process of working from within the relations that were already at stake in the local environment of Hökarängen. For example, curators Jenny Richards and Jens Strandberg developed a practice of walking in Hökarängen, getting to know people, establishing relationships with residents, local self-organized groups, and becoming a part of the local community. Not unlike Ukeles, Jenny and Jens shook hands and spent time with residents. They found ways of collaborating with Hökarängens stadsdelsråd, and Martinsko-



FIG. 3
Jens Strandberg walking in Hökarängen, in
conversation with the director of Surr surr.
February, 2017.
Photo: Signe Meisner Christensen

lan—a local Steiner school—self-organized initiatives such as Hökarängens Climate Smart Cooking Group. There was interaction with Surr surr, a self-organized local cinema group in the area, as well as talking to local shop owners. The communal dinners held at Konsthall C were very much a follow up of this spatial practice of connecting and relating.

In other words, walking around in Hökarängen became a way of connecting people, spaces and ideas. And it was through this embodied and spatial practice that the abstract thematic of a critique of the home and of the devalued status of affective and reproductive work became vernacular. It turned into a socio-material practice that negotiated how to live in Hökarängen. In both a literal and imaginative sense, the relational practice of the curators walking and “shaking hands” engaged with the material affordances that were intrinsic to the material infrastructure of Hökarängen as invented by architects as a model suburban town.²¹ In this way, handshaking reactivated what was becoming oblique under the new urban regeneration scheme: the postwar welfare mantra that housing was a social problem.

21 — The concept of affordance is coined by James Gibson (1979) to indicate possibilities for action that reside in the environment. The notion of affordances has been applied in architectural theory to point to how material components of an environment, for example paths or squares, are active in enabling everyday social action.

Elderly Care as Symptom

Moving between these historical trajectories for social housing and a contemporary urban reality, *Home Works* picked up on a public controversy in Stockholm around elderly care. In 2015, new measures for monitoring the time spent by care workers in the homes of elderly clients were in place in Stockholm. Care workers were to carry an app that would monitor time spent on a task and thus survey the workers. *Home Works*, together with Gunilla Lundahl, intervened into this public debate by organizing a discussion on the issue of elderly care policies, in Konsthall C, inviting Hökarängens hemtjänst, a local cooperative elderly care company, Kommunal, the largest union for care workers in Sweden, Hemtjänst upporet, an activist group of care workers and Clara Lindblom from the left-wing party who at the time was responsible for the elderly care system in Stockholm. The way in which *Home Works* responded to this public controversy was to pose a question which addressed the underlying economization of care work that informed this formalization of time management. As Gunilla Lundahl commented, speaking of the “elderly burden,” as has become normalized in contemporary welfare Sweden, points to an economization of care, and leaves out the constitutive human dimension of care—as a founding disposition towards the other, as a source of human relatedness and mutual dependence.²² Lundahl proposed the question: What would elderly care be if it were valued as a source of public wealth rather than as a burden? So what *Home Works* proposed was to acknowledge an initial misconception at the heart of current political debate around elderly care. As an opening up of the possible meanings of care, *Home Works* engaged with elderly care practice as a potential site of political struggle. A line of flight, in the sense of shifting the semantic-material arrangements of how elderly care created realities, was established through the responsivity strategy of *Home Works*. Responsivity, as a methodological tool, thus unfolded as a readiness to connect to emerging struggles over the reproduction of the city—here the care work performed in the homes of elderly people. This initial response is of a discursive kind, it starts off as pointing to a

22 — Conversation with Gunilla Lundahl, September 24, 2016.



FIG. 4
 Map of Hökarängen indicating the homes of the interviewed residents for the project “This is what they told me”.
 © Konsthall C

misconception present in how elderly care becomes practiced through the new public management procedures of governmental administration—such as apps for monitoring time—and how these apparatuses come to structure everyday spatial practice. In the second instance, however, this linking of Hökarängen to the care app case evolved into new projects and interferences into the socio-material realities in Hökarängen. In addition to the public debate on elderly care mentioned above, several artistic projects embedded in Hökarängen evolved from this: an ethnographical project curated by Gunilla Lundahl called “This is what they told me...” the exhibition “Watch Out, One Day You Might Be Part of the Elderly Care System Too!!” as well as several collaborations between Hemtjänst upproret and commissioned artists Ciara Phillips, Stephan Dillemoth and Natalie Wuerth.

