

Sculpture as Activating Object

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Abstract

This thesis includes the artworks produced for the *Sculpture as Activating Object* exhibition at the Artspace gallery, VCA in May 2018, and the written dissertation. Three bodies of artworks were produced for the project and have been used as the case studies within the written dissertation. They are: *The Inflatable Island Fuppidhoo* (2015-ongoing), *The Slingshot Planting Technique* (2016) and *The Gnome Painting Technique* (2015-2018). The artworks comprise: sculpture, installation, photography, video, drawing, actions, playing well and social experiences.

The practice-led project *Sculpture as Activating Object*, which has developed over the past three years, investigates how a sculptural object activates a process of transformation through play. Sculpture activating describes how the process itself becomes the artwork. Through the investigation of three artwork case studies produced for this project, this thesis examines the different outcomes generated by the art objects and speculates that sculpture as activating object is a new category within the field of contemporary action-sculpture.¹

The thesis establishes the contextual framework for land art and environmental art, action-sculpture and socially engaged art within contemporary art. All three case studies are framed within a nexus of these genres in art with the addition of play as a method to complete new iterations of artworks. The activating sculpture-object plays the leading role in all three of the case studies where it activates a series of collaborations with the forces of nature, various materials and people. The iterations occur through an invitation to collaborate and play within a framework of generosity,

¹ The term action-sculpture describes sculpture as a process over time. In this thesis kinetic sculpture is not included or discussed in relation to action-sculpture as this thesis focuses on natural and human collaborations with the sculptural object.

slapstick aesthetics and familiar objects. The notion of the inherent qualities of playing well during the process of making new iterations is furthermore established, in accordance with games scholar Bernard De Koven's concept of the 'well-played game' and play theorist Johan Huizinga's concept of 'the magic circle of play'.

The activating sculpture, this research proposes, extend notions of a more nuanced understanding of action-sculpture and socially engaged art. The methodology of completing the work in a series of iterations, through a framework of playing well, represents an opportunity to consider a more diverse understanding of authorship in collaborative practices. The concept of the activating sculpture is not encompassed by existing frameworks in action-sculpture or socially engaged art.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

1. this thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy
except where indicated in the preface
2. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used
3. The thesis is 40,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, image captions,
bibliography, footnotes and appendices.
4. Signature:

Preface

All three case studies of this research grow out of previous artistic practice. I will here describe how previous work have informed or shaped the research projects.

Case study one is centered on an inflatable island sculpture measuring 8 x 3,6 x 3,6 meters. The inflatable island was initially part of the group exhibition *The Maldives Exodus Caravan Show*² shown at the Venice Biennale, 2013. In this exhibition the inflatable island was strapped on the roof of a caravan, which hosted the exhibition, representing Maldives and the theme of the exhibition; climate change and the threat of rising sea levels. All work with the inflatable island, where is it not tied to the roof of a caravan are new iterations made during this research and include a photo-series, videos and actions.

The second case study is titled *The Slingshot Planting Technique*, and is created in collaboration with Israeli artist Meir Tati for this research. This project builds on an ongoing artistic collaboration between Tati and myself, which began in 2008. Tati has signed a co-author authorisation form declaring I am the primary author.

The Gnome Painting Technique marks the third and conclusive case study artwork of this research project. This project is also a collaboration between two artists, namely Australian Tully Moore and myself. The first iteration of this work was produced and shown at Gertrude Contemporary Art Center in Melbourne in 2015 and the second iteration at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery in 2016. Moore has signed a co-author authorisation form declaring I am the primary author. Both versions of the *Gnome*

² Søren Dahlgaard, "The Maldives Exodus Caravan show," published May 20, 2013, <http://the-maldives-exodus-caravan-show.com/> accessed February 7, 2019.

Painting Techniques were exhibited as part of the PhD exhibition at the Artspace gallery, Victorian College of the Arts May 29th - June 1st, 2018 and produced by me.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to undertake this PhD research with the support from Melbourne International Research Scholarship 2015 and Melbourne International Fee Remission Scholarship 2015. This practice-led PhD has been an opportunity to identify the essential questions my artistic practice offer. The journey has been a rewarding process and for that I am truly grateful.

Prof. Barbara Bolt, primary supervisor, many thanks for your welcoming and kind guidance throughout this journey and keen professional eye and mind on feedback to the projects different stages. To my initial secondary supervisor Dr. James Oliver, thank you for all the support and fruitful conversations. Dr. Simone Slee, my secondary supervisor for the last two years, thanks for your insights and encouragement. Thank you Dr. Danny Butt and Dr. Bernhard Sachs in your roles as coordinating the research from the research office of the art school.

Many thanks to Kylie White, the Artspace gallery, for hosting the PhD exhibition and Darren Munce and Mark Friedlander, at the VCA workshop, for your assistance to produce the slingshot second version and the two gnome installations for the PhD exhibition.

It has been a pleasure to work with my fellow collaborating artist colleagues Meir Tati and Tully Moore. The projects would not have been to same without your contributions. Thanks to the Margaret Lawrence Gallery staff in 2016, Scout Miles and Nicholas Pearce, for being a pleasure to work with during the installation and running of *The Gnome Painting Technique*. Thanks to Eyal Danon and Udi Edelman at the Israeli Centre for Digital Art, Holon, for the collaboration and financial support towards the production of *The Sling Shot Planting Technique*, 2016.

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My closest family, Amani Naseem, Eskil Dahlgaard and Olau Dahlgaard, have assisted in realising multiple iterations of the artistic work. *Walking Fuppidhoo* was made in collaboration with Olau's class and art teacher Hannah Rother-Gelder. Eskil helped realise the maiden flight with the inflatable island in Apollo Bay. These collaborations spurred vital developments and insights to the research. Thank you.

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***Sculpture as Activating Object* PhD exhibition**

Artspace, VCA, University of Melbourne, 2018. All images by Søren Dahlgaard unless otherwise stated.

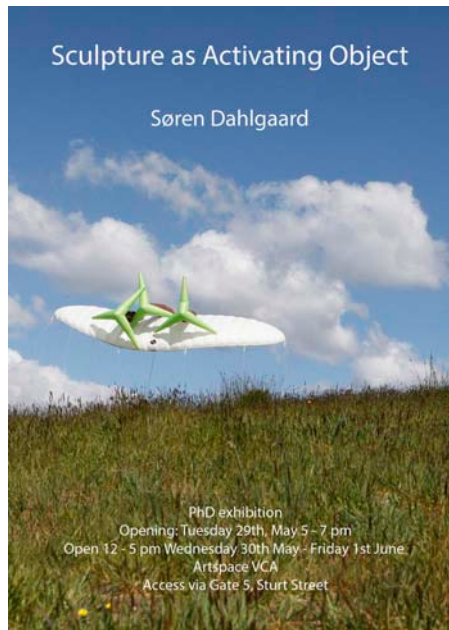


Figure 1 PhD Exhibition poster, 2018.

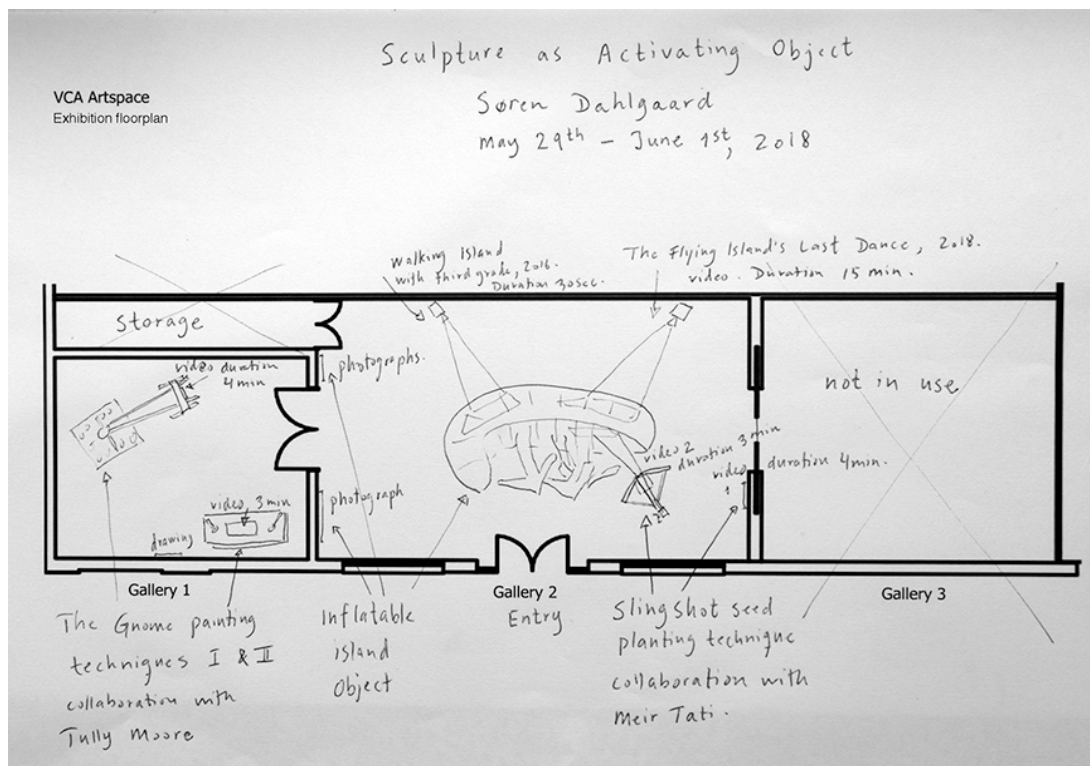


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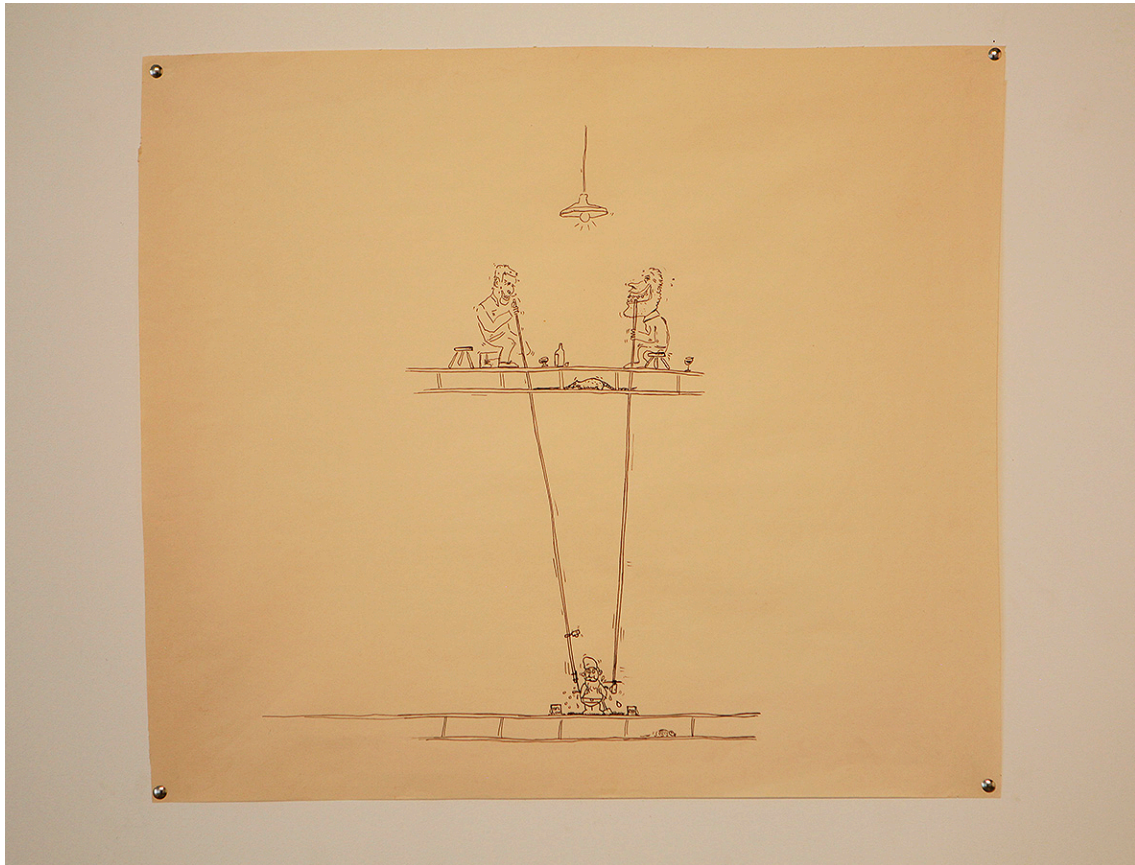


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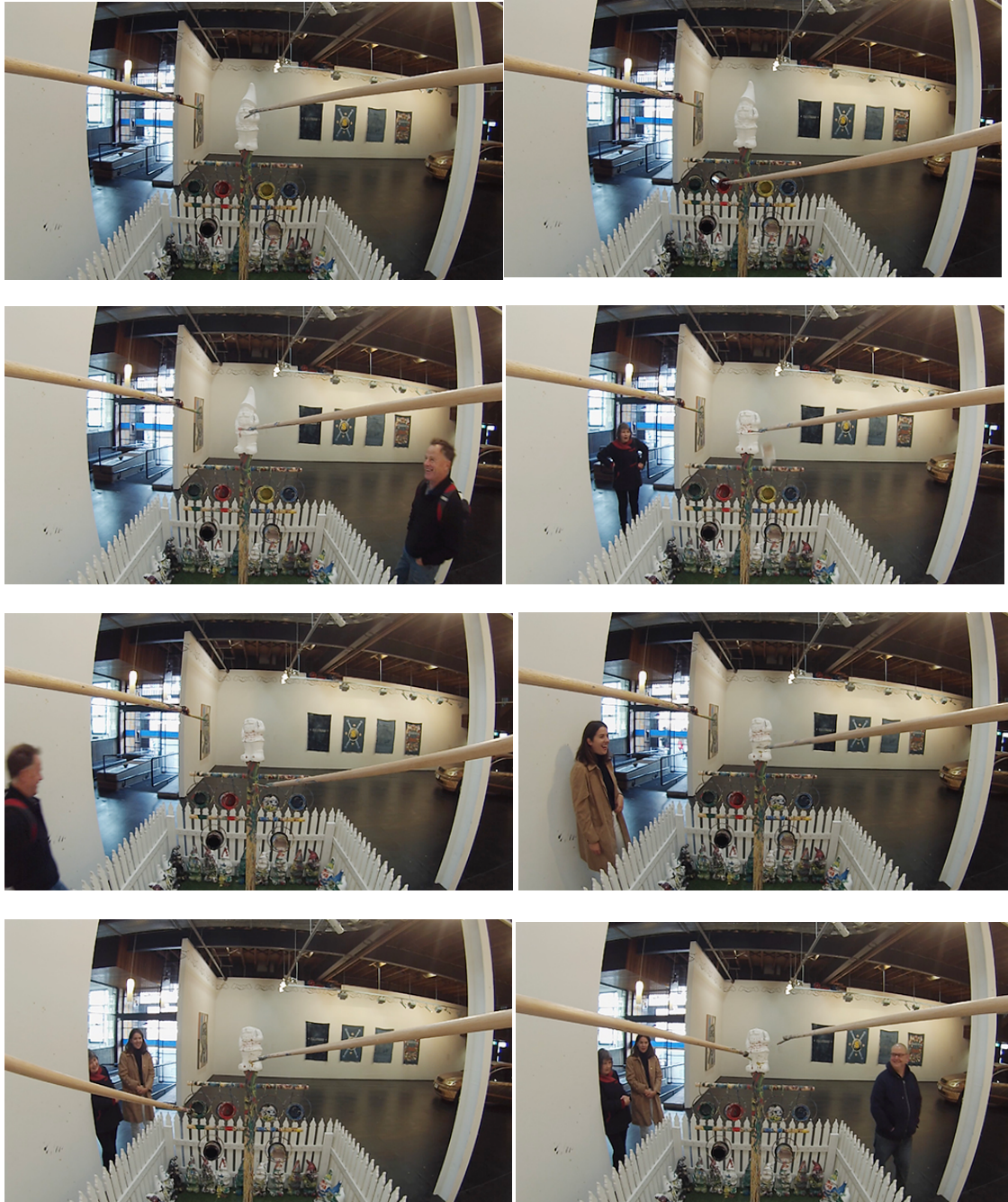


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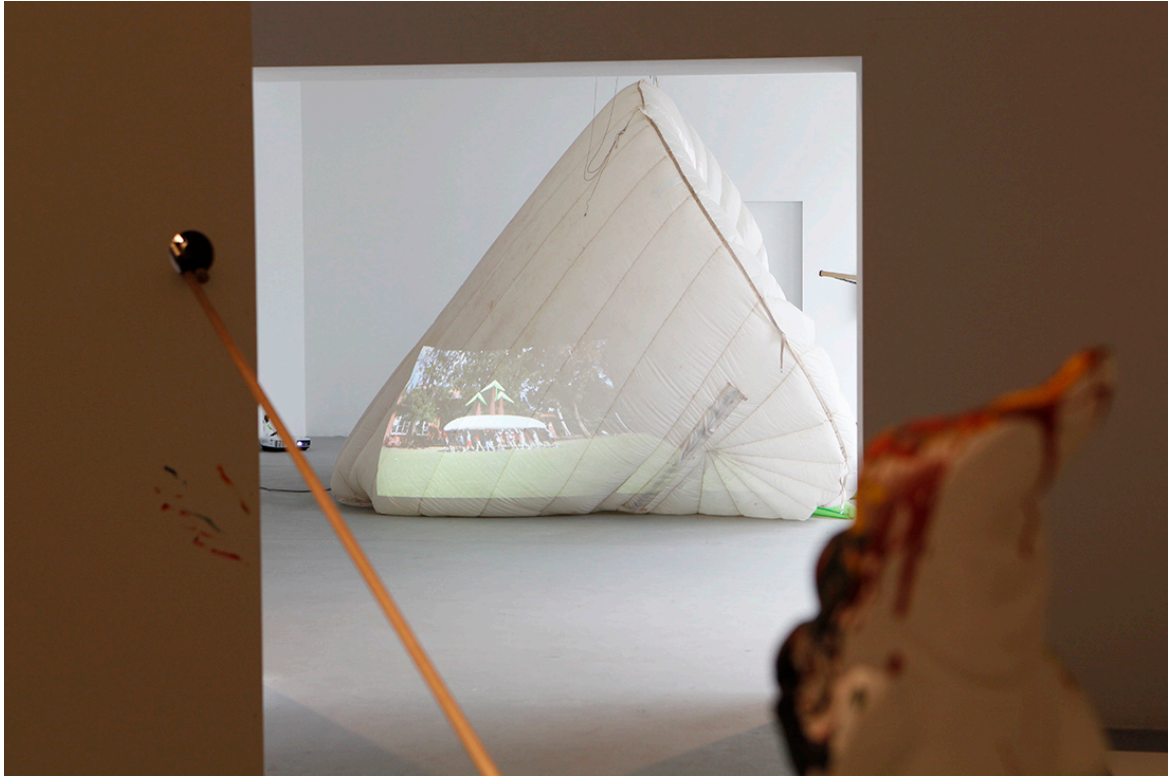


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Figure 17 View from room two through to gallery one.



Figure 18 Photo wall of the inflatable island in different landscapes, gallery two.



Figure 19 The inflatable island first flight, Apollo Bay, Victoria, Australia, 2016. Dimensions 100 x 150 cm.



Figure 20 The inflatable island installed in gallery two, with a video projection of *The Flying Island's Last Dance*. Duration 16 min. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/262704713> password: island. The video was shown with the music off due to the sound of the fan in the island and considerations of other works in the space. In the online video link, however, the video is displayed in a version including the audio composition of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*.



Figure 21 Installation view of gallery two with the Slingshot and the inflatable island.



Figure 22 Installation view of gallery two with the slingshot and the inflatable island, featuring a video still from *The Flying Island's Last Dance*. Duration 16 min. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/262704713> password: island.



Figure 23 Video stills from *The Flying Island's Last Dance*. Recorded in 2017. Edited in 2018. Duration 16 min. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/262704713> password: island.



Figure 24 Installation view gallery two, showing part of two video projections on the inflatable island: *The Flying Island's Last Dance* to the left and *Walking Fuppindhoo* to the right.



Figure 25 Installation view gallery two of the inflatable island, showing the video projection: *Walking Fuppindhoo*, 2016. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/222189354>



Figure 26 Installation view gallery two of the inflatable island, showing the video projection: *Walking Fuppidhoo*, 2016.



Figure 27 Video stills from *Walking Fuppidhoo*, 2016. Made in collaboration with 3rd grade students at Princess Hill Primary School, Melbourne. Duration of video: 30 sec. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/222189354>



Figure 28 Installation view of gallery two with the inflatable island and the Slingshot. Note the screen on the wall behind the Slingshot, showing *The Slingshot Planting Technique*, Holon, Israel, 2016, in collaboration with Meir Tati. Video duration: 5 min. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/224231514>.



Figure 29 Video stills from: *The Slingshot Planting Technique*, Holon, Israel, 2016, collaboration with Meir Tati. Video duration 5 min. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/224231514>



Figure 30 Installation view of gallery two with the inflatable island and the Slingshot.



Figure 31 Installation view gallery two. The Slingshot projects *The Slingshot Planting Technique* video from the Negev Desert, Israel, 2016, on to the inflatable island. Made in collaboration with Meir Tati. Video duration: 2 min. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/283906202>



Figure 32 Video stills from: *The Slingshot Planting Technique* video from the Negev Desert, Israel, 2016, collaboration with Meir Tati. Video duration 2 min. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/283906202>



Figure 33 Close up view of the slingshot next to the inflatable island in gallery two.

Introduction to the Thesis

Keywords: Activating object, action-sculpture, play, process and collaborations.

The Research Question

The over-riding question of this research is: In which ways can sculpture, within the context of participatory art, environmental art and action-sculpture, activate a process of transformation through play? This question leads to the sub-questions: In which ways might the process be the artwork? What is the agency of the activating sculptures of the case studies in this research? Moreover, how might the sculptures of the case studies activate collaborations with nature, materials and people? Further, how can the sculpture conceived of as an activating object extend notions of socially engaged art?

The Journey to the Research Question

Initially, the research project was titled *Art as a tool for Environmental Regeneration*. The vision was to create a food forest as a perma-culture model in a public park in Melbourne. Within a framework of art and ecology and socially engaged art, the intention with this project was to build awareness about ecology and the environment, through social and productive collaborations with members of the local community. This idea grew out of a vegetable farm I had established and operated in a very different environment to Melbourne, namely on a small coral island in the Maldives from 2002-04.³ Throughout the first year of research the first

³ S. Dahlgaard et al., *Growing Vegetables on a Coral Island: Hibalhidhoo* (Aarhus: Galleri Image, 2011).

format I had envisioned developed in ways I could never have anticipated. The change in direction came about through the practice-led research.

During a field trip to Israel in 2016, I studied educational models for learning through play and nature and visited *The Ecological Greenhouse School*.⁴ In Israel, I furthermore developed 'a tool for environmental regeneration', which became *The Slingshot Planting Technique*, one of the case studies of this research. During the research I began to understand how my action-sculpture practice can connect to socially engaged art, land art and ecology and play and be 'the tools for environmental regeneration' I first envisioned.

My artistic practice is developed on the foundations created by artists and movements such as Marcel Duchamp through conceptual art and idea of the ready-made and the Dada groups nonsensical actions and interventions. Also, the Japanese Gutai group's methods of working with play, movement and unconventional exhibition formats as well as Fluxus' absurd instructional pieces influence the research. The playful strategies of transformations in action-sculptures by Roman Signer, Erwin Wurm and Fischli and Weiss furthermore impact this research.

⁴ The Ecological Greenhouse School was founded by Israeli artist Avital Geva in 1977 and has operated since. The Ecological Greenhouse School combines art, learning, technology, perma-culture and aquaculture in a greenhouse where children from twenty schools around the area meet and work with artists and university researchers. The Ecological Greenhouse School approaches to learning and collaborations between people offer new ways to learn and grow. The school children and university researchers have together created several new-patented inventions. <http://www.greenhouse.org.il/> accessed November 17, 2018.

Introducing the Research Case Study Projects

The three art projects I have produced for this research are titled: *The Inflatable Island: Fuppidhoo*,⁵ *The Slingshot Planting Technique* and *The Gnome Painting Technique*. *Fuppidhoo* is an eight-meter-long inflatable tropical island made from nylon and inflated by a fan. It is an ongoing project that began in 2013 before this research started, and the first iteration was part of the exhibition *The Maldives Exodus Caravan Show*,⁶ shown in the Venice Biennale in 2013. In this exhibition, the inflatable island was installed on the roof of the exhibition space - a caravan. The iterations presented as part of this research with *Fuppidhoo* are all made during this research. The second project *The Slingshot Planting Technique* was produced in Israel in 2016 as a collaborative work with Israeli artist Meir Tati. We constructed a massive slingshot to shoot seed balls in a public wasteland as a way to sow local plants with an aim to improve this public space. The third project, *The Gnome Painting Technique*, is a collaborative work created with Australian artist Tully Moore in Melbourne in 2016. Exhibited at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery, the audience was able to paint a garden gnome with paintbrushes attached to long sticks through holes in the gallery wall during the exhibition.

Defining Key Terms

The terms 'activating object' and 'activating sculpture' used in this thesis, describes the agency of the sculpture-object in each of the three case studies. The agency of the

⁵ In Dhivehi, the language spoken in the Maldives, *fuppi* means inflated and *dhoo* island. Hence the name *Fuppidhoo* for the inflatable island sculpture.

⁶ Dahlgaard, "The Maldives Exodus Caravan Show."

sculpture objects is a process of transformation and collaborations through play. In this thesis, collaboration describes the process when the artwork is completed with the assistance of another agent. The different collaborations (collaborators/agents) include nature's forces, materials, both physical and immaterial, and people. For example, when audience members collaborate, they complete the work by either making a physical action or by physically manipulating material, which is part of the artwork. In the case studies of this research, the collaborators or co-producers always have a real physical impact on the resulting artwork.^{7, 8} The activating sculpture considers the role of the sculpture-object in the time based action-sculpture.

Challenges and Limitations

The activating sculptures have a continuous potential to produce new outcomes with a difference. Many elements play a role in shaping the outcome of the work, and the circumstances change at each new iteration – sometimes only a little at other times

⁷ An audience being engaged or participating in an artwork, is often used in research in art and most often refers to the idea that the audience are looking and thinking, at a painting on the wall for example. This understanding of being engaged and participating, refers to activity in the mind of the spectator. In other words, the engagement of the participating spectator/audience member is not physical, apart from walking around, nor are they collaborating in completing an artwork with physical materials. Most often the word 'engage' describes the spectator reflecting on the impressions the artwork communicates. Engaging with, or even completing, an artwork according to writers such as Jacques Ranciere, Umberto Eco and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, refers to brain activity, which I do hope my work also activates. The primary focus of this thesis, however, is on how the case study sculptures activate a physical, collaborative process to complete an iteration of the work.

⁸ A common understanding of the terms audience participation and engagement is found in phenomenology, of which the Danish artist Olafur Eliasson is a prolific practitioner and advocate. Phenomenology is a theory, which describes sensing the artwork through your senses. Eliasson demonstrate how 'seeing yourself sensing' makes the audience a co-producers of the work. MoMA exhibition, Olafur Eliasson, New York: MoMA, published, 2002, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/161> accessed February 18, 2019.

Eliasson's argument is the audience co-produces the artwork by producing their own experience (through their senses). Phenomenology describes a different understanding of the relationship between the artwork and the spectator but uses some of the same words.

the work transform considerably. The outcomes presented in this thesis therefore only represent examples.⁹

Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured in eight chapters. Chapter one lays out the context of practice and theory, chapter two the conceptual framework and the methodology. The three case studies titled *The Inflatable Island: Fuppido*, *The Slingshot Planting Technique* and *The Gnome Painting Technique* are presented in chapters three, four and five. In these three chapters, I discuss and depict different aspects of the artworks of this research in relation to the context of practice and theory as well as the methods, with a continuing focus on the overall research question. Chapter six considers the PhD exhibition of the three case study artworks. Chapter seven includes a discussion of the three research art projects and chapter eight finally sum up the key findings and contributions to new knowledge.

In the appendix to the thesis, I include an interview with New York-based, Mexican artist and writer Pablo Helguera. The interview provides an opportunity to address the case studies and research questions with a significant practitioner in the field of

⁹ An encounter with a work of art is a subjective experience and how one perceives a work is an individual experience. Art works, for example I perceive as particularly different from mine can be analysed and depicted to very similar findings and conclusions by other writers. For example, I read a PhD thesis on art in which the art works sounded as if they could be my case studies. When I attended the completion seminar and later the PhD exhibition by the artist, to my surprise the work was very different to my work. In other words, significantly different works of art may appear to be quite similar in the text of a thesis. This is a problem, to be aware of since it poses a challenge to how works of art are discussed, compared and understood. A way I address this challenge is to refer to a number of artworks in this thesis, which I find to be the closest companions to my work in terms of their personality, that is their aesthetics, concept, style, humour and references.

socially engaged art and have a discussion about the questions the research raises through the framework of Helguera's writing and experience.

1. Context of Practice and Theory

Introduction

In this chapter, I situate the context of practice and theory of my research project. This practice-led research sits at an intersection of three established genres in art, namely land art, action-sculpture and socially engaged art. Within this particular overlap of art genres, the concept of play occupies a crucial role. In the case studies of this research, play is used as a method to activate a creative and productive process of collaborations with nature, materials and people to complete the artwork.

In this chapter, I present work by artists who are critical practitioners in the three mentioned fields of art. Some of these artists have influenced my work in significant ways over a long period, and it is important to acknowledge this. Other artists' works I include in this chapter, I have discovered more recently. For this reason, their work has not influenced my work directly but rather serve as examples, which bear conceptual or methodological similarities to the case studies of this research and therefore assist in shedding light on the research question of this thesis. The aim of this chapter is furthermore to demonstrate that the particular contextual framing in itself is original.

Land Art and Ecological Art

The 1960s marked a new eco-consciousness in the United States, and Europe sparked in part by the book *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson from 1962.¹⁰ The book

¹⁰ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962).

highlights the negative impact on the environment caused by pesticides in large-scale agriculture – ecological issues that were never before put forward to the American public. This cast the foundation of grassroots activist movements and led to the establishment of the US Environmental Protection Agency in 1970. In the arts, Lucy Lippard has been one of the principal writers on ecological concerns. Lippard was early to recognise dematerialisation in conceptual art and has furthermore made significant contributions in research as an activist and feminist.^{11, 12}

These developments inspired some of the most radical and experimental artists of the 1960s. In essence, many artists left the city and went into the wild landscapes of the western United States to create some of the most iconic artworks of this time. In 1968 the group exhibition *Earth Works* at the Dwan Gallery in New York became one of the first manifestations of this new trend, which later became known as land art.¹³ This ground-breaking new way of thinking about and making art was shaped by figures such as Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, Walter De Maria, Dennis Oppenheim, Michael Heizer and James Turrell.¹⁴ Moving vast quantities of earth, rock and gravel in works such as *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, and *Double Negative*, 1969, in Utah and Nevada, created permanent shapes or scars in the natural landscape. From our perspective today, we may question the ecological ethics of these strategies of using heavy machinery and fossil fuel energy resources to create art about ecology. But at the

¹¹ L. Lippard et al., *Weather Report: Art and Climate Change* (Boulder: Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007).

¹² "Lucy Lippard Bibliography" Encyclopædia Britannica, published May, 2009, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lucy-Lippard> accessed 23 December 2018.

¹³ Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Michael Lailach, *Land art* (Cologne: Taschen, 2007) 6 - 95.

time, these works were made partly in response to the environmental concerns, partly to escape the modernism of the 'white cube'¹⁵ exhibition format and also as a means to connect with nature in new ways. It showed a new way of making art with materials from nature, in nature that changed nature and could equally change people's perception of nature. Contrasting the heavy shifting of materials mentioned above, Dennis Oppenheim's work *Whirlpool (Eye of the Storm)*, 1973, in which a small aeroplane discharged white smoke in the sky over El Mirage Dry Lake, Southern California, demonstrates a more subtle and ephemeral approach to creating earth art.¹⁶

At the other end of the material spectrum were Fluxus' early performance works from the early 1960s, creating art as actions – what Lucy Lippard would come to describe as 'de-materialising the art object'.¹⁷ This new artistic practice where process, experience, documenting, archiving and analysing became the medium itself, shifted the established ideas of what art was and could be and crossed art-making into the areas of literary theory, philosophy and social sciences. These investigative methods, framed as institutional critique, were often focused on the art world itself, and became a distinct direction in contemporary art of the late 1960s and 1970s. Standing on the shoulders of Joseph Beuys and his influential idea of

¹⁵ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: The Lapis Press, 2000).

Land art was also an institutional critique of the museum and the white cube and the associated power structures.

¹⁶ Lailach, *Land Art*, 82-83.

¹⁷ Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1973).

‘social sculpture’,¹⁸ figures such as Hans Haacke and Marcel Broodthaers made use of tools such as investigative research to reveal the systems they questioned and critiqued. These artists wanted to affect both social and environmental change.¹⁹

With a professed interest in land and site as artistic materials, the American artist Alan Sonfist proposed in the 1960s a large-scale environmental sculpture in Manhattan entitled *Time Landscape* consisting of native plants of that area from pre-colonial times. It was eventually realised in 1978 and still exists today. This forest presents a living vision and reminder of the value and fragility of our natural environment. Similarly, Argentinean artist Nicolás García Urriburu created a spectacular environmental work in Canal Grande for the Venice Biennale in 1968 using the pigment fluorescein, which turns bright green on contact with the microorganisms in the water. He has repeated this intervention in several locations around the world since. Photographic reproductions of these bright green rivers have raised awareness of the problems of water pollution to the public.²⁰

Shortly after Urriburu’s nature-focused works, US artist duo the Harrisons created *Portable Fish Farm: Survival Piece 3* at London’s Hayward Gallery in 1971. This work, along with many other later productions, highlighted environmental problems in

¹⁸ Laurie Rojas, “Beuys’ Concept of Social Sculpture and Relational Art Practices Today,” *Chicago Art Magazine*, published November 29, 2010. <http://chicagoartmagazine.com/2010/11/beuys%E2%80%99-concept-of-social-sculpture-and-relational-art-practices-today/> accessed November 18, 2018.

¹⁹ T.J. Demos, “The Politics of Sustainability: Contemporary Art and Ecology” In *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969–2009*, published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at the Barbican Art Gallery, eds. Francesco Manacorda (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 2009), 16-30. <http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/3417> accessed November 18, 2019.

²⁰ Andrew Brown, *Art & Ecology Now* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014), 13.

conventional agri-, horti- and aquacultures such as resource depletion and water pollution. Their work proposes alternative methods that try to solve these issues in imaginative and sometimes controversial ways, such as the mentioned *Portable Fish Farm* installation where catfish were electrocuted before being skinned and filleted. Mierle Laderman Ukeles's *Touch Sanitation*, 1979-80, had similar concerns about pollution. As part of the work, Ukele shook hands with the 8500 sanitation workers in New York City and thanked each one of them individually. She recorded the conversations, documented the handshakes and mapped the locations of these meetings. It is an example of early eco-art that combines social, political and environmental issues, and engages community members in educating them about the consequences of a high consumerist lifestyle.²¹

In the 1980s the successful Franklin-Gordon 'wild rivers' campaign, in Tasmania, Australia,²² used the photograph *Morning Mist*, Rock Island Bend, Franklin River, by photographer Peter Dombrovskis to advertise against a massive dam construction that would ecologically ruin that location. The beautiful colour photograph was printed and distributed to most households in Australia and helped stir public opinion on the importance of protecting nature. The campaign subsequently led to

²¹ P. Phillips, "Maintenance Activity: Creating a Climate for Change," in *But Is It Art: The Spirit of Art as Activism*, eds. Nina Felshin (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1995), 165-193.

²² Matthew Jones, "Peter Dombrovskis: Journeys into the wild," *Canberra Times*, September 19, 2017, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/peter-dombrovskis-journeys-into-the-wild-20170918-gyjo1o.html> accessed July 5, 2017.

the area was protected by the UNESCO World Heritage register.²³ This is an example of an environmental achievement triggered by activism and an artistic image.

In 1982, US-based Hungarian artist, Agnes Denes created a spectacular two-acre eco-intervention titled *Wheatfield – A Confrontation* in lower Manhattan near Wall Street. Denes harvested the ripe wheat field on a large combine harvester next to some of the most expensive real estate in the world. The work raised issues about food production and world hunger, trade and economics, waste and ecological concerns. The grain travelled to many cities around the world as part of the exhibition The International Art Show for the *End of World Hunger*, 1987-90. The seeds were distributed at the exhibitions and planted by people in many parts of the world as a way to connect people, land and food production on a global scale.²⁴

Norwegian writer and philosopher Arne Naess was influenced by Carson's book *Silent Spring* and coined the term 'deep-ecology.' Naess argues that humans need to deeply change their 'behaviour in the direction of ecological responsibility'.²⁵ This viewpoint is part of what drives the ecological art movement; it addresses ethical issues of how we live on this planet. Artists such as Mel Chin, Kathryn Miller and Michael Singer set out to try and heal the environment through their projects and are some of the first so-called remediationist artists. These artists believe art can be more than an object to look at and sell – it can also have a direct positive impact on

²³ Tim Bonhady, "The Photo That Changed Us," *The Weekend Australian*, April 20, 1996, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/39041927?q&versionId=51876864> accessed July 5, 2017.

²⁴ Agnes Denes, "The Dream Critical Inquiry," Vol. 16, No. 4. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Summer, 1990, 919-939.

²⁵ Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 31.

the natural environment. Mel Chin's *Revival Field*, 1991- ongoing, is designed to clean contaminated soil on an old industrial site in Minnesota using special hyper-accumulator plants to extract the heavy metals.²⁶ Kathryn Miller's *Seed Bombing Raytheon back lot*, Goleta, California, 1992, was a small urban intervention of seed bombs that the artist threw in degraded areas she thought needed new vegetation.

By the end of the eighties, US eco-artist Michael Singer had become renowned for his innovative approach to garden design, architecture, infrastructure and planning as a means to 'promote environmental justice, generate ecological renewal, inspire civic responsibility and enhance the quality of life without sacrificing economic viability'.²⁷ He asks questions such as: How do we balance and integrate human needs with those of nature, how do we co-exist with nature rather than separate us from it? Singer responds by creating ecological gardens, such as Concourse C. Denver International Airport, 1994, Colorado. In another major commission, Singer transformed the power plant Solid Waste Transfer and Recycling Centre, 1989-1993, Phoenix, Arizona into an inviting place with an aesthetic utilisation of green technology by letting nature take over facades and leisure areas on and between the buildings.²⁸ Through an interdisciplinary artistic practice, Singer shows how to innovatively address environmental, social, political and economic challenges, as well as providing solutions that promote regenerative outcomes. As US eco-artist Lynne Hull

²⁶ "Website of Mel Chin," <http://melchin.org/oeuvre/revival-field> accessed July 17, 2017.

²⁷ Else-Marie Bukdahl, *The re-enchantment of nature and urban space: Michael Singer projects in art, design and environmental regeneration* (Aalborg: The Utzon Center, 2011), 9-104.

²⁸ Ibid, 9-104.

puts it, 'I believe that the creativity of artists can be applied to real-world problems and can have an effect on urgent social and environmental issues.'²⁹

Practitioners from land art of the late 1960s-70s such as, Robert Smithson³⁰ and Christo and Jeanne-Claude,³¹ represent a sculptural approach and aesthetics, which has influenced and shaped my art practice since I discovered their work in the mid-1990s. Smithson's most notable works include *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, and *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, 1971.³² These two works are recognised by many artists today as investigations into geological time, which connects to current trends and concepts such as the Anthropocene Epoch.³³

²⁹ "Website of The Green Museum," http://greenmuseum.org/content/artist_content/ct_id-188_artist_id-7.html accessed July 17, 2017.

³⁰ Brown, *Art & Ecology Now*, 11.

³¹ "Website of Christo and Jeanne-Claude," <http://christojeanneclaude.net/> accessed July 4, 2018.

³² "Website for Broken Circle/Spiral Hill," <http://www.brokencircle.nl/> accessed 7 November 2018.

Spiral Jetty is a 460-meter long spiral shaped road, built with gravel, on the Salt Lake in Utah, USA. This land art work is regarded by many artists and scholars as Smithson's most important work and has been elevated by art historians in numerous books and articles over the years, to represent the field of land art of the 1970's as one of the most iconic works. One year after completing *Spiral Jetty*, Smithson travelled to Europe and created the only remaining permanent land art piece in Europe, *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*. It is located in a quarry on the outskirts of the town of Emmen in the Northeast of The Netherlands.

³³ Have human beings permanently changed the planet? That seemingly simple question has sparked a new battle between geologists and environmental advocates over what to call the time period we live in. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/what-is-the-anthropocene-and-are-we-in-it-164801414/> accessed January 31, 2019.

The Anthropocene Epoch, unofficial interval of geologic time, making up the third worldwide division of the Quaternary Period (2.6 million years ago to the present), characterized as the time in which the collective activities of human beings (*Homo sapiens*) began to substantially alter Earth's surface, atmosphere, oceans, and systems of nutrient cycling. A growing group of scientists argue that the Anthropocene Epoch should follow the Holocene Epoch (11,700 years ago to the present) and begin in the year 1950. The name Anthropocene is derived from Greek and means the "recent age of man." Although American biologist Eugene Stoermer coined the term in the late 1980s, Dutch chemist and Nobelist Paul Crutzen is largely credited with bringing public attention to it at a conference in 2000 as well as in a newsletter printed the same year.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude and Australian photographer artist Rosemary Laing are artists who place fabric in the landscape, within a context of environmental awareness. These artists transform nature temporarily with human-made fabrics. These works relate rather closely to the inflatable island case study of this research, as we shall see in chapter three. With the inflatable island, I visited the site of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's project *Wrapped Coast* from 1969,³⁴ at Little Bay located approximately 10 km South of Sydney on the Australian South Pacific coast. Today there is not a trace remaining on site of the one million square feet of fabric, which covered a large section of the rocky coastline fifty years ago offering a unique experience of the landscape for the visiting public as they walked on the fabric as well as making an ironic image.

The Australian photographer artist, Rosemary Laing's work, represents the juxtaposition of constructed elements, in the 'natural' landscape to produce a staged photograph. Laing uses the method of installation staging the photograph in many of her artworks. An example of this is the photograph in which she laid down a vivid carpet pattern on the forest floor and then photographed it.³⁵ Cut around rocks and the roots of trees, the scene brings to mind European settlers gradually making a home in the Australian landscape, and how the altering of this ground also displaced what was there before.

<https://www.britannica.com/science/Anthropocene-Epoch> and
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/29/declare-anthropocene-epoch-experts-urge-geological-congress-human-impact-earth> both accessed January 31, 2019.

³⁴ Christo and Jeanne-Claude, "Personal Website."

³⁵ "Rosemary Laing" Art Gallery NSW, published 2001,
<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/451.2001/> accessed January 31, 2019.



Figure 34 Rosemary Laing *The Flowering of the Strange Orchid*, 2017 from the series *Buddens* archival pigment print, 100 x 200 cm. Courtesy: Rosemary Laing and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne.

Laing's projects draw upon both the histories of a place or situation and the conditions that create its contemporary circumstance. From these considerations, she develops the undertakings that become her images. Laing's projects characteristically take a couple of years to complete, involving travel and time in place of her subject to develop the vocabulary of her images.

The Flowering of the Strange Orchid, figure 34, references the history of landscape painting and photography, and how early settler Europeans had tried to make sense of the strange Australian landscape. Laing's insertion of a carpet belonging to a domestic interior into this pocket of the wild bush landscape is also suggestive of the destruction of natural habitat and the introduction of foreign plant and animal species into the Australian environment. While some photo-artists might care most about the final image, for Laing, the process is paramount, as she states:

Fundamental to the work I make is being physically in a place and within a situation; working with the experience of the place and the situation as

well as the uncontrollable factors that inherently arise within it. The intention of the idea pitted amidst these factors is what the work is. It's the actions that I undertake that are of primary importance, and making an image of that action and printing it remains like some sort of aftermath, some sort of leftover, that remembers that I undertook the action.³⁶

Laing recognises the creative process of being on site and allowing nature's uncontrollable factors to influence the outcome of the work. This method of working has close associations to the case studies of this research, as we shall learn later.

The Anthropocene and Environmental Awareness

In 2009, British-based Pakistan artist and writer, Rasheed Araeen published the manifesto *Eco-Aesthetics*.³⁷ Artists and writers in the field of art and ecology have since diligently referenced this manifesto. *Eco-Aesthetics* challenges the artist to make a real impact in the world and critiques the traditional artwork as a bourgeois fetishised object, which only exists for the art market. Araeen's manifesto is relevant today however his points echo artistic positions from the 1960s mentioned earlier in this section.³⁸

³⁶ Ingrid Kesa, "Photo Artist Rosemary Laing Stages Cinematic Scenes in Unexpected Environments," VICE, published August 27, 2015, https://creators.vice.com/en_au/article/kbpqx3/rosemary-laing-interview accessed November 17, 2018.

³⁷ Rasheed Araeen, "Ecoaesthetics: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century" *Third Text* 23, no. 5 (2009): 679-684.

³⁸ My introduction to Araeen's manifesto *Eco-Aesthetics* occurred on the occasion of my exhibition *Hibalahidhoo: Growing Vegetable on a Coral Island*, 2011, in Aarhus Contemporary Art Centre, Denmark, which took his manifesto as a framework for the exhibitions that year. In the book by the same title as the exhibition, Araeen discusses the vegetable farm project in relation to his manifesto.

Land art and ecological art relate to the English Object-Oriented Philosopher Timothy Morton formulation of the term *Hyperobject*. The ecological crisis, including global warming, pollution and the distinction of many species is a problem too large and complex to grasp, and this is what Morton hope *Hyperobjects* can describe. *Hyperobjects* is a concept, which defies traditional ideas about what a thing or problem is. Morton insists that we have to reinvent how we think even to begin to comprehend the world in which we now live. In his book *Hyperobjects*, he outlines the first steps; being a genuinely post-modern ecological approach to thought and action.³⁹ Morton is a proponent of Object-Oriented Ontology (O.O.O.), which is a school of thought that rejects the privileging of human existence over the existence of nonhuman objects.⁴⁰

In his book *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, 2016 Morton hopes to re-establish our ties to nonhuman beings and to help us rediscover the playfulness and joy that can 'brighten the dark, strange loop we traverse.' Morton compares the situation of the lack of ecological awareness in the general public in the world today

Araeen's reflections opened up new ways of thinking about the work I had done on the small coral island in the Maldives from 2002-04 by placing it in the context of art and ecology. Even though the vegetable farm was active between 2002-04, it was only since the conversation with Araeen in 2011, that I came to understand this project as Eco-Aesthetics or within the broader field of art and ecology.

S. Dahlgaard et al., *Discussion: Rasheed Araeen and Søren Dahlgaard: Growing Vegetables on a Coral Island Hibalhidhoo* (Aarhus: Galleri Image, 2011), 68 – 76.

In 1998 artists Rirkrit Tiravenija and Kamin Lerdchapraserit initiated The Land Foundation near Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand. This project bears several parallels to the vegetable farm Hibalhidhoo. I had the opportunity to visit The Land Foundation in 2012 and meet both Rirkrit Tiravenija and Kamin Lerdchapraserit. www.thelandfoundation.org accessed December 23, 2018.

³⁹ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 10-26.

⁴⁰ Timothy Morton, "Ecology Without Nature," published 2012, <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com/p/ooo-for-beginners.html> accessed January 31, 2019.

to the Classical story of Oedipus, where it turns out that humans are the plague and culprit, in this case of the possibility of ecological catastrophe.⁴¹ Morton argues that this environmental emergency is also a crisis for our philosophical habits of thought, confronting us with a problem that seems to defy not only our control but also our understanding of the natural environment.

How do we comprehend something we cannot even see, such as the CO² concentration measured in parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere and rising temperatures caused by climate change? The French philosopher Bruno Latour writes about our notion Earth and refers to the famous photograph taken in 1968 (published in Life magazine in 1969) of Earth, known as 'Earthrise.'⁴² Latour makes a point about how we feel powerless about the ecological crisis because we are disconnected from nature. This is partly due to our view of the world, which can be described from the influence of the iconic Earthrise image, we, therefore, need to change the way we think about Earth as an object to better be able to grasp what Morton describes as *Hyperobjects*.⁴³

The American paleoanthropologist Donald Johansson states 'We really are Homo Egocentricus' and goes on to say 'we have to reinvent a real reverence for the natural world. We seem to have forgotten that nature is our creator. Johansson argues that

⁴¹ T. Morton, "Ecology in the shadow of Oedipus," in *Yes Naturally: How Art Saves the World*, eds. Ine Gevers, Pierre Bouvier and Rick Dolphijn (Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 2013), 18-23.

⁴² On Christmas Eve 1968, astronaut Bill Anders captured the rising Earth, as the Apollo 8 spacecraft rounded the dark side of the moon.
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/dec/22/ behold-blue-plant-photograph-earthrise>, December 22, 2018 accessed December 23, 2018.

⁴³ Bruno Latour. *Waiting for Gaia: Composing the Common World through Arts and Politics*. Lecture at the French Institute, London, 2011.

we (human beings) need to take the incredible responsibility we have as the most creative, the most powerful, and also the most destructive species on this planet, very seriously.⁴⁴ Johansson sums up one of the essential points many artists address through their work, within the field of ecological art. From Carson's book in the 1960s to Johansson statement in 2018, the message remains the same. The relevance of addressing environmental concerns in the world continues.



Figure 35 British artist Alex Hartley's *Nowhereisland*, 2012, arriving in England's Southwest coast. Image: Max McClure.

Addressing ecological issues but also issues of migration and borders, the British artist Alex Hartley's *Nowhereisland*, 2011-12,⁴⁵ is an art project comprising a mobile island. The island is constructed from many tonnes of soil and stones loaded on an extensive barge pulled behind a tugboat, quite similar to Robert Smithson's *Floating*

⁴⁴ Video interview with Donald Johansson by the Danish nature and science festival Bloom, October 17, 2018, www.bloom.ooo accessed October 20, 2018.

⁴⁵ Commissioned by Claire Doherty of the Bristol based arts organization *Situations*.

Island, 1970/2005,⁴⁶ but without vegetation.⁴⁷ The main idea of *Nowhereisland*, according to Hartley, was to create a new country, where anyone could sign up online to become members of this new state sailing in international waters. According to the curator of the project, Claire Doherty of Situations in Bristol, 23,003 people did so from 135 countries making *Nowhereisland* a highly participatory artistic work. The artist proposed that its citizens write *Nowhereisland's* constitution as an ongoing process.



Figure 36 Robert Smithson *Floating Island*, drawing 1970, work realised in 2005 on the occasion of a retrospective exhibition of Smithson's work at the Whitney Museum, New York. Photo: Jane Cohan © Estate of Robert Smithson, courtesy of the James Cohan Gallery, New York.

⁴⁶ Robert Smithson *Floating Island*, drawing 1970, work realised in 2005 on the occasion of a retrospective exhibition of Smithson's work at the Whitney Museum, New York. www.robertsmithson.com/earthworks/floating_island.htm accessed October 20, 2018.

⁴⁷ Claire Doherty, *Public Art Now: Out of Time, Out of Place* (London: Art Books Publishing Ltd., 2015), 22-29.

This allowed engagement to happen over time and extended *Nowhereisland* to a work of co-production. The journey of *Nowhereisland* became the visual heart of the project, but it became something more also, a multifaceted work that developed over time and space through the participation of many people. As the artist Suzanne Lacy has observed:

Powerful ways of acting spring from powerful ways of seeing. Yes, visual images can be manipulative, but they can also be transforming in ways we do not always immediately understand. Even hearing about this image from *Nowhereisland* – a ship pulling a land mass between continents – begins the imaginative process: what on Earth would that look like?⁴⁸

Inflatables in the Name of Ecology

Several artists and architects have created innovative and intriguing works addressing themes of ecology with inflatables. The British architect and artist Graham Stevens have designed inflatable architectural spaces since the 1970s.⁴⁹ One of his notable works is the *Desert Cloud*, 1972, which is a large mattress shaped inflatable hovering over a desert. As the rays of the morning sun heat the air inside the inflatable, it ascends into the sky. The purpose of Stevens aesthetic *Desert Cloud* is to produce two things commonly lacking in a desert, namely shade and water. Firstly, as the *Desert Cloud* hovers in the air, it creates a shadow underneath.

⁴⁸Suzanne Lacy, "The Uncertainty of Land and the Mutability of Art," Resident Thinkers, published 2012, www.nowhereisland.org, accessed 17 July, 2017.

⁴⁹ Graham Stevens was a student of Buckminster Fuller in the 1960s and much of Stevens work is underpinned by a similar ecological awareness, which is aimed to create aesthetic practical solutions to global environmental challenges. These issues have grown so profound that it is mainstream rather than avant-garde for artists and architects today, to address these concerns.

Secondly, the *Desert Cloud* traps early morning mist from the air on its surface, through condensation, which later ‘rains’ from the ‘cloud’ on the land below.

Ultimately the *Desert Cloud* could help transform desert areas into more habitable areas. Stevens explains his mantra for kinetic art of the 1970s,⁵⁰ which is the art of movement, participation and environment. His general idea is to involve the audience physically in the artwork as a way to create a direct connection between the body and the surrounding work. In Stevens’ words, ‘it is participation by participating and becoming part of, and affecting, the outcome of the work.’⁵¹

Buckminster Fuller’s large flying utopian spheres inspired Stevens⁵² and references can also be drawn from these examples with the contemporary Argentinean artist Tomás Saraceno’s inflatable’s when he more recently produced an inflatable from recycled plastic bags and using the principles physics, as Stevens employed, to create ascent. *The Castle of Vooruit* by the Turkish artist Ahmed Ögüt’s is an example of a floating inflatable representing a large rock.⁵³

Artworks and images, such as the Franklin Gordon River photograph, *Earthrise* and *Nowhereisland*, can communicate complex environmental issues (Hyperobjects as Morton has coined) capturing the minds of people viewing the work who then become co-collaborators in the artworks making. Through engagement and participation, people gain a deeper awareness of the issues the artists wish to

⁵⁰ In the 1960-70s kinetic art was considered an avant-garde form of art.

⁵¹ Lecture by Graham Stevens titled: *Desert Cloud and other lightweight wonders*, University of Westminster, 2013. Quotation approximately four minutes into the video lecture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-hGmd-j34I> accessed October 14, 2018.

⁵² According to Stevens, *ibid*.

⁵³ These flying inflatables, however, have only come to my attention recently and have therefore not inspired the case studies.

address. The themes occupying the artist in the next section are the transformation of everyday objects, sometimes including flight, nature and people as collaborators to complete the work. A common starting point, however, is ideas around sculpture and time.

Action-Sculpture

The case studies of this research are situated within the field of action-sculpture and owe a significant influence to its foremost practitioners Swiss artists Roman Signer, Peter Fischli and David Weiss, Austrian artist Erwin Wurm and US artist Chris Burden.⁵⁴ If I should point to one artist specifically, who has influenced my artistic methodology most profoundly, it is Roman Signer.⁵⁵ Signer can extend ideas around sculpture with time and absurd yet straightforward transformations, which to me represents a unique combination of process and humour into notions of sculpture. In this section, I will present examples of action-sculpture transformations of everyday objects and strategies for how to complete the work in collaborations with nature's forces, materials and even the audience.

The main historical trends, which have shaped what is now known as action-sculpture, can be said to begin with French artist Marcel Duchamp and his infamous ready-made objects such as *Bottle Rack*, 1914 and *Fountain*, 1917, where he showed that art could be a concept rather than an object. Everyday readymade objects were

⁵⁴ It is a coincidence that five of the six artists I mention hail from the European Alps, namely Austria and Switzerland. I have no explanation to why I find artists in particular from the Alps influential to my artistic practice.

⁵⁵ Roman Signer was born in 1938 in Appenzell, Switzerland. He has been working as an artist since the early 1970's and presently lives and works in St. Gallen, Switzerland.

since used to facilitate the idea of the action-sculpture. The artwork by Duchamp that has been the most influential to my work is his lesser-known happening where Duchamp strapped a paintbrush to the tail of a donkey in 1910. The donkey then produced a painting automatically because of the natural gesture of its tail, which is, to wave it forth and back. In the notes to his work: *The Green Box* Duchamp suggested using a Rembrandt painting as an ironing board. The idea was to reverse the transformation of the everyday object into a work of art by suggesting the opposite: the transformation of an artwork into an everyday object.^{56, 57, 58} The Dada movement formed shortly after Duchamp's conceptualisation of the ready-made and Duchamp was part of this group or movement in post-WWI Europe based in Paris in the 1920s.⁵⁹ In the Dada art movement nonsense was used for comic amusement or satire or to illustrate a point about language or reasoning. Duchamp wanted his art to satisfy the mind. He wanted to make art that made people think, laugh, and play. His art was conceptual. Duchamp wanted to open the experience of art up to everyone, not just the artists who created the work and the rich people who could afford to buy it. Calvin Tompkins, an art critic, said, '(Duchamp) suggested that art could be a form of play, a game between the artist and the onlooker.'⁶⁰ Duchamp believed that the

⁵⁶ I still find this idea cutting-edge. But where would we go if the materials of artworks transformed back into the materials they originally were? This would then undo art. In this thesis I stay with Duchamp's first idea of transforming everyday materials into art. Exploring Duchamp's next idea could be another research project.

⁵⁷ David Hopkins, Dawn Ades and Neil Cox, *Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

⁵⁸ Eds. Phillip Dennis Cate, *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor and the Avant Garde, 1875-1905* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

⁵⁹ Hopkins, Ades, Cox, *Marcel Duchamp*.

⁶⁰ Calvin Tompkins, "Duchamp: A Biography," *The Washington Post*, 1996.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/duchamp.htm> accessed October 14, 2018.

participant, the person looking at the art, was just as important, if not more, than the artist. Duchamp speaks of the joy he found in the spinning bicycle wheel that he mounted upside down to a kitchen stool. Duchamp said, 'It just came about as a pleasure, something to have in my room, the way you have fire or a pencil sharpener, except that there was no usefulness. It was a pleasant gadget, pleasant for the movement it gave.'⁶¹ With this type of conceptual artwork, he was playing with everyday objects by using them for something other than their original purpose.

Post-WWII saw another highly innovative art movement, in Japan called the Gutai group, active from the late 1940s and into the 50s.⁶² The Gutai group was an avant-garde collective exploring new art forms combining performance, painting, and interactive environments through the spirit and call, 'Do what has never been done before!' from the group's founder Yoshihara Jiro.⁶³ In the 1960s-70s, New York was the epicentre for the latest developments in contemporary art with movements such as avant-garde, Fluxus, conceptualism and minimalism. While in Europe during that time artists such as Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, Jean Tinguely, Alexander Calder, Poul Gernes and Niki de Saint Phalle, were also developing a playful approach to making art, which trickles through and influence this research.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ming Tiampo and Alexandra Munroe, *Gutai: Splendid Playground* (New York: Guggenheim, 2013), 9.

⁶³ Tiampo and Munroe, *Gutai: Splendid Playground*, 10.

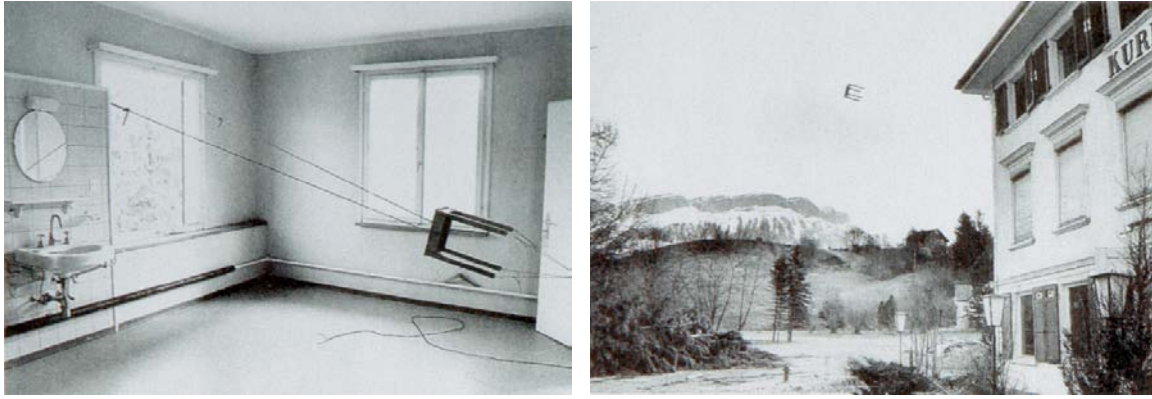


Figure 37 Roman Signer's *Action in Hotel Weissbad*, Switzerland, 1992.

The starting point of action sculpture is the combination of an everyday object and time where the element of time adds a fourth dimension to sculpture.⁶⁴ With the addition of time, action-sculpture introduces several artistic disciplines such as performance, photography and the moving image of video and film and claim they all constitute different phases of the sculptural production. While action-sculpture is conceptually 'sculpture' it does not, however, have a physical material at its core. The main material is the process and the process of transformation through time. Irish lecturer and writer Sinéad Hogan frames action-sculpture in the article, *What is Sculpture?* (2015): 'Some 'sculptures' are not even physical objects per se but the staging of interactions between materials and forces.'⁶⁵

One of the contributions of action-sculpture to the practice of sculpture is the transformation of the traditionally three-dimensional static sculpture object into a non-static object. The element of action and the associated time in the process of making the artwork shifts the focus away from the traditional sculpture materials

⁶⁴ Wurm asks, 'How long is an action an action? When does it become a sculpture?' Erwin Wurm, interviewed by the author, Malmö, June 15, 2007.

⁶⁵ Sinéad Hogan, "What is Sculpture?" *IMMA magazine*, 2015, <https://imma.ie/magazine/what-is-sculpture/> accessed January 29, 2019.

such a clay, plaster, wood, marble, bronze. It also turns the attention away from considering the texture of the physical materials and their properties, which often is an essential aspect of 3-dimensional sculpture. Action-sculpture frees sculpture from the traditional thinking about sculpture thus creating another way to consider sculpture. Action-sculpture is an offshoot from sculpture similar to how action-paintings of the Gutai group is a small branch in the vast field of painting. With the added element of time to sculpture, action-sculpture is primarily about a process of transformation. With the dimension of time, action-sculpture extends to include other media such as performance, still photography and the moving image.



Figure 38 Two examples from Erwin Wurm's comprehensive *One Minute Sculpture* series (1996 -), where members of the audience follow the written instructions from the artist and thus completes the sculpture.

Transformation and Process

The *One Minute Sculpture* series (1996 -) by Erwin Wurm is an example of action-sculpture, combining performance, photography and audience participation.⁶⁶ The work consists of the event of an audience member completing the work by following

⁶⁶ "Website of Erwin Wurm" <https://www.erwinwurm.at/artworks/one-minute-sculptures.html> accessed January 21, 2019.

the written instructions by the artist, thus transforming into a sculpture for one minute. A photograph document the audience member having transformed into a sculpture for one minute (figure 38). Wurm states he views 'everything to be sculpture', meaning, all the parts of his work, which includes photography and the action of making the work.⁶⁷



Figure 39 Video stills from Fischli and Weiss' *The Way Things Go*, 1987.

Fischli and Weiss' well-known video, *The Way Things Go*, 1987, is an example of an action-sculpture in the medium of a video. Everyday objects such as tires, ladders and chairs are put into motion with the assisted by the forces of water, fire, acid and the laws of physics, to create a domino effect where one object transfers the energy of movement to the next.⁶⁸ Transforming objects into actions into video, Fischli and Weiss' playful methodology is a collaboration with the forces of nature and materials of everyday objects and elements as a method of completing the work.

⁶⁷ Erwin Wurm, interviewed by the author, Malmö, June 15, 2007.

⁶⁸ Peter Fischli and David Weiss, *The Way Things Go*, video, accessed January 21, 2019, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/32552>

Flying Objects



Figure 40 Chris Burden's *Flying Steamroller*, South London Gallery, 2006. Image courtesy: South London Gallery.

Often I am drawn to flying action sculptures. Perhaps this is due to the sculptures liberation from the traditional plinth, which is a radical transformation of the idea of sculpture. Burden's gravity-defying *Flying Steamroller*, 1996, illustrates an example of a transformation of a large and heavy everyday object, which consists of the performative event of driving the steamroller around in circles until it takes off and flies for several rounds with photo documentation of the process (figure 40).⁶⁹

⁶⁹ "Important Art by Chris Burden," <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-burden-chris-artworks.htm>



Figure 41 Left image: Chris Burden's *Beam Drop* action sculpture in the making. Right image: The completed beam sculpture in the hardened concrete. Image courtesy: Instituto Inhotim, Brazil © Eduardo Eckenfels, 2013.

Another work by Burden, namely *Beam Drop*, 2008, was made by dropping long I-shaped steel beams from a height of 45 meters into a ditch filled with wet cement. The final position of the beams in the concrete was affected by how the beam moved in the air, gravity and the wind. Burden decided the rules and instructed the crane operator to drop the beams. Burden leaves the completion of the sculpture to his collaborators. The instructions are Burden's method of making the sculpture.⁷⁰ Burden says about art: 'It takes something that exists and moulds it into another form so that you can look at it differently.'⁷¹ I understand Burden's comment to address an idea of transformation and his point is evident in *Beam Drop* and *Flying Steamroller*, in that both of these action-sculptures make one look differently at steel beam and steamrollers after experiencing Burden's transformations.

⁷⁰ Nina Azzarello, "Falling Steel Hits Wet Concrete in Beam Drop by Chris Burden," Design Boom, published September 8, 2013, <https://www.designboom.com/art/falling-steel-hits-wet-concrete-in-beam-drop-by-chris-burden/> accessed January 21, 2019.

⁷¹ Doug Harvey, "Chris Burden," *Art Review*, August, 2006, https://artreview.com/features/august_2006_feature_chris_burden_copy/ accessed 15 November 2018.

Signer also uses everyday objects in his actions. Tables, chairs, barrels and balloons reoccur in several of his works. Signer rarely uses everyday objects for their normal functions. In the work, *Action in Hotel Weissbad*, 1992, a table is suspended with rubber strings in front of an open second-floor window inside an otherwise empty room (figure 37). Signer has transformed the table into a sculptural object by suspending it in the space. When Signer pushes the button of his detonation box, the table shoots out through the window thus transforming into a projectile. The event is over in a matter of seconds. Nature's forces, in this case, gravity, and the laws of physics play a crucial role as a collaborator in Signer's action-sculptures. Signer states: 'I do half the work and then nature finishes the other half. I make a plan, a construction. And nature makes then the actual work'.⁷²

The critical aspects of action-sculpture, with regards to the research question, presented in the examples by Signer, Burden, Wurm and Fischli and Weiss demonstrate: the object is a ready-made. The object is central in an action. The action transforms the object into a process over time consisting of three states, the static, the action and static again but changed. Action-sculpture works across media and includes the event of the action, which transforms into photography and video. Furthermore, the methodology of action-sculpture relies on collaborations such as nature's forces, materials and the audience to complete the work.

As we have seen, the objects in action-sculpture initiate a process, within a set of rules determined by the artist, and are completed with the assistance of nature,

⁷² Armin Senger, "Roman Signer," *Bomb: Magazine*, 105, (October, 2008), <http://bombmagazine.org/article/3176/roman-signer> accessed June 17, 2017.

nature's materials and sometimes people assisting in carrying out the action. This process, or action, constitutes the work. As the case studies of this research combine action-sculpture with elements of socially engaged art, in the next section, I introduce the field of socially engaged art where the material of the work is social rather than a physical object.

Socially Engaged Art

Socially engaged art is an art form, which focuses on social aspects between people such as the experience and participation of people to be part of the work. Socially engaged art has no physical art object, but objects are often used to facilitate social interactions and processes. According to Helguera, American artists Alan Kaprow and Suzanne Lacy influenced from the 1960s what we today know as socially engaged art.⁷³ Kaprow, known in the art world as the father of 'the happening', expanded the idea of what art could be in the early 1960s. He suggested that through play the artist could open up a space that doubts, probes, suspend disbelief as to what art is. Kaprow introduced the idea of *action itself* as art.⁷⁴ *Trading Dirt* (1983-6) is an example of a Kaprow work aiming to connect art and life more closely. The happening consisted of trading or exchanging soil with other people. The conversations between Kaprow and the people he traded dirt with connected the happening to an everyday chore, thus life.⁷⁵

⁷³ Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011), ix.

⁷⁴ Ihlein, Lucas. PhD thesis. *Framing Everyday Experience: Blogging as Art*, 2009, 27.

⁷⁵ Jeff Kelley, *Childsplay: The Art of Allan Kaprow* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2007), 212-215.

The American philosopher John Dewey presents in his book *Art as Experience*, (1934), 'the idea of the practical value of experience in the restoration of the arts as tools for social renewal.'⁷⁶ He emphasised experimentation and method over dogma and ideology, believing that intelligence is situational, a condition of changing circumstances'.⁷⁷ Dewey 'campaigns for the idea of art working in ordinary life. He saw art not for art's sake, but as a tool for education and for enhancing the world around us. Dewey wanted to make art useful'.⁷⁸ Helguera explains there is a connection between the North Italian Reggio Emilia pedagogy approach to education and learning and socially engaged art, which amongst others is based on Dewey pedagogical ideas on education. Dewey's ideas, therefore, sit closely with Helguera's writing about education, pedagogy and socially engaged art, where social inclusion and participation, rather than passive recipient of information, is at the heart of the method.⁷⁹ The kind of participation and collaboration that takes place describes the learning through the experience. The idea resonates with the practice-led research of this thesis, where through the physical practice of making, for both the artist and the collaborating audience members, there is discovery and learning.

Helguera further defines socially engaged art to 'include working with society in a professional capacity' and continues by writing socially engaged art 'is dependant on the involvement of others besides the instigator of the artwork'.⁸⁰ Helguera makes an

⁷⁶ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 1980).

⁷⁷ Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

⁷⁸ Dewey, *Art as Experience*.

⁷⁹ Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, xi – xii.

⁸⁰ Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, 3.

important distinction: 'Socially engaged art is actual, not symbolic, practice,' and 'The symbolic act is part of a meaningful (actual) conceptual gesture.'⁸¹ Helguera's definition of socially engaged art, in summary, is that social interaction plays a central role in socially engaged art. 'Socially engaged art is a hybrid, multi-disciplinary activity that exists somewhere between art and non-art, and its state might be permanently unresolved.' And lastly, Helguera states, 'socially engaged art depends on actual – not imagined or hypothetical – social action.'⁸²

Since the 2000's socially engaged art is the most widely used term to describe social, artistic practice in art. Socially engaged art is now a large field of diverse interdisciplinary practices branching into a myriad of knowledge areas. In this section, I present some of the most well-known examples from the field of socially engaged art and focus on the social aspect of making art within the framework of the art institution that has emerged within socially engaged art. During this research, I have, however, come across diverse and inspiring socially engaged art projects, which operate in a field of social improvement in the context of low socio-economic areas, such as work by Richard Lowe and Theaster Gates.⁸³ It is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis to consider all aspects of socially engaged art. Many of these projects, though not all, take place outside the art institution, even while most of these artists also have an active voice inside of the art institution.

⁸¹ Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, 5 - 8.

⁸² Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, 8.

⁸³ Carol Becker et al., *Theaster Gates*. (London: Phaidon, 2015), 8 - 133.



Figure 42 Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Pad Thai*, Paula Allen Gallery, New York, 1990. Figure 43 Pablo Helguera *Libreria Donceles*, travelling around the USA, 2013.

Prior to socially engaged art becoming the general term of the objectless art there was relational aesthetics. The manifesto *Relational Aesthetics*⁸⁴ (2002) was authored by French curator and writer Nicolas Bourriaud in 1998 in his book *Esthétique relationnelle* (Relational Aesthetics). The term was first used in 1996, in the catalogue for the exhibition *Traffic* curated by Bourriaud at CAPC musée d'art Contemporain de Bordeaux in France with Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija as the most referred practitioner.

New York-based British art historian Claire Bishop, however, argues that Bourriaud's relational aesthetics is not a new idea as such, as it sits firmly within the conceptual framework the previous art movements such as process art and social art from the 1960s.⁸⁵ For example, the New York café titled *FOOD* created by US artist Gordon Matte-Clark in New York in 1971 was an artwork where people came and had a meal

⁸⁴ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002).

⁸⁵ Claire Bishop et al., *Participation* (London, Cambridge, Mass.: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2006), 10 - 17.

together.⁸⁶ Tiravanija's green curry event *Phai Thai* share many similarities with Matte-Clark. Tiravanija's thinking does, however, extend Matta-Clark's concept via the artefact of the bowl and its performance within the art institution. According to Tiravanija, historic cultural artefacts such as a clay bowl is activated in his happening and used for the common purpose it was designed for, namely eating a meal. In this way, *Phai Thai* activates the artefact for its original purpose, not an original historical thousands-years-old clay pots but conceptually, when he serves green curry in bowls to the audience of his event. Furthermore, *Phai Thai* takes place in the white cube of the art gallery amongst artefacts from our cultural history. Tiravanija's happening, therefore, sits within a different context to Matta-Clark's café. Through the act of serving green curries in bowls, Tiravanija activates, at least symbolically, the artefacts.⁸⁷

In the book *Conversation Pieces*, 2004, American art historian and writer Grant Kester presents art projects he calls dialogical art. Dialogical art ticks many of the same boxes as socially engaged art but most often takes place outside the art institution and has a particular focus on facilitating a dialogue between different groups of people to create better understanding and thus social change.⁸⁸ Bishop takes a critical view of socially engaged and dialogical art. She raises the issue of the absent critique of aesthetics and how critique tends to stay focused on the ethical

⁸⁶ "Gordon Matta-Clark's Art Restaurant Resurrected," *Phaidon*, <https://uk.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2013/may/02/gordon-matta-clarks-art-restaurant-resurrected/> accessed February 5, 2019.

⁸⁷ Rirkrit Tiravanija, in conversation with Søren Dahlgaard, Chiang Mai, December 26, 2012.

⁸⁸ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 187-89.

aspects around socially engaged art rather than its aesthetics and transformational capacity.

The Audience

The role of the audience in relation to the artwork as an active participant in recent times is examined through similar fields with different names such as socially engaged-, participatory-, dialogical- and new genre public art. Is the spectator passive or active? Was the spectator always active? Who said what about the role of the spectator? Where is the discussion currently? Swedish art historian and curator Maria Lind's essay *Complications: On collaboration, agency and contemporary art* (2009) gives a detailed overview of the role of the audience in different types of collaborations, participation and interaction in artworks.⁸⁹ Lind refers to art historian and critic Christian Kravagna's four different methods in contemporary art of human interaction, which include, working with others, interactive activities, collective action and participatory practice.⁹⁰ It is however beyond the scope of this thesis to consider all aspects of audience interactions with artworks, including phenomenology and post-phenomenology, as these are considerable areas of research. In regards to the role of the spectator/audience, this thesis considers the audience as they physically complete the work (or a new iteration) through a process of play and interaction with the activating sculpture objects.

⁸⁹ Maria Lind, "Complications: On Collaboration, Agency and Contemporary Art," *Public: New Communities*, 39 (2009): 52-73.

⁹⁰ Lind, "Complications: On Collaboration, Agency and Contemporary Art," 59.

Completing the Work through Inclusion

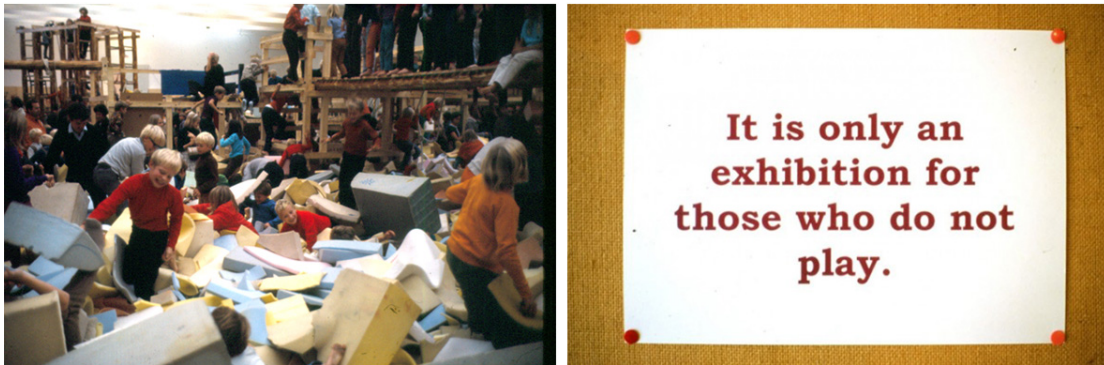


Figure 44 Palle Nielsen's *The Model* playground at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1969. Image: Palle Nielsen.

One of the strengths of socially engaged art is its emphasis on social inclusion. Social inclusion becomes a key character of some of the works that I have produced for this thesis. The main artworks I will present in this section are, by the Danish artist Palle Nielsen's *The Model* and *Slide* by Polish artist Pawel Althamer. Both works include the audience, primarily children, to complete the work through play. Some artists practice is situated in a cross between action-sculpture and socially engaged such as Erwin Wurm, and it is this cross over that becomes relevant to my research.

A historical playful and socially inclusive installation is Palle Nielsen's work, *The Model: A Model for a Qualitative Society*, 1969, in which the Moderna Museet in Stockholm was turned into a playground, with the artwork using costumes from the local theatre, paint and swings. During its three-week exhibition period, the installation received over 33,000 visitors, 20,000 of whom were children.⁹¹ *The Model*, 1969, is an early example of what the Danish writer Lars Bang Larsen refers

⁹¹ L. B. Larsen, "Social Aesthetics 1999," in *Participation*, eds. Clare Bishop (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2006), 172 – 183.

to as social aesthetics.⁹² Nielsen's *The Model* was literally a playground. What marked the distinction between Nielsen's playground and other playgrounds was the fact that it was installed in an art museum (Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden) and thus transformed by the art institution 'the playground is no longer just a playground' as Bang Larsen notes.⁹³ As Nielsen states, 'it is a playground if you play and a work of art if you are observing'.⁹⁴ The children played and the adults observed. Today many museums offer play spaces for children, often framed as learning labs and educational programs. *The Model* can be said to be one of the forerunners for this trend to combine play and learning in the art museum. It is however beyond the scope of this thesis to consider children's learning through play in the art museum or elsewhere.

⁹² S. Høholt et al., *Palle Nielsen: The Model* (Ishøj: Arken Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 79.

⁹³ Lars Bang Larsen, Mari Bartomeu, and Palle Nielsen, *The Mass Utopia of Art Activism: Palle Nielsen's The Model – A Model for a Qualitative Society* (Barcelona: MACBA, 2010), 35.

⁹⁴ See figure 44. Image to the right. Palle Nielsen's *The Model* playground at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1969. Image: Palle Nielsen.



Figure 45 Pawel Althamer's *Slide*, 2010, Aachen, Germany. Image: Ludwig Forum Aachen.

Nielsen may have inspired Althamer for the *Slide* work, 2010, at the Ludwig Forum, a museum in the German town of Aachen. Althamer's objective was to create a sculpture for children inside a church. The slide took the form of a stair tower, resembling a pulpit, crowned by a wooden cupola, with a slide from the top and a mini scriptorium below. The play-tower gave the children the opportunity to play, write, ponder about and reflect.⁹⁵

According to Althamer, his work is guided by a fundamental trust in the creativeness of play. For him, play is a pivotal category, enabling the much-desired-for scope of artistic freedom, a space that entices us to partake in the joy of childlike invention.⁹⁶ In my view, his works activate the subversiveness of play. Althamer frequently

⁹⁵ Esther Boehle, Brigitte Franzen, and Paweł Potoroczyn, *Paweł Althamer: Aachen Projects 1992/2010/2014* (Aachen: Ludwig Forum, 2014), 51-93.

⁹⁶ Boehle, Franzen, Potoroczyn, *Paweł Althamer: Aachen Projects 1992/2010/2014*, 116.

describes his installations as ‘game-like situations’.⁹⁷ He furthermore characterises children as ‘estranged and alienated somehow, with the freedom and self-confidence bordering on insolence’.⁹⁸ They possess the qualities Althamer values the most; curiosity and the urge to explore. It is, however, not only curiosity and exploration but also resistance, a lack of respect for conventions that is the definition of insolence. These qualities have then found expression in several works of his such as: in *King Matt the First* also named after Korczak’s children classic, where Althamer had children replace the guards in Zurich’s Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, amongst them his daughter Weronika, who was six at the time. There the children sat as ‘living ready-mades’, legs dangling from the chairs amidst the work of the exhibition. Nielsen’s *The Model* and Althamer’s *Slide* both extend an invitation to play. There is much resonance between Nielsen’s focus and trust in play and the creativity of children participating in completing the work with Althamer’s *Slide*, 2010.

Nielsen’s and Althamer’s work contain several of the same elements as the case studies of this thesis, such as the audience completes the work through their play activity. *The Model* and *Slide* are however primarily intended for children, which marks a significant difference to the case studies, as they are for everybody - both adults and children.

⁹⁷ “Pawel Althamer: The Museum Revisited,” *Artforum International*, 48. no. 10, summer 2010, 295.

⁹⁸ Boehle, Franzen Potoroczyn, *Pawel Althamer Aachen Projects 1992/2010/2014*, 116.

Instructions

As mentioned earlier in this chapter instructions play a part in action-sculpture, (Wurm and Signer) and socially engaged art (Nielsen and Althamer) and has influenced the case studies in this thesis. Fluxus artists, such as American John Cage and Danish Knud Pedersen, produced numerous instructional game-like works in the 1960s-70s.⁹⁹ What does the idea of instructions in art include? The framework the artist creates for the work defines the rules and can, therefore, be considered the instructions for the artist. Instructions for the audience, also known as instructional pieces are works such as Wurm's *One Minute Sculptures*, where the audience are invited to follow the written instructions by the artists to complete the work. In this way, instructions are part of a method to complete the work. Does all action-sculpture fit the idea of instructional pieces? The instructions in Wurm's *One Minute Sculptures* are rather strict in that they do not allow much creativity or freedom from the participating audience to influence the outcome with many variations. The audience must follow the written instructions by the artist and thus repeat the actions by previous participators. Instructions in socially engaged art are usually less strict compared to instructional pieces. They are often developed through conversations between the participants, but initiated and directed by the artist in various degrees.

⁹⁹ Knud Pedersen presented the fluxus event, *Fodbold med to bolde (Two-Ball Football)* at FLUXSHOE, the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, 1973.
<https://www.nikolajkunsthall.dk/en/udstillinger/museum-closed-exhibition-about-knud-pedersen>
accessed January 20, 2019.

An example of a socially engaged artwork, with instructions, is Jeremy Deller's work, *We're Here Because We're Here*, 2016. It was a national event to commemorate the Battle of the Somme, which took place during WWI. Hundreds of actors dressed, as WWI soldiers appeared all around England for one day only. They followed the scripted rules of not speaking to people and handed out a piece of paper to interested members of the public stating they were killed such and such date and place.¹⁰⁰

Within this framework decided by the artist, the actors were free to interpret their role and add their creativity to how they moved around, posed and interacted with the public. The soldier's actors had a degree of freedom to perform within the framework set in place by the artist Deller. The simplicity of the instructions was intentional, according to Deller, thereby leaving a significant element of freedom in the hands of the actors to complete the work how they saw fit.¹⁰¹

The Belgian artists Francis Alÿs work, *When Faith Moves Mountains*, 2002, is an example of another instructional piece similarly framed around a few simple rules and a large number of volunteers involved to realise the work. The work consisted of a long line of people each equipped with a shovel, and they were instructed to shovel sand forward as they moved forwards up and over a dune in Peru. The idea being they moved the mountain a tiny bit as they made their way over it. According to writer Jean Fisher, Alÿs describes his work to have three distinct lives, namely the preparatory, the event and the re-presentation in the form of video, photography and

¹⁰⁰ Jeremy Deller and Rufus Norris, *We're Here Because We're Here* (London: Cultureshock Media, 2017), 11 – 12.

¹⁰¹ Link to video interview with Jeremy Deller: <https://becausewearehere.co.uk/> accessed January 19, 2019.

written documentation.¹⁰² Artists mentioned earlier divide their work in a similar way, such as Denes, Uriburu, Christo and Jeanne-Claude (environmental art), Signer, Burden, Würm (action-sculpture), Althamer, Nielsen, Deller (socially engaged art) as well as the case studies of the thesis.

The instructions in *We're here because we're here* seem to grant space for the participating volunteers to add their creative mark in the work whereas the framework of *When Faith Moves Mountains* is more strict and therefore allow little if any individual contribution. *We're here because we're here* is squarely situated in social practice whereas the social aspect of is less prevalent in *When Faith Moves Mountains*. *When Faith Moves Mountains* appears to have an environmental agenda with the physical and direct connection to the landscape. Both *We're here because we're here* and *When Faith Moves Mountains* have game-like rules for the participants to complete the work. Playing a game as a way to complete the work is an essential part of the framework of the case studies of this research. In the following section, I will present the concept of play and what it means to play.

Play

One of the characteristics of many of the works that have influenced my practice and research has been the aspect of play and playfulness as a method of making and completing the work. Play or a spirit of play is evident too, as mentioned earlier, in the work of Duchamp, Nielsen, Althamer, Signer, Burden, Würm, Fischli and Weiss. In the early theories of art, play inhabited a key role. German poet and philosopher

¹⁰² J. Fisher, "In the Spirit of Conviviality: When Faith Moves Mountains," in *Francis Alÿs*, eds. Cuauhtémoc Medina, Russell Ferguson and Jean Fischer (London: Phaidon Inc Ltd, 2007), 112.

Friedrich Schiller's theory about the instinct of play from the late 1700s is a clear example. According to Schiller, it is this instinct playfulness, (*spieltrieb*), which connects life and form, the infinite and final, sensuous and rational. We become human, according to Schiller, through plays ability to set free and associative game.¹⁰³

The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga and theorist on play describe in his much-referenced book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, 1938, the play concept. We play because it is fun. That seems to be the purpose of play. Play gives us passion, pleasure, rouses a frenzy, its power is maddening, recalling the joy Duchamp found in spinning bicycle wheel mounted upside down to a kitchen stool, mentioned earlier in this chapter. Nature gave us play, with its tension and fun.¹⁰⁴ Huizinga continues by pointing out that fun in Dutch *aardigheid* derives from *aard*, which means Art in German. The fun element characterises the essence of play.¹⁰⁵ In addition to the fun component of play, Huizinga mentions that playing is for enjoyment and play is always a voluntary activity. Huizinga furthermore stresses play 'is free, is in fact freedom'.¹⁰⁶

Huizinga additionally presents the idea of the social function of play and formulates two aspects hereof: 'a contest *for* something or a representation *of* something',¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 168.

¹⁰⁴ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A study of the Play-Element in Culture*, 2-3.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 8.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 13.

‘These two functions can unite in such a way that the game ‘represents’ a contest, or else becomes a contest for the best representation of something’.¹⁰⁸ For example, through a contest of painting a gnome (the case study in chapter five) is the representation of the result. ‘Representation means display ... in the exhibition ... before the audience’.¹⁰⁹ The ‘actualisation by representation ... is played or performed within a playground’ in a space of freedom.¹¹⁰ Huizinga clarifies; the ‘important characteristics of play was its special separation from ordinary life’.¹¹¹ Huizinga’s concept of the ‘magic circle’ of play expresses the concept of how ‘play is at once part of and removed from everyday life’.¹¹²

In the three case studies of this thesis, I use play as a method of making and completing the work. While the play element is fun and enjoyable, it is nevertheless part of how the work is made. In this way, my case studies do not separate the idea of play and work. Huizinga recognises an ‘important characteristic of play was its special separation from ordinary life.’¹¹³ In the case studies of this research, as I will demonstrate in later chapters, playing becomes productive in how it helps complete the artwork, hence it can be said the play aspect is work. My methodology of playing as a way to complete the artwork thus embrace Huizinga’s magic circle (of how play is at once part of and removed from everyday life).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 13.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 13.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 14.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 19.

¹¹² A. Naseem, “Playing with Dough” in *Dough Portraits: Søren Dahlgaard*, eds. Andrew Brown and Søren Dahlgaard (Art Books Ltd., 2015), 72.

¹¹³ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A study of the Play-Element in Culture*, 2-3, 19.

Making Art Through Play

The scope of play is diverse, and the field of play in research has grown substantially in the past twenty years with many genres of games and forms of play. For this research project, however, I narrow the scope of the field and focus primarily on the theory of playing games, through the writing of game theorists Bernard De Koven and Brian Sutton-Smith. Sutton-Smith observes in his book *The Ambiguity of Play*, 2001, 'play is difficult to understand because it is ambiguous.'¹¹⁴ Sutton-Smith presents the many and diverse types of play, such as competitive, serious, and educational. It is, however, Sutton-Smith's concept of frivolous play, which frames a core aspect of the type of playing in the three case studies that constitute this research project.¹¹⁵ Frivolous indicates pointless, and, thus, relates to De Koven's concept of the 'well-played game', which I will present in the next paragraph, where the purposelessness of play is essential. Sutton-Smith argues play and art are self-regulating systems, ostensibly without any goal outside their sphere. They are outside the every day, the 'playground' has both space and time for itself as well as its laws – just like artistic creativity.¹¹⁶ As recognised earlier in this chapter, Sutton-Smith's frivolous play concept is present in both Nielsen's *The Model* and Althamer's *Slide*.

De Koven introduces the concept of *The Well-Played Game* in his book of the same title, from 2013.¹¹⁷ He presents a point, which is relevant in regards to the

¹¹⁴ Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 214.

¹¹⁵ Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, 201 – 213.

¹¹⁶ Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, 133 – 135.

¹¹⁷ Bernard De Koven, *The Well-Played Game* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013), 1 - 9.

methodology of my case studies, 'A game can change. The game we are playing can become something we never intended it to be. The game can change for the better. A game can establish a new way of seeing and playing together.'¹¹⁸ De Koven's writing on the relationship between play vs game, has inspired me to consider my artistic methodology as rules for how to play a game.¹¹⁹ De Koven's concept of playing well and the idea of a game changing as it is played are essential aspects in the three case studies of this research, which I will address in the following chapters.

De Koven explains the purpose of purposelessness in that games offer purpose but play purposelessness.¹²⁰ This paradoxical idea comprises three elements according to De Koven's, namely:

1. The nature of the surprise (when playing a game).
2. Community – the experience of playing well together.
3. Playing well – a union of mastery and mystery.¹²¹

De Koven concludes: 'the harmony that is created between purpose and purposelessness. This is the game well played.'¹²² The purpose of games and the purposelessness of play offer the well-played game framework with the elements of surprise, a social experience and the quality of playing well together. De Koven's framework contains essential elements of the methodology of this research.

¹¹⁸ Koven, *The Well-Played Game*, 39.

¹¹⁹ Koven, *The Well-Played Game*, viii - x.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 140 - 143.

¹²¹ Ibid, 142.

¹²² Ibid, 143.

The Model, Slide and *One-Minute-Sculptures* are examples of making art through a framework of play. These artworks utilise the act of play in their work methodology to complete their socially engaged art projects with the assistance of audience participation. I suggest play is instrumental in producing art, where the artwork could be considered a game in that play is the strategy, which moves within the game.

Summary of Chapter

This chapter aimed to situate the particular context of practice and theory of the case studies. As presented, the context of practice and theory is positioned in a nexus of three established genres of artistic practice, namely,

1. Land art and environmental art
2. Action-sculpture
3. Socially engaged art

In addition to the overlap of the three art genres listed above, the element of play adds new possibilities for the development of the methodology, as we shall learn in chapter two. The particular combination of practice and theory constitute the contextual framing for this practice.

The core art element of both action-sculpture and socially engaged art are non-physical materials, namely the process in action-sculpture and experience in socially engaged art. However, in both action-sculpture and socially engaged art an object often facilitates the process and experience. This research draws together action-

sculpture and socially engaged art to enable the emergence of a sculptural object that facilitates a process of transformation through play.

In the following chapter, I will present the artistic methodology of the case studies.

2. Methodology: The Conceptual Framework and the Methods

In chapter one, I presented the context of practice and theory for this research. The sum of the artistic practices not only represents the context of my art practice, but many of them also share a somewhat similar working methodology to this research project.

In this chapter, I will cover the methods of the conceptual framework for the case studies, which are: observations, audience inclusion through generosity and slapstick aesthetics, the agency of the sculpture activators, repetition with a difference, and finally activating collaborations through play with nature, materials and people as a method to complete the work.

The Danish existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard said: ‘Tell me something and I will forget it. Show me something and I may remember. Give me an experience and I shall never forget’.¹²³ To Kierkegaard’s quote, I would like to add: Give me the possibility to physically co-produce my own experience and, I will feel I am part of it.

How might one produce an experience ‘I shall never forget’? - As Kierkegaard asks. How might I create a framework for collaboration with people, which will provide a sense of inclusion? This chapter considers collaboration a key element in addressing not only the question of remembering an experience of an artwork but also as a method of making the artwork. The methodology of this research incorporates a

¹²³ Johannes Sløk, *Kierkegaards Univers: En Guide til Geniet* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt og Ringhof, 2013). The translation is mine.

rather wide range of collaborations. They include a sculpture object collaborating with nature, materials and people. The elements of nature are the wind, gravity, time and the laws of physics. Materials include the agency of the sculpture object, the physical materials of the sculpture, and immaterial materials such as air, the location and the camera. Collaborations with people include the artist, other artists and the audience. All these types of collaborations represent ways to complete the work and are central to the methodology of this thesis. In the case study projects, what comes before the completing stage of the work is providing the conditions that allow the activating sculptures and deciding how these sculpture objects might activate collaborations. This part of the work is conceived and produced by the artist without collaborating with nature or the audience but working with materials.¹²⁴

The following story illustrates my motivation for creating a methodology, which includes collaborators of different kinds to complete the work. A reflection occurred to me, when I last flew 30,000 feet over the landscape of Australia in a commercial airliner since I enjoy looking at the changing landscape below. The continent of Australia and elsewhere presents astounding views of mountainous formations, ever-changing geological shapes and colours. Imagining being in the landscape below is like imagining being in another world, yet the landscape is right there, within sight. I could reach most places on Earth in a matter of a few days of travelling. However, I

¹²⁴ Making a sculpture out of materials is a collaborative process with the materials. Materials affect or inspire the shape and aesthetics of the final sculpture in many ways, and thus feed into the work. From this perspective it can be considered there is a collaboration between the artist and the material to produce the artwork. This notion of collaborating with materials alludes to new materialism, which I will touch on in the Collaborating with Materials section later in this chapter. Collaborations with materials, as I will explain later in this chapter, takes place during the completion stage of the artwork, where the sculpture objects activate a process of transformation through play.

cannot help feeling detached from the landscape I see below. I am not in the landscape but looking at it from high above. Visiting art exhibitions, I often have a similar feeling of being removed or detached not from the artworks themselves but from what I view as the essence, namely the creative process of their making. It is a feeling of disconnection from not being physically part of any aspect of the creative processes of the making or completion of the artwork. I often feel curious to know more about this aspect of the artwork and, I wish, as a spectator, I could be included and become a co-producer in the completion of more artworks. In regards to the issue of the audience relationship with the art and feeling excluded, Helguera's observes in the book, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, 2011:

The contemporary art milieu is most distinctively about exclusion.

Because the structure of social interactions within its confines are based on a repertory of social codes, or passwords, that provide status and a role within a given conversation.¹²⁵

In my experience, I have never met an artist or curator whose aim it is to exclude the audience from experiencing the art. However, there seems to be a paradox between what the artist intends to achieve with the artwork and what is often the experience of the audience.¹²⁶ Responding to Helguera's criticism of the exclusiveness of the art

¹²⁵ Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, 22.

¹²⁶ Several exhibitions have consisted of literally blocking the gallery with boards of wood, as the Danish artist Joachim Koester's did in Gallery Wallner, Copenhagen, in the mid 1990s and similarly Santiago Sierra pulled this stunt at the opening of Lisson Gallery's project space in London, 2002. Elmgreen & Dragset went all the way and simply announced the gallery is closing and put an 'opening soon Prada' sign in the window of the Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in New York, 2001. Anyhow, these examples of physical excluding the audience from entering the gallery space do not address the social exclusion I wish to address. These examples may even serve to strengthen the feeling of exclusion.

milieu, I ask: How might I embed an invitation to participate through play to complete the work with my sculptures? What would be required of a sculpture to address this concern? My paradigm is to create sculpture-activating objects. In other words, the sculptural objects I create are not the completed artworks. They represent the starting point for facilitating a process, and it is this process, which forms a crucial part of the artwork. The process is when the artist, sculpture or an audience completes a new iteration of the work in a collaborative effort.

Repetition With a Difference

I understand iteration as 'repetition with a difference'. Iterations are similar to improvisation in jazz music, where multiple variations are produced over a theme. The iterations always create new variations. I find a potential is staying with 'the same theme' (the activating sculptures) and initiate countless iterations from the same starting point. The iterations, repetitions with a difference, might uncover ambiguous and intriguing outcomes. Iterations with one of the activating sculptures of the case studies are similar to playing the same game. A new iteration, or game, generates new outcomes (repetitions with a difference). Experimenting with the same setup is similar to how scientists often work to test a theory. The iterations start from the same basic pattern. A similar movement/action, as a tennis forehand may appear to be the same movement repeated again and again, however, there are hundreds of variations to a tennis forehand. Several factors determine the tennis forehand shot, such as; the pace and the spin of the ball, the height of the bounce, the racket swing path and speed, your body position, motion, balance and weight transfer as you make contact with the ball. The activating sculptures of the case studies, offer a similar basic pattern as a tennis forehand or a game, with its multi-

function parameter of variations to the outcome. For me, the idea of iterations, with the activating sculptures, is a method to clarify and extracting new meaning. The idea of ‘what happens if I repeat this?’ is a credo of the methodology of this research.

Practice-led Research

This practice-led research is led by the artistic practice of the research projects. The practice is, therefore, the main point to reference also in this chapter on the methodology of my practice. I will, however, refer to theoretical writing on the subject of practice-led research within the visual fine arts but theory is not leading this research, the practice is. At times I find theoretical writing helpful in clarifying ideas and concepts, but at other times theoretical writing tends to complicate the very same. Australian educator and writer Robert Nelson stresses research in art is research *through* art as opposed to research *in* art.¹²⁷

The American philosopher Donald Schön developed the theory ‘reflection-in-action’ in his book *‘The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action’*, a method, which has something in common with the mentioned iterations as a way of producing new outcomes. Schön’s theory involves a spiralling process of action and reflection. The steps of this process include identifying the problem emerging from one’s practice and a conceptual reframing of the problem. This spiralling cycle continues with a reflection on the outcomes of this process. As Schön writes:

¹²⁷ Robert Nelson, *The Jealousy of Ideas: Research Methods in The Creative Arts* (Fitzroy: Ellikon, 2009), 89.

In this reflective conversation, the practitioner's effort to solve the reframed problem yields new discoveries which call for new reflection-in-action. The process spirals through stages of appreciation, action, and reappreciation. The unique and uncertain situation comes to be understood through the attempt to change it and changed through the attempt to understand it.¹²⁸

Schön's theory articulates a method, which lies at the heart of my practice-led research. There is numerous published writing on artistic practice research paradigms, which present Schön's theory in various alterations such as Nelson's the praxis of doing-thinking.¹²⁹

Australian artists and researchers Barbara Bolt and Lucas Ihlein, for instance, discuss, Participatory Action Research (PAR) and artistic research in socially engaged art. In short, PAR is the method of learning through practice as opposed to learning from theory. It is the meta-discussion that differentiates PAR from experience.¹³⁰ My iterative practice of repetitions with a difference can thus be understood as a PAR method. According to the British architect Graham Stevens practice-led methodology is learning-from-doing. As you try out different ideas, you

¹²⁸ Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action* (Abingdon: Routledge Books, 1991), 131.

¹²⁹ Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*, 3 – 22.

¹³⁰ B. Bolt and L. Ihlein, "Socially Engaged Art as a Boundary-Rider," in *Associations: Creative Practice and Research*, eds. James Oliver (Melbourne: MUP Academic, 2018), 83 – 84.

make mistakes, learn and adapt to your idea. The new learning is produced from your reflections on what happens.¹³¹ Stevens notes,

You enter into the work as a way to understand how the space, material, environment works and to understand the participation aspect of the works as you want it and you also understand how it does not work and what you are not looking for. Through this process, you discover lots of other things, which you can then develop into something that works and something you want.¹³²

According to Stevens, an essential principle for participation art is the artist interacting with the work to develop the work through this process.

The Polish architect and teacher Oskar Hansen's concept 'Open Form' from 1959 was initially conceived as a tool for designing architectural projects. The concept of Open Form shifted from architecture to the visual arts and performative artistic practice since Oskar Hansen was interested in developing strategies for collective participation and the possibility of continuous transformation. Open Form considers that all individual actions must strive to bring forth a response as a group effort. The group focused on developing activities, structures and games through which forms of collective action would emerge to embrace the unpredictable as part of the process.¹³³ The collaborative aspect in socially engaged art share Hansen's Open

¹³¹ Graham Stevens lecture at the University of Westminster, London, published on youtube, November 4, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-hGmd-j34I> accessed October 14, 2018.

¹³² Ibid, quote from Stevens lecture 12-13 minutes into the video.

¹³³ Oskar Hansen, "Open Form," *Przegląd Kulturalny* Vol 5, No 5, 1959.

Form framework. A contemporary artist such as Althamer refers to the influence of Open Form generally to this socially engaged practice and how the *Applied Social Arts* manifesto,¹³⁴ created with fellow Polish artist Artur Zmijewski, also references Hansen's framework.¹³⁵ Althamer and Zmijewski both work on reducing the gap between art and life.¹³⁶ Althamer and Zmijewski are inspired by Kaprow's idea to separate his work from art (Kaprow referred to his work as 'unart') envisioning it as David Antin notes 'an articulation of meaningful experiences from ordinary life'.¹³⁷ Open Form provides a loose model of reference in which to frame the artworks produced for this project.

Observation

Observation connects to the before mentioned method of iterations, in how continuous observations of apparent repetitive actions also can reveal new meaning. I observe and have for many years observed the world around me. What I mean is I not only look, I look carefully, and I spend time looking. For me, observing is a way of learning and knowing. The Danish architect Jan Gehl does precisely this, he observes how people behave and use space.¹³⁸ He has written the widely studied and

¹³⁴ Artur Zmijewski, *The Applied Social Arts* (Dublin: Fire Station Artists' Studios, 2010).

¹³⁵ Boehle, Franzen, Potoroczyn, *Paweł Althamer Aachen Projects 1992/2010/2014*, 202.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ David Antin, *Childsplay: The Art of Allan Kaprow* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2007), Foreword.

¹³⁸ From his observational methodology, Gehl is able to have a very clear understanding of how people use the public space. People's use of public space is complex and consists of and is influenced by many components and variables only noticeable for the observant researcher. Observations produce insights, which generate new questions, as Schön's theory iteration implies, and this is part of a methodology of working things out as you go along.

referenced book, *Life Between Buildings*, 1971,¹³⁹ and has since been commissioned by the urban planning offices in cities in many countries to improve the quality of spaces for living between buildings.¹⁴⁰ In my discipline, the exhibition of Fine Arts, I have, like Gehl, been a curious observer for over twenty years of how the audience move around and behave in exhibitions. Nelson explains in the book, *The Jealousy of Ideas*, 2009, that the philosophy of phenomenology is rooted in observation.¹⁴¹ Formal considerations such as how an exhibition is mounted and how the art relates to space are of interest, but it is the social environment constructed around art, I consider specifically. This curiosity leads to questions such as, how does the audience behave around the artwork and why? What are the social codes around art exhibitions? How do people feel in exhibitions?

¹³⁹ Jan Gehl, *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space* (Washington – Covelo – London: Island Press, 1987/2011).

¹⁴⁰ Melbourne is one of the cities Gehl has been an external city planner for and Gehl has been a strong advocate for the bike-cycle lanes and can be credited to help a bike-cycle culture emerge in Melbourne.

¹⁴¹ Nelson, *The Jealousy of Ideas: Research Methods in the Creative Arts*, 57.



Figure 46 Left image, *Mile of String* by Marcel Duchamp in the exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism*, New York, 1942. Image courtesy: John D. Schiff. Figure 47 Right image, British artist Phyllida Barlow and art student Jonathan Thrupp next to the *Obstruction Painting* by Søren Dahlgaard, Slade School of Art London, 2001. Image courtesy: Søren Dahlgaard.

For instance, *Obstruction Painting*, 2001,¹⁴² my first painting or artwork relating to ideas about what a painting can be, was a work I created as a direct reaction to a conversation I had with my sculpture teacher and artist Phyllida Barlow, at the Slade School of Art in London during my BA (Hons) Degree, figure 47. Our conversation was about how the spectator of painting moves in the space, walking closer to the painting for a close-up inspection of the paint strokes and then steps back a few meters for a better overview. The embedded notion of how the spectator moves in the gallery space provoked me to create a physical obstruction thus altering the path of movement. The *Obstruction Painting* aimed to change the way an observer views a

¹⁴² Link to photos and video of *Obstruction Painting*, 2001:
<http://sorendahlgaard.com/?portfolio=obstruction-painting>

When I had to take the *Obstruction Painting* down, the dismantling process developed into the work *Destruction of Obstruction Painting*, link: <https://vimeo.com/33032086>, accessed October 9, 2018, a video work where I break the wall plinth holding the painting with the weight of my body. This work added the element of action to the static *Obstruction Painting* installation and became for me a more interesting work due to the realness and transparency of the artistic intention the action itself helps to foreground. From a desire to inject life and action to the static art object, the wall plinths activated or inspired me to do this action. The observations and explorations of those early years of my practice in art school, 1995 - 2002, continue to inform my work methodology.

painting by literally occupying the space directly in front of it. I achieved this by constructing an extremely thick frame mounted on the wall projecting 6-meters into the gallery space, imagine a large plinth mounted on the wall, leaving only a tight gap for the viewer to squeeze past between the painting and the opposing wall. The viewer could only view the painting at a very distance, were their nose was almost touching the canvas. In this work, the installation of the painting was apparently more important than the picture itself. Questions of how the installation of the painting affected the movement and behaviour of the spectators became essential aspects of the work. The *Obstruction Painting* afforded or activated a particular physical behaviour by the spectators in the space. This was however not the point I was trying to make. The point was, as mentioned, to question the status quo way of looking and moving in the space for a painting in an art exhibition.¹⁴³

Duchamp might have aimed to provoke the spectators by creating a physical obstruction with the string in the gallery in his work *Mile of String* (see figure 46) installation. In addition to the obstructing string, Duchamp instructed a group of children to play ball and skipping games throughout the opening of the exhibition. Duchamp's instructions for play activity in the art gallery makes a welcoming connection to play in the gallery space, which also took place during the making of the *Gnome Painting Technique* I will present in chapter five. As Tompkins noted, mentioned in chapter one, '(Duchamp) suggested that art could be a form of play, a

¹⁴³ Note that I do not refer to the spectators as participants or being engaged or co-producing their own experience through their senses in the *Obstruction Painting* work. Refer to the Defining Key Terms section in the introduction of this thesis for further details.

game between the artist and the onlooker.’¹⁴⁴ Duchamp’s notion of play in the gallery and play between the artist and the onlooker is part of the methodology of this research.

The Agency of the Sculptures

When I create the sculpture objects, I have as a starting point, myself in mind as the collaborating partner of the completing process. I do not consider the aspect of audience participation early in the development of my projects. This approach marks a significant difference to Helguera definition of socially engaged art.¹⁴⁵ According to Kester, however, socially engaged art is typically developed with a community group in the centre from the beginning.¹⁴⁶ The aspect of including the audience in my case studies happens as a result of people simply wanting to interact with the sculptures and ‘complete the work’. In this way, the methodology of these case studies sits on the edge of what is considered socially engaged art. I return to this idea in chapter seven.

What is the agency of the sculptures in these research case studies? The agency is what the object affords such as a function or quality. The agency of the case study sculpture-objects is how they afford an invitation to play a new game. Similar to a swing or a slide in a playground, the sculptures of this research have a particular agency, which extends an invitation to play. Once you have encountered a swing or a

¹⁴⁴ Tompkins, “Duchamp: A Biography,” *The Washington Post*, 1996.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/duchamp.htm> accessed October 14, 2018.

¹⁴⁵ Helguera, *Education for Socially-Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, 1 - 8.

¹⁴⁶ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 15.

slide on a playground, these objects are however not new anymore. They are still fun to play with, but they were more exciting the first time.

The German philosopher Walter Benjamin states in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), 'The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.'¹⁴⁷ Benjamin argues that the unique artwork holds a particular aura, which cannot be replicated by a copy – or a ready-made. The sculptures of this research are unique art objects, contrary to the ready-made objects presented by the practitioners of action-sculpture, Wurm, Signer, Burden and Fischli and Weiss. The case studies sculptures therefore have the inherent aura Benjamin describes.¹⁴⁸ If the sculptures possess aura, they would appear even more exciting to play with than a familiar mass-produced object such as a slide or swing in a playground. The idea of the aura is thus an affordance of the sculpture-objects.

Slapstick Aesthetics as a Method for Dialogue

As there is no dialogue if no one participates in the conversation, the work (activating sculptures) must somehow capture the attention of the audience. Humour can offer the viewer a point of entry into the artwork, since humour can make art appear more casual and familiar, like everyday objects. This strategy provides a way to better connect with the audience. However, as Nelson has noted, 'things are never absolute'.¹⁴⁹ He notes that: 'The architecture of things impresses people

¹⁴⁷ W. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, eds. Hannah Arendt, (London: Fontana, 1968), p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 214 - 18.

¹⁴⁹ Nelson, *The Jealousy of Ideas: Research Methods in the Creative Arts*, 58.

differently.¹⁵⁰ 'Understandings and even perceptions are different' because they hinge on personal experience, histories, mood etc.¹⁵¹ Creating a sense of surprise by combining familiar objects and concepts in new ways is a core idea of the activating sculpture strategy. Humour offers an absurd transformation of everyday objects in action-sculpture as discussed in chapter one. In this way, slapstick aesthetics is a method to create a dialogue with the audience in a process to complete the work, similar to Wurm's *One Minute Sculpture* series.

The thesis case studies have in some regards their precedents in the earlier photo-series *The Dough Portraits*, 2008-2015.¹⁵² The *Dough Portraits* are made by combining of a lump of dough (as the activating sculpture object), and the participation of audience members to complete a portrait photograph with me (the artist/photographer). Both elements, a lump of dough and a portrait photograph, are familiar individually but the combination to the two is not only new but also absurd, and many participants found the event offering an experience parallel to Huizinga's concept of the magic circle of play.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² S. Dahlgaard et al., *Dough Portraits* (London: Art Books Publishