



# Artikel

Artistic research in Sisters Academy  
– Sisters Academy in artistic research

# Artistic research in Sisters Academy – Sisters Academy in artistic research<sup>1</sup>

By Gry Worre Hallberg

This article is structured in two sections, focusing on the second one. The first section is a short presentation of the multilayered and multifaceted understandings of artistic research currently accessible within the field – artistic research as an umbrella concept for a series of submethodologies and approaches. The second, and lengthier, section is a clarification of the artistic research approach in my recently submitted PhD dissertation on the performance experiment *Sisters Academy*<sup>2</sup> by the performance group Sisters Hope<sup>3</sup> of which I am the artistic director. This section includes four practice-specific parts, where the first focuses on the transdisciplinary intersection of art and academia, including what I term ‘experiential reflections’. The second part discusses the documentation of *Sisters Academy*, focusing on the expansive *in-situ* experiential reflection material it has generated. In resonance with these approaches, the third part is a reflection on *The Critical Gaze and The Devoted Body* – a conceptual framework responding to different participatory positions observed in *Sisters Academy*. The fourth and final part is focused on the relationship between theory and practice within the activism of ‘living the theories’ and ‘inspiring theories’.

## Sisters Academy

Since the early 2010s the performance experiment *Sisters Academy* has manifested itself in several Nordic countries, where it has explored the school of a *Sensuous Society* through *Sensuous Learning* approaches. Sensuous Society is rooted in the *Sensuous Society Manifesto*, which I wrote in response to the economic crisis in 2008 and the ongoing ecological crisis. It imagines a future world governed by the aesthetic dimension as opposed to the current dominance of economic rationality. Not as a utopia, but as a conceptual framework to performatively explore alternative worlds and life forms. Sensuous Learning is a terminological unit that frames the explorations of this ‘school of a Sensuous Society’ and the outcomes. Rather than a well-described formula to be strictly followed, it should be understood as emerging during the experimentation. *Sisters Academy* currently unfolds itself in the two large-scale formats: *Sisters Academy – The Takeover*, a takeover of an actual youth school, which is focused on the Sensuous Learning explorations of the teachers and students at the school, and *Sisters Academy – The Boarding School*, an immersive performance installation at an art institution where the audience-participants enrol for at least 24 hours. Central to the work is also the *Sisters Performance Method*. With the development of the Sisters Performance Method the art activist interventionism is not only linked to an integration into systems outside the art institution, e.g. the schools, but can also be perceived as an integration directly into the participants through *The Poetic Self*, which is described as an inherent poetic potential unfolded within *Sisters Academy* (see Hallberg 2017; 2018).

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1) This article introduces thoughts and texts generated as part of my PhD studies and presented in the dissertation (Hallberg 2021).

2) [www.sistersacademy.dk](http://www.sistersacademy.dk) (accessed 27.04.2021).

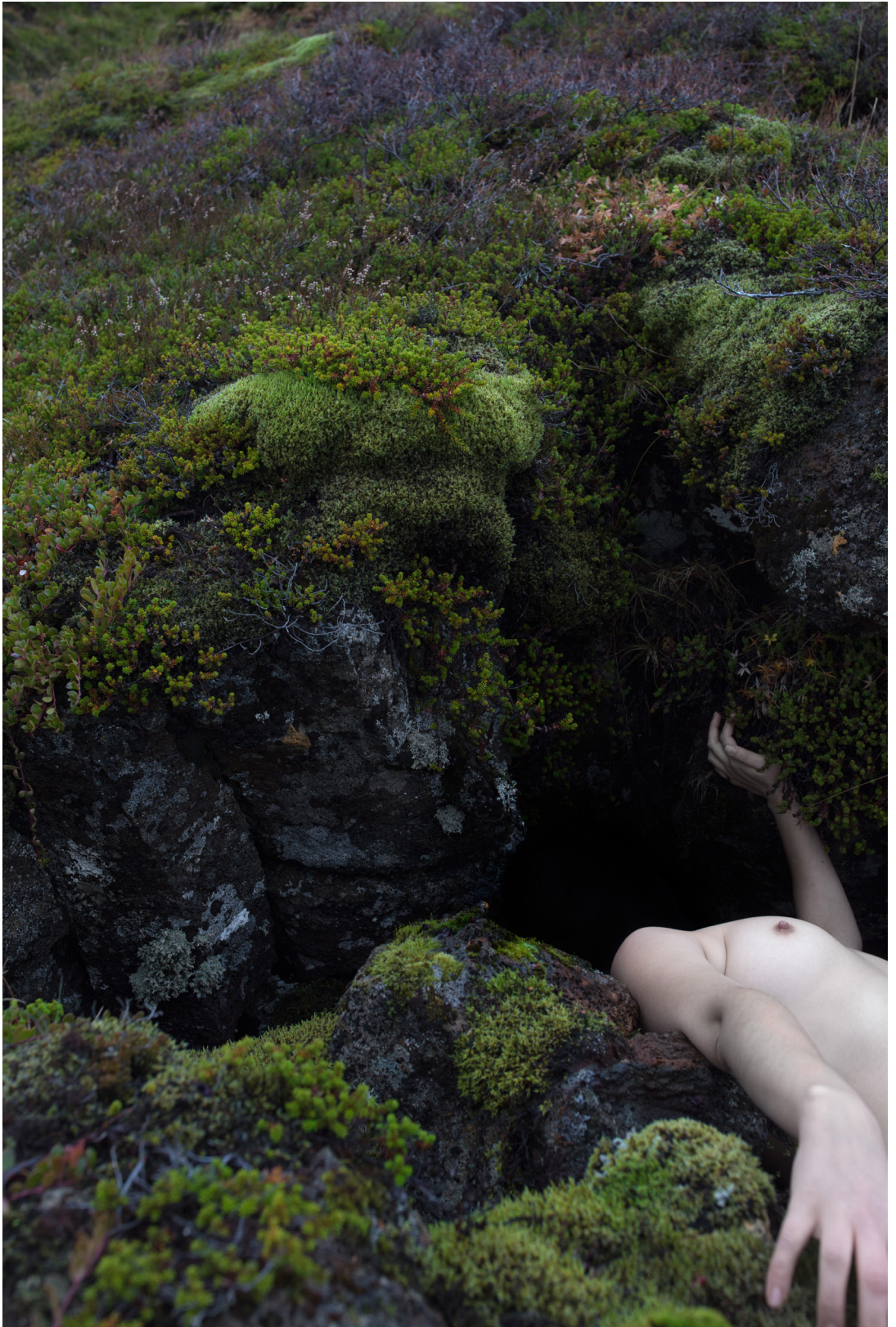
3) [www.sistershope.dk](http://www.sistershope.dk) (accessed 29.04.2021).





Student writing in their notebook at *Sisters Academy – The Boarding School* by Sisters Hope. Photo: I diana lindhardt





*Sisters Academy – Iceland* by Sisters Hope. Photo: I diana lindhardt

### Artistic research – an umbrella concept

In the Artistic Research Working Group of PSi #25 in Calgary, 2019, the call for proposals from the working group conveners included a state-of-the-art reflection on artistic research as:

[...] an elastic umbrella concept that includes a range of approaches that use art, creative practice or performance as a primary means and method of inquiry. These include the distinct approaches ‘performance as research’ (PAR), ‘practice as research’ (PaR), ‘practice-based research’ (PBR), ‘practice-led research’, ‘creative arts research’, ‘research-creation’, ‘arts-based research’, and numerous other associated practices [...] (Arlander et al. 2019, p. 1).

Arlander et al. went on to describe how one of the objectives of the call was to invite in as broad a spectrum of approaches as possible “[...] to reflect the diverse and vital abundance of interrelated orientations [...]” aiming at exploring “[...] the elasticity of artistic research as a methodology, and to expand our collective horizons [...]” (2019, p.1) . Thus, artistic research is not at all a concept carved in stone, but rather, it is still an emerging field which expands opportunities for practitioners operating at the intersection of art and academia and which is still very much developing. Apropos *field* – in *Artistic Research and/as Interdisciplinarity* (2016) artistic researcher Annette Arlander, who was also one of the conveners mentioned above and who plays a central role in the contemporary dialogue on and within artistic research, discusses how artistic research can be understood both as a *methodology* and as a *field* (Arlander 2016, p. 7). When understood as a methodology, it refers to either an extension of qualitative methodology or it is equated with practice-based research in general (Arlander 2016, p. 7ff). When understood as a field, it can be understood as an arena for knowledge creation – a new discipline, which allows the researching artist to adopt any relevant methodological approach. At the same time, artistic research is an ‘elastic methodology’ as the quote above states. Thus, one can understand it as a field and a main methodology for a wide range of practice-specific submethodologies developing within it.

So, what is my specific submethodological approach within this field? In response to this question, I will now turn to an elaboration on my artistic research approach.



*Sisters Academy – Iceland* by Sisters Hope. Photo: I diana lindhardt



## **An artistic research approach**

In a Danish context, the Danish National School for Performing Arts has formulated The Quality Assessment Model for Artistic Research (cf. Strøbech and Allerup: *The Strategy for Artistic Research, 2019–2022, DASPA*), which argues that without practical experimentation, there can be no artistic research; however, the artistic research process starts at various times depending on, respectively, the time of the focused reflection process in the work and its contribution to a wider topic. Arlander divides the artistic research process into three overall phases by which she also addresses the question on the temporality of artistic research, the three phases being: planning, experimentation, and reflection (Arlander 2016, p. 15). She suggests considering when the artistic research *writing* is produced to get a clearer idea of the nature of one's own artistic research work (Arlander 2016, p. 16f). Considering this guiding principle, I have realized *Sisters Academy* as a large-scale manifestation for almost a decade and now take the time to reflect and write about this practice – how it contributes to a wider topic based on an expansion of my theoretical foundation and framework, which will be applied to the reflective material generated in *Sisters Academy*.

## **Transcending art and academia**

When operating at the transdisciplinary intersection of art and academia, the emerging and continuously becoming field of artistic research contributes with a unifying terminology and methodological foundation for operation at this intersection. I have previously had to justify this through an argumentation of the power of research and theory when communicating with the arts world, as well as through an argumentation of the research validity of realizations harvested through artistic practices when communicating with academia. Both art and academia are now in motion, and the rigidity of the boundaries of the respective fields is softening. Artistic research expands the manoeuvrability within both fields and everything in-between in the celebration of transdisciplinary engagements and oscillations at the transcending intersection. To artists, artistic research can be perceived as an invitation to expand and deepen the understanding and potentiality of their practices in response to the environment and to build up a vocabulary to better articulate the aesthetic potentiality of their work as part of this response. To academics, artistic research can be perceived as an invitation to be more unified within their own practices, for example, and break the boundaries of a potentially limiting specific academic identity cf. benchmark arts-based researcher and sociologist Patricia Leavy's expressed longing to be "[...] unified and resonate with who I am within and beyond academia" (Leavy 2009, p. viii), and thus, allow for research questions in which theory and practice are intertwined and in which "[...] *the heart* [...]" (Leavy 2009, p. 2 with reference to Ronald Pelias, 2004) is present. Leavy expresses how the carving out of this artistic research method, which she termed arts-based research, also came out of this desire:

In my own research [...] I often felt that the "scraps" of data left strewn across my office floor were part of my heart – the heart of my work and even more so the heart of my relationship with my work. As researchers, we are often trained to hide our relationship to our work; this is problematic for some, impossible for others. Arts-based research practices allow researchers to share this relationship [...] (Leavy 2009, p. 2).

Thus, this new transdisciplinary field provides certain methodological benefits. For example, the artistic research approach allows the artistic researcher who is both operating within the art world and academia, to avoid, and thereby also challenge, the distinction between the artist's "[...] embodied knowledge and the scientist's purely research-based knowledge [...]" (Tygstrup and Bogh 2011, p. 103). Although this may be convenient it is also problematic in relation to the way

research is conceived at this intersection where it feeds from both practical and theoretical resources as discussed in cultural researchers Frederik Tygstrup and Mikkel Bogh's *Working the Interface: New Encounters between Art and Academia*; here they encourage new modes of understanding the knowledge production unfolding at this interface. Since 2011 artistic research has come to cover this interface, as a methodology, or rather as a series of submethodologies that avoids the distinction between the artist's embodied knowledge and the scientist's purely research-based knowledge. Artistic research is also not so concerned with discussing subjectivity and objectivity in relation to research, in that the artistic researcher is always inevitably central to their field of investigation in so far as it is a research study through embodied practice.

### **Experiential reflection**

I highlight this here where I zoom in on my specific artistic research approach, as this is a distinction that I have always found problematic due to the nature of both my artistic practices and academic endeavours. This has led me to continuously emphasize how I always reflect, while also enacting my practice, by which I question objective distance as *the* parameter of validation. Inspired by philosopher Richard Rorty's pragmatism theatre and performance scholar Niels Overgaard Lehmann, it suggests a position as a 'pragmatic dualist' for the study of one's own practice. According to Lehmann, it is possible to be both an 'experiencing practitioner' and an 'analyzing researcher', but not simultaneously, because the two modes of perception cannot co-exist as you cannot reflect on the "[...] trance [...]" (Lehmann 2002, p. 266) while you are in it. However, I do not find this to be accurate; I do reflect while performing my artistic practice, and furthermore, the experiences within these inhabited artistic spaces and the subsequent analyses are also based on these in-situ reflections. I am tempted to go as far as to argue that my reflections are deeper in the lived situation because my entire body, my whole being co-reflects with my mind in these particular situations (e.g. see Hallberg and Harsløf 2013, Hallberg and Darsø 2019).

This resonates with scientific approaches in phenomenology, which make a study of embodied experiences possible (see Merleau-Ponty 2009), and with performance studies, gender studies, and feminist theory. For example, biologist and scholar of feminist studies and environmentalist consciousness Donna Haraway has conceived a vision for a feminist scientific approach, which she terms *situated knowledge* in which the researcher acknowledges and understands their situated position in the world. This will always inevitably influence their knowledge production. Thus, the articulated awareness of this subjective situated position is more objective than the claim of neutrality, which is an illusion (Haraway 1988). In artistic research, this mode of understanding reflective processes is, in many ways, inherent due to the embedded nature of the researcher in practice and, thus, per definition, more or less legitimized. At her opening lecture at the first symposium for the Copenhagen-based *International Center for Knowledge in the Arts* titled *Becoming Research*, transdisciplinary scholar Irit Rogoff (2019) emphasized how the ability to think through immersion dissolves the distinction between subject and object and, thus, the understanding of objectivity as *the* position that legitimizes the research. Theatre and performance scholar Doris Kolesch who studies participation in immersive performances also emphasizes how she understands these to be spaces of a dynamic oscillation between embeddedness and distance as opposed to unreflective absorption (Kolesch 2019, p. 8). Experience and reflection are conceived as co-existing. In the same anthology, theatre and performance scholar Janelle Reinelt shares reflections on the expansive research project *Cultural Value Project* commissioned by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AhRC), to better understand the impact created in performances

on what Reinelt terms spectators, which produced quite comprehensive data. Within this set of responses, they also found “[...] ample evidence of an embodied act of receiving and processing the experience” (Reinelt 2019, p. 124).

By inscribing my research in an artistic research methodology whereby my embeddedness in my own practice is not only perceived as legitimate but fundamental to my research, a contrast is created with an academic tradition of objective distance as *the* parameter of validation, which has always been alienating to me as I not only reflect, but often reflect deeper when immersed in my aesthetic practice. I will therefore term this submethodological approach *experiential reflection* and, with Rogoff and Kolesch, I argue that the ability to think through immersion dissolves the distinction between subject and object (Rogoff 2019), and thus the understanding of objectivity as *the* position that legitimizes the research so that experience and reflection coexist (Kolesch 2019); this might allow a ‘going deeper’ into both realms of perception.

Experiential reflection plays out at both a micro and macro level. The macro level can be understood as the continuous oscillation between immersion in my artistic practice and in academia over longer periods of time, such as a series of production over several years (immersed in practice) and the process of writing my recently submitted dissertation over several years (immersed in academia). The micro level can be understood as the unceasing reflections that are always emerging while immersed in the practice and the continuous ideas for practices to come while immersed in the academic endeavour. No matter at what level, they cross-pollinate and expand the field of manoeuvrability within both fields.





*Sisters Academy – The Boarding School* by Sisters Hope. Photo: I diana lindhardt

### ***In-situ***

In response to the trust and value I place on those experiential reflections, what I term *in-situ* reflective material has been generated in *Sisters Academy*. By *in-situ*, I refer to reflective material generated *during* the artistic manifestation and thus transported directly out from the sensuous and poetic experience, while the body is immersed in this experience. This material is, furthermore, not only generated by me, which is often the case in artistic research, and almost always the case in more classical performance analysis, but by the majority of participants in the projects. Consequently, I now have at my disposal thousands of *in-situ* reflections from participants that illuminate the co-existence of experience and reflection. This is unique even when compared to state-of-the-art performance analytical approaches such as those developed to understand new performative formats, e.g. immersive theatre, which suggests post-reflections in the form of memory protocols focusing on the relational aspects of the most intense and affective experience by the participating performance analyst. This is in contrast to a neutral and objective description of all aspects of the performance. Furthermore, a communal poly-perspective approach is introduced, where a number of research colleagues and performance analysts explore the many-faceted immersive performance together, so that they are able to compare and discuss their different memory protocols afterwards. Additionally, the collection of empirical information continues afterwards with inclusions, for example, of audience interviews (just after and two months later), registration of social media responses from audiences, and dialogue on traced impact received by the host institution of the performance (e.g. letters from audiences to the hosting theatre)<sup>4</sup>. However, sharing and writing from this post-reflective position is still somehow removed from the actual sensuous and affective experience that the analysts describe and interpret, and the extent of the empirical amount of the memory protocols from the participating researchers, the number of conducted interviews and the number of collected responses on social media, and to the host institution. Warstat himself is very much aware of the limitations of this, thus suggesting, for example, blogs for shared experiences to collect a 'bigger data' mass. This corresponds with the approaches developed by Reinelt and her research group (Reinelt 2019), which also studies the audiences beyond the actual performance, but through an expanded approach that includes surveys, interviews, and workshops before, shortly after and two months after attending the performance in question plus memories from the previous year. This approach produces 'bigger data' from more participants, and Reinelt encourages the 'big data' approach to get a more nuanced image of what the performance does beyond the individual (Reinelt 2019, p. 131f). She furthermore highlights how the phenomenological experience of 'being there' is crucial, which makes me curious to know more about how the spectators' memories were teased out phenomenologically<sup>5</sup>. However, Reinelt does not elaborate much on this and one might also argue that no matter how it is teased out, the *in-situ* reflective material of *Sisters Academy* will always illuminate other aspects of participation, as it is generated and transported out *while* the participants are immersed in the experience, which allows me special insight into the sensuous

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4) Theatre and performance scholar Matthias Warstat lectured on these analytic tools at University of Copenhagen, The Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, Performance and Theatre Studies, in autumn 2018, invited by the research group *Audience positions* (translated from original Danish title *Publikumspositioner*), of which I am part. The dialogue with Warstat and his colleagues from Freie Universität, Theaterwissenschaft, and the research project *Affective Societies* is ongoing.

5) Which relates to my performance colleague Inga Gerner Nielsen's attempt to tease out new phenomenological qualitative approaches in researching the experience and impact of participants of immersive performances through sense-stimulating qualitative approaches in the post-reflective 'interview-situation' (Nielsen 2007).

and poetic mode of being and what it activates. As Warstat calls for collaboration, so too does Reinelt in her proposal to combine the in-depth, well-informed performance analyses based on the individual phenomenological experience of the performance analyst with empirical approaches that generate ‘bigger data’ inspired by both quantitative and qualitative approaches in social sciences. In my approach these two approaches are combined as I work with a subtraction of the generated reflective in-situ-material combined with my own experiences and observations in my analysis on the practice. The material of Sisters Hope’s performance archive simply named *The Archive* is open source and available for everyone wishing to use it for their research. Thus, its contributions could also very well be a qualified response to the calls for collaborations above.

There are differences in the way I am dealing with the participants’ reflective material in my artistic practice and as a scholar reflecting on the possible impact of the work. In my artistic practice, the reflective material is part of the interactivity design that informs the processes of the participants. Therefore, my interest is in how the books they write support their experiential and reflective journey within the framework of the artwork. The books are also props that are crafted and designed in resonance with the overall visual expression of the artistic project. This is done to support the immersion into the world that the project represents. When I read the notes and comments within the framework of the artwork, I myself am immersed in the world in which the notes and comments are produced. Thus, I read them while embodying the same sensuous and poetic mode. We are co-participants exploring together and, in different ways, we express our explorations in our notebooks. In my scholarly work an amount of this generated reflective material is subtracted as ‘data’ that informs my research question. When reading it, I am not immersed in the framework of the project. However, I have experienced that if I read for a long time, the reflective material, perhaps due to its tactility, transports me into another state of sensibility. This resonates with a response from one of the three readers<sup>6</sup> who has been part of a group that helped me read, make a first scan and categorize the reflective in-situ material for my PhD. The response came in a meeting we had in the group: “I went through a liminal phase while reading [...] We were thinking about a place to go after having been in the universe [as a participant in *Sisters Academy – The Boarding School*]. You can come back to the space and go through the three-phased liminal process of the ritual while reading.” In that way reading the material can bring you back to the experience and/or evoke the same sensuous and poetic experience and longing so strongly that it also embodies a desired postliminal continuation of the experience into everyday life.

Another reader who had not experienced the work of Sisters Hope but knew people who had and who had shared their profound experiences with her (her then boyfriend), highlighted her experience of the fatigue of words to describe the experiences that participants had: “How people express themselves in words and how that relates to this sensuous experience [...] they are not able to or don’t want to express it in words, or the words are limiting or they don’t do the experience justice. There are also very many different ways to express themselves present.” An interesting finding in the readings of the reflective material in another group – *The Archive Study Group*<sup>7</sup> of Sisters Hope – was that many of those students who were immersed in the

6) These being Tania Maria Henneberg, Krisztina Toth, Emma Sofie Brandon, and Bogumiła Majchrzycka.

7) Which over time (2015 – ) has consisted of: Maja Størseth (who also introduced the findings above after her first thorough reading of reflective material from *Sisters Academy – The Boarding School* at Inkonst, Malmö, Sweden, 2015), Maja Ejrnæs, Denis Rivin, Marie-Louise Werner, Albert Greve Rasmussen, Emma Gustafsson, Maja Skjøth Hegelund, Nana Elisabeth Paja Senderovitz and I.



manifestations lacked words and so could not put down their experiences in the notebooks; they therefore left them empty, drew, ripped out pages, made paper collages, or did nothing at all. Whereas those who watched with a certain critical gaze from a certain distance had many words and were very articulate as described in Hallberg and Darsø (2019, 101–2). Thus, to me it is of utmost importance to be immersed with the participants in the reading of the material, to be attentive to the sensitivity in the expressions of the reflective ‘data’. In relation to this I am also touched by scholar of performance design and psychology Henriette Christrup’s acknowledgement of sensibility, not only in the creation of, but also in the interpretation of the generated reflective material, where one should also avoid violation of the integrity of the person expressing themselves (Christrup 2001, pp. 25–28).

With that, I will now turn to the conceptual framework of what I have come to call *The Critical Gaze and The Devoted Body*.

### **The Critical Gaze and The Devoted Body**

This conceptual framework was conceived during the large-scale immersive performance installation *Sisters Academy – The Boarding School* at Inkonst, Malmö, Sweden in 2015, in response to different participatory positions. It describes the excesses of these, where The Critical Gaze refers to the participatory position of watching from a critical distance and The Devoted Body to participation through affective engagement. What I have experienced is that The Critical Gaze sometimes seems to inhibit and limit the movements and liberties of The Devoted Body. The Critical Gaze, furthermore, often seems to be unaware of this ‘violation’ as it operates from a self-understanding of heroically exposing unhealthy structures in order to liberate those held hostage by them. The Critical Gaze, moreover, often has strong verbal skills and is able to compose a strong critical argument. Where The Devoted Body is sometimes in the process of ‘losing language’ in the attentiveness to another more sensuous and poetic mode of perception, and thus is not prepared to enter into an argument constructed from the perceptive premises of The Critical Gaze. Paradoxically, this again sometimes translates into the validation of the danger of immersing into affective engagement with The Critical Gaze. This relates to the critique of immersive strategies as manipulative, and here within to the perception of totally immersed<sup>8</sup> participants as being naive or even helpless in the face of the seductive pull of immersion. See, for example, Alston (2016) and Kolesch’s (2019) response to Alston, in which she instead suggests that the affective encounters train a new skillset that encompasses dual reflectivity and embeddedness in the experience, through which a rich thickness of response is stimulated (Kolesch 2019).

In their article *The critique of critique*<sup>9</sup> (Gade and Schultz 2016), theatre and performance scholars Solveig Gade and Laura Luise Schultz also illustrate how the role of critique is currently undergoing a transformation. Thus, modernity’s critic, which Rogoff (2003) calls *Criticism*, as a disinterested, non-affected, critically distanced authority is challenged as is postmodernism’s *Critique*

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8) With reference to theatre and performance scholar Josephine Machon’s three categories of immersion in immersive performances: compare these definitions to Machon’s three immersive participation categories – respectively: *Absorption*: fully engaged in the experience, *transition*: when the experience creates otherworldliness and *total immersion*, which combines the first two categories and thus opens up the participants to complete engagement with the immersion artwork. This is sketched out in *Immersive Theatres. Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (Machon 2013), which is one of the first books dedicated to an exploration of the theatre and performance art genre of the immersive.

9) My translation from *Kritik ad kritikken* (Gade and Schultz 2016).

(Rogoff 2003), which understands itself to reveal the true course of the matter through a discursive analysis of the hidden, but inherent, power structures prevailing underneath that which is presented. The postmodernist understanding of critique very much resonates with the participatory position of *The Critical Gaze*. With reference to Rogoff and art historian Gavin Butt, however, Gade and Schultz (2016, p. 24) clarify how this position, paradoxically, has become a dominating legitimizing meta-discourse that blocks out the emergence of new critical approaches, which again resonates with my experience of the ‘violating impact’ of *The Critical Gaze* on the sensuous explorations of *The Devoted Body* and thus on the development of their critical and activist potential, including the inherent hope for change in these affective practices, as queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues in her analysis of how the critic is so engaged in not appearing naive that their ‘revealing’ approach completely compromises the activist potentiality for alternatives to appear (Sedgwick 2003 referenced in Gade and Schultz 2016, p. 24). This resonates with philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi and the hope he subscribes to the affective, cf. his *Politics of Affects* (Massumi 2015), which opens with his conversation with Mary Zournazi on hope (Zournazi 2002). Thus, in response to the shortcomings of this postmodernist critique paradigm, Rogoff (2003) suggests *Criticality* as a subsequent paradigm that maintains the insights of the previous paradigms but simultaneously dares to inhabit and practise alternatives through embodied processes (Gade and Schultz 2016, p. 25). In other words, the criticality and potentiality that is also inherent in *The Devoted Body* is seen and respected<sup>10</sup>. However, this position does not mean that the possibility of criticality nor self-criticality is erased. In my own case, self-criticality is the modus that is always present. While manifesting and performing I am very aware of elements that are critical or could be improved, maybe even more so because it is exactly when I am immersed in experiential reflection that I experience and reflect, also critically, with my entire being.

### ***The activism of ‘living the theories’ and ‘inspiring theories’***

The understanding of simultaneity of experience and reflection should also not lead to the misconception that a theoretical approach is alienating to me. It is quite the contrary. I find it liberating, with its ability to carve out a richer understanding of the potentialities and complexities at play in the work. One might say that, in this way, it also adds depth to the experiential reflections.

Due to this attraction to theory, I was touched by the quotation of the feminist writer and activist bell hooks in the call for proposals for a special issue on artistic research in the journal *Periskop* (Dirckinck-Holmfeld et al. 2019): “Let me begin by saying that I came to theory because I was hurting [...] I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what was happening around me [...] I saw in theory then a location for healing.” (Hooks 1991, p. 1).

I came to theory in a longing to expand and deepen the understanding and potentiality of my practice in response to the crises faced. My practice is highly inspired by theory and vice versa. It is an oscillation. For example, the findings in aesthetic philosophy and critical theory that informed my master’s thesis on my practice at the time<sup>11</sup> (Hallberg 2009) run through the *Sensuous Society Manifesto*, which again informs my current practices. The origin of my current PhD process is likewise my current practices, which constitutes the starting point for the theoretical curiosity,

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10) Ultimately my interest is in how a fruitful and constructive alliance between the two can also co-exist within one body, where it becomes the alliance between reflective cognitive processes co-existing with the sensuous and devoted moves of the immersed body (e.g. see Hallberg 2017, p. 45).

11) As a performer in the performance group SIGNA’s ([www.signa.dk](http://www.signa.dk), accessed 12.12.2019) interactive performance installations from 2006–2008.

which indicates that this is also a chance to expand the theoretical fundament and framework and apply new theory to the practice, through a process of deep thinking in the writing process, which will then again expand the potentialities and depths of the practice.

Theory is also a source that informs the activist aspects of my practice<sup>12</sup>, and in many ways, the practice is a tool to transform the visions and the pleas read in the theories into manifest fleshy life (Haraway 2016, p. 12) multispecies feminist theorist Donna J. Haraway offers provocative new ways to reconfigure our relations to the earth and all its inhabitants. She eschews referring to our current epoch as the Anthropocene, preferring to conceptualize it as what she calls the Chthulucene, as it more aptly and fully describes our epoch as one in which the human and nonhuman are inextricably linked in tentacular practices. The Chthulucene, Haraway explains, requires sym-poiesis, or making-with, rather than auto-poiesis, or self-making. Learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying together on a damaged earth will prove more conducive to the kind of thinking that would provide the means to building more livable futures. Theoretically and methodologically driven by the signifier SF—string figures, science fact, science fiction, speculative feminism, speculative fabulation, so far—Staying with the Trouble further cements Haraway's reputation as one of the most daring and original thinkers of our time.”, ”event-place”: ”Durham”, ”ISBN”: ”978-0-8223-7378-0”, ”language”: ”en”, ”note”: ”Google-Books-ID: ZvDgDAAAQBAJ”, ”number-of-pages”: ”238”, ”publisher”: ”Duke University Press”, ”publisher-place”: ”Durham”, ”source”: ”Google Books”, ”title”: ”Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene”, ”title-short”: ”Staying with the Trouble”, ”author”: {”family”: ”Haraway”, ”given”: ”Donna”}], ”issued”: {”date-parts”: [[”2016”, 8, 25]]}], ”locator”: ”12”}], ”schema”: ”https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json”} through the embodied processes of performing arts<sup>13</sup>. Likewise, it is often through practice that completely new reflections emerge, that can then be explored theoretically

12) I understand an important element of the activism of *Sisters Academy* to be the embodiment of the intention to ‘democratize the aesthetic’, by which I mean to give access to the sensuous and poetic, which I argue is to a large extent exclusive, and thus to its expansive potentiality e.g. see the *Sensuous Society Manifesto* ([www.sensuousociety.org](http://www.sensuousociety.org), accessed 29.04.2021).

13) To name but a few – the embodied manifestation of a ‘society’ created from the Marcusean idea of The Aesthetic Dimension (Marcuse 2003), or of ‘interconnectivity’ as a primary awareness for ecological change (Bateson 1984, 2000), or of ‘multispecies kinship’ (Haraway 2016) multispecies feminist theorist Donna J. Haraway offers provocative new ways to reconfigure our relations to the earth and all its inhabitants. She eschews referring to our current epoch as the Anthropocene, preferring to conceptualize it as what she calls the Chthulucene, as it more aptly and fully describes our epoch as one in which the human and nonhuman are inextricably linked in tentacular practices. The Chthulucene, Haraway explains, requires sym-poiesis, or making-with, rather than auto-poiesis, or self-making. Learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying together on a damaged earth will prove more conducive to the kind of thinking that would provide the means to building more livable futures. Theoretically and methodologically driven by the signifier SF—string figures, science fact, science fiction, speculative feminism, speculative fabulation, so far—Staying with the Trouble further cements Haraway's reputation as one of the most daring and original thinkers of our time.”, ”event-place”: ”Durham”, ”ISBN”: ”978-0-8223-7378-0”, ”language”: ”en”, ”note”: ”Google-Books-ID: ZvDgDAAAQBAJ”, ”number-of-pages”: ”238”, ”publisher”: ”Duke University Press”, ”publisher-place”: ”Durham”, ”source”: ”Google Books”, ”title”: ”Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene”, ”title-short”: ”Staying with the Trouble”, ”author”: {”family”: ”Haraway”, ”given”: ”Donna”}], ”issued”: {”date-parts”: [[”2016”, 8, 25]]}], ”schema”: ”https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json”} as a manifestation of this awareness.



and inspire new theorization<sup>14</sup>. It is ‘living the theories’<sup>15</sup> and ‘inspiring theories’. Through my practice, I create frameworks where new worlds can be both imagined and embodied<sup>16</sup>, cf. the *Sensuous Society Manifesto* and the embodiment of this vision in *Sisters Academy*. If it wasn’t for the problematic aspects of autonomy in that I subscribe to Haraway’s notion of complete entanglement and the tentacular nature of living organism (Haraway 2016 chapter 2: Tentacular Thinking)” plainCitation”:(Haraway 2016 chapter 2: Tentacular Thinking one might say that the practice allows the creation of *Temporary Autonomous Zones (T.A.Z)* as expressed by political author Hakim Bey (2003). A temporary space in which the dominating societal control mechanism can be escaped, and new modes of being and being together can be explored based on and activating the sensuous and poetic aspects of our being. An activation that might ultimately support the transition to a more sustainable future as investigated in my ongoing artistic research PhD. One might also understand it as an exploration of ‘ecology of practice’ as understood by feminist philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers (1949– ) (Stengers 2005). According to Stengers, an ecology of practices is thinking in a *minor key* rather than a *major key* by which thinking is particulate rather than universal. Even though the *Sensuous Society Manifesto* might be mistaken as major key thinking in its articulation of something as grand as a new paradigm based on the aesthetic dimension, it is, as a matter of fact, rather, to be understood as an inspirational framework for rethinking and reliving alternatives through situated experimentation that thinks *par le milieu*<sup>17</sup>. Radical experimentation in which new practices can emerge because they are based on new principles, through which the aesthetic might escape the The Capitalocene. It is also in line with the possibilities in practice approaches presented by art historians and curators Nicholas Bourriaud and Claire Bishop, even though they disagree on how to unfold and realize this potential. Moreover, within the artistic research field also with Arlander’s emerging understanding of artistic research as speculative practice, which she describes as “[...] an activity engaged in imagining alternatives, as a form of speculation through practice [...] Rather than speculate on alternative possibilities as a mental exercise, the speculation takes place by repeatedly creating the conditions for alternatives to appear [...]” (Arlander 2017a). See also Arlander (2017b). However, the approach presented here is also theoretically informed and thus, both an intertwined mental and tactile exercise.

With this carving out of some of the central aspects in my artistic research approach, I will end with some conclusive remarks.

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- 14) For example, ‘Democratizing the aesthetic’ and ‘The Critical Gaze and The Devoted Body’ as concepts emerging from practice inspiring further theorization.
- 15) Or as ‘applied philosophy’ as someone reflected, when I presented my practice at the seminar *Music pedagogics of the future* (my translation from the Danish original title: *Fremtidens musikpædagogiske områder*) at the Danish National Rhythmic Music Conservatory on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2019.
- 16) For example, see (Hallberg 2009) for an analysis of the contribution of *theatricality* and *performativity* in the creation of framed spaces, where new modes of being and being together can exist.
- 17) According to Stengers, an ecology of practices is also a tool for thinking *par le milieu*. With reference to Deleuze, she argues that you belong to an environment that is both the centre and the surroundings of your practice. With another reference to Bruno Latour’s *Pandora’s Hope*, Stengers also subscribes to the notion of *attachment* – we are always inestable attached to an environment, and it is from this position of *par le milieu* that we can unfold ecological practices. An ecology of practices answers to challenges and experiments with changes while fostering the *milieu* (Stengers 2005, p. 186ff).



*Nesting* by Sisters Hope. Photo: I diana lindhardt

## Conclusive remarks

This article was structured in two sections, where the first short section presented the multilayered and multifaceted understandings of artistic research as a field containing multiple submethodologies and approaches, and the second lengthier section clarified central aspects in my artistic research approach: being situated at the transdisciplinary intersection of art and academia, and operating with experiential reflections as not only a legitimate, but also a deep mode of reflection, which is reflected in the expansive in-situ material generated through the practice. I am not only drawing on my personal experience but on hundreds of others when subtracting material for analysis. In this way, the humanist, aesthetic, and performance-analytical approach to analyses is combined with an empirical data-based approach typical of social sciences. However, the ‘data’ set is quite different as it is generated as reflective in-situ material incorporated into the sensuous and poetic experiences of the participants in the artwork and transported directly out from this mode of being. Based on my own in-situ experiences in my practice and the observance drawn from this position, the conceptual framework of *The Critical Gaze* and *The Devoted Body* has emerged. This corresponds both to the simultaneity of experience and reflection that I subscribe to and to the confrontation of a particular mode of critique, not to be confused with the artist’s constant self-evaluation, that, in its preoccupation with revealing the hidden power structures of the presented, compromises the activist potentiality for alternatives to appear. These alternatives can, though, emerge through practices and, in this case, also through ‘living the theories’, by which the possibilities presented theoretically get a lived embodied life that supports the carving out of new possibilities. Thus, also placing value in embodied experiences does not mean that theory is alienating or avoided in this artistic research. On the contrary. It is yet another space for liberation and a ‘location for healing’ (Hooks 1991, 1; see also Sedgwick 2003) that informs the embodied practice experiments.

In this relatively new field of artistic research, a discussion revolves around how to understand what the term and concept mean at all. This includes a continuous development of very practice-specific submethodologies still developing to capture, with great precision, the exact characteristics of how knowledge is produced, or how ‘thinking is happening’, as artistic researcher Sofie Volquartz Lebech (2019, p. 7ff) would suggest we name this process, in the specific practice unfolding at the transdisciplinary intersection of art and research. The intersection is, however, what they all share. Thus, it is possible to illustrate the multilayered and multifaceted understandings of artistic research currently accessible within the field, but not to single out all of them. Unless perhaps the prime objective of this article, as a bigger part of the field itself, is to continuously produce new strands and approaches to, and within, artistic research. My purpose here, however, is not to contribute to the institutional definitions of artistic research, nor to focus specifically on the development of the term. Neither do I engage specifically in the development of new artistic research methodologies as Lebech (2019) has recently done by developing and contributing with two new methodologies to the field; respectively *Research-Based Aesthetics* (Lebech 2019, 101ff) and *Research-Based Performance* (Lebech 2019, 33ff). Instead, I intend to apply new theory to the analysis of the reflective material generated in my practice in order to illuminate how the sensuous supports a transition towards a sustainable future. Thus, the outcome of my analysis is intended to be my primary research contribution. This is in resonance with an articulation in the *Periskop* call for artistic research also mentioned above:

But while the discussion, for the most part, has been about what artistic research is, and whether its processes and productions can qualify as both art work and knowledge, a wealth of different artistic practices involving research are starting to emerge as an unruly field in which the



research takes various different forms and expressions – practices that continue to unsettle the normative borders that govern and separate the disciplines (K. Dirckinck-Holmfeld and Graff Junior 2019, 1).

I believe I have and am engaged in such practices.

I found it hard when trying to position myself within one certain submethodological strand of artistic research. To name but a few of the more famous and often referred to approaches out of the multitude that I have been trying to read into my practice: my artistic practice is neither a supplement to my research as described by Leavy (2009), nor is it only art that leads to knowledge, even though I do understand my starting point to be to curiously understand the artistic process as a mode of creating knowledge in itself, where the understandings and realizations that appear could not have been made without the precognitive process of art making. This resonates with the DASPA artistic research model and scholar of theory of research in the arts Henk Borgdorff (Borgdorff 2006). And even though I have a kinship with Arlander's (2017a) speculative research also highlighted above, Rogoff's artistic research and methodological approaches (Rogoff 2003; 2019) and artistic researcher Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld's Sedgwick-inspired reparative approach (K. R. Dirckinck-Holmfeld 2015; Sedgwick 2003) none of these fully encapsulate the specificity of the artistic research approach presented here, and as witnessed, such precision characterizes the submethodological approaches in artistic research. Thus, even though it is not my intention to devote my work to the development of a new submethodological approach, the second and more substantial section of this article focused on my central artistic research approaches, and enabled me to term my specific submethodological approach within the artistic research field *experiential reflection*. By this I argue that the ability to think through immersion, enabled through the artistic research methodology, allows a 'going deeper' into more realms of perception, which is a central methodological point in my work.

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**Gry Worre Hallberg** is a performance artist and the artistic director of the performance group Sisters Hope (on-going project: *Sisters Academy*) and of the project *Dome of Visions*. She recently defended her PhD: *Sensuous Society – Carving the path towards a sustainable future through aesthetic inhabitation stimulating ecologic connectedness at Theatre and Performance Studies*, Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen.

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