The resulting accounts of lived experiences with the neighborhood planning in Hökarängen opened up a pool to access multiple versions of what social sustainability meant, and what care for your neighbor implied

for these residents. Rather than an “elderly burden,” the project posited these elderly residents as confiders into practices of everyday life where material amenities were scarce, but where the social life of the community was strong. In this way, “This is what they told me...” applied a research method that opened up alternative accounts of commonality and care as a way to invent new community practices.

The Communal Laundry—A New Materialist, Pragmatist Account

In initiating activities and experimenting with new uses of the laundry, *Home Works* did not primarily conceive of this space as a sanctioned frame for producing and showing art, but rather as a material support structure and a socio-spatial infrastructure embedded in the larger infrastructure of Hökarängen’s housing program. Thus, the building itself became engaged not as a passive object, but as an active agent, a set of material and physical arrangements and structures that co-shape reality. During the exhibition *Expansions of Home Craft*, the video work *The Home as a Tool for Exploring Life*, by Kristina Schultz, documents a recording of an experiment where the artist, her partner and her five-year-old son clear out all the things from their apartment, in order to craft other possibilities.

In the absence of things: furniture, kitchen tools or beds, Schultz reinvents daily life by using whatever materials are at hand, such as paper shopping bags and homemade spoons, in order to perform basic activities such as eating, sleeping and organizing the home. Schultz thereby calls attention to how reproductive work, here the intimate and affective practice of parental care, is basically dependent on, and entangled with, things and material artifacts. Things in Schultz’ artistic experiment afford a care practice. Transferred to the premises of the laundry, *Home Works* experimented with how the space, the material arrangement in itself, could be put at stake as an agent. As can be inferred from fig. 1, what was being made visible in the exhibition was not merely the exhibited artworks. These artworks were almost discretely, and scarcely, placed along the walls of the room, leaving open an encounter with the material structure of the space—a cut off section of an industrial laundry. Through



FIG. 5
Installation shot, Kristina Schultz, *The Home as a Tool for Exploring Life*.
Photo: Signe Meisner Christensen

the large windows, a glimpse of the surrounding housing blocks painted in ochre and mingled with tall pine trees makes tangible how the laundry forms part of a larger infrastructure that enacts possible realities of community and co-living. These spatio-material agencies of the building itself were exposed in *Expansions of Home Craft*, thus making it feasible how responsivity as a key methodological tool did not merely unfold in responding to people in the area; it also extended to the spatial and material component of site-specific research. A similar experimentation with the affordances of material structures took place in the combined kitchen and office. Rather than separating kitchen and office function from the exhibition space, the kitchen/office is spatially folded into the exhibition space. A large table worked simultaneously as a working desk for staff, as a lunch table, a meeting table for seminars, knitting cafés, open house dinners, printing workshops, and as a cooking and buffet table for the weekly cooking meetings of Hökarängen's Vegetarian Cooking Group.



FIG. 6
 Installation shot, exposing at the same time the physical structure, the exhibition, and at the back the kitchen/office which at this moment was enacted as location for a Hökarängen's Vegetarian Cooking Group.
 Photo: Signe Meisner Christensen

It was enacted as a multi-functional shared space. One could then argue that just like Ukeles' *Maintenance Work* it became a creative methodology of relating and engaging with material infrastructures in Hökarängen. So, in a similar way, Schultz' *The Home as a Tool for Exploring Life* provided a creative methodology for exploring how the material affordances of the former laundry could co-guide experiments with everyday communal life and neighbor solidarity in Hökarängen.

As an infrastructural knot, the laundry connected people. It concentrated and redistributed flows of events. *Home Works* expanded and experimented with these capacities by inviting people to take charge of the space, making it accessible.²³ Thus the space turned into a social nexus that “shifted the trajectory of people and things” (Yaneva, 2017, p. 64). The

23 — Conversation with Jens Strandberg, September 23, 2016.

building itself, its spatial organization, its physical embeddedness into a material infrastructure—the neighborhood unit—co-shaped possibilities for action.

Conclusion

As the above presentation of *Home Works* attests, Konsthall C is ambivalently situated in Hökarängen between local grass-root structures, (Hökarängens Stadsdelsråd), urban restructuring schemes (sustainability programs initiated by Stockholmshem), gentrification markers, and a critical art discourse informed by New Institutionalism. By offering its spatial premises as a platform for social meetings, one could argue that Konsthall C delivers what is being discharged under the rule of neoliberal urban restructuring: social responsibility and a sense of community. The issue of reproduction, therefore, was not only critically claimed as a political issue at the level of curatorial programming, it also appeared problematically as a meta-structural question, of how *Home Works* was assigned a role in the overall new economy of city branding procedures. In other words, *Home Works* enhanced the value of Hökarängen as a vibrant and creative hub, as a livable neighborhood. Along the lines of the critique of New Institutionalism for apparently offering an inclusive social platform, but in fact setting up an exclusionary place reserved for the insiders of the art community and intellectuals, Konsthall C and *Home Works* could also be charged with employing the legacy of the communal laundry to assert a social agency, which in reality was replaced by a kind of “social positivity”—the idea that social engagement, and social platform is unconditionally beneficial. Following this line of argument, Konsthall C could be said to make symbolic use of the building of the former public laundry, symbolically appropriating its ideological meaning as an emblem of the Swedish folkhemmet and a site of democratic co-living.²⁴ What I have tried to argue in this article, however, is that, while not refuting that Konsthall C does take up such a

24 — For a study of the link between Per Albin Hansson’s vision of folkhemmet and the introduction in Sweden of the communal laundry, see Lund, 2009.

function of welfare provision surrogate within the logics of post-welfare city branding, nevertheless, this critique misses the point of the agency of *Home Works* and how the project engaged with the local area. Instead, I have argued that *Home Works* evolved as a performative engagement with these materialities and that this enactment became the locus of struggle around the urban reality of Hökarängen. The curatorial practice of *Home Works* moved in between the discursive and the material structures at work around housing in Hökarängen, thus reactivating the spatial structures of the laundry as a multi-functional communal space and enacting connections to its surroundings. Unique to the method of *Home Works* was that it drew on performative artistic methods to translate an ethical and political vision of care and neighbor relations into a spatial practice. I have argued that in the curatorial appropriation and translation of Ukeles' handshaking practice into a daily curatorial practice of walking and encounters, connecting Konsthall C to people and places constitutes an act of ontological politics. It makes a specific version of the city emerge. This is an enactment of the urban environment as sustained by neighborhood solidarity and a recognition of the vital role of reproductive work to sustain the community. At the same time, this practice is also a material practice—one that is shaped by the affordances and the material agency of the built environment itself. The discursive and the material enactment of the project cannot be separated as these two dimensions merge into a performative spatial curatorial practice. Turning back to my initial question of the agency of art-based projects in situations of urban restructurings, I will argue that a project such as *Home Works* demonstrates that art methods have a potential for radically questioning the value transformation that informs contemporary urban planning and development schemes. *Home Works* further demonstrates that the arrangements that make up urban reality are unstable and can be reassembled in new ways by mobilizing the built and social infrastructures in local communities. Art washing, therefore, does not apply to *Home Works* for the reason that the programme entered into a self-directed appropriation of the material infrastructure and value production in Hökarängen. The concept of ontological politics may point to the way in which art projects like *Home Works* modulate urban infrastructures to propose alternative uses of the city. As such, the agency of art

within a set-up of creative city discourse and planning practices should not be seen as servile to gentrification but rather as a dialogue partner and as an imaginative resource in envisioning other models of urban life. After the closing of the *Home Works* program, a new collaboration between Konsthall C, Hökarängens stadsdelsråd and Jens Strandberg emerged called *Bomassan* (2017-2019), which was conceived of as a citizen-led housing fair that continued expanding on some of the questions raised in *Home Works*.²⁵ Thus, the knowledge of the area and the institutional legacy built during *Home Works* was channeled into the *Bomassan* project. The case of *Home Works* is unique due to its embeddedness—physically as well as organizationally—within a locality. However, many parallels can be pointed to which similarly employ art-based experimentation to interfere with urban infrastructures. In a Danish context, the long-term art project Sigrids Stue (Sigrid’s Living Room) in the social housing area of Gellerup, a suburb of Aarhus, is an example of an art project that operates within an area of urban restructuring. In Chile, the project Espacio Santa Ana can be pointed out, and a major historical reference is the project Park Fiction in Hamburg, initiated in 1995. *

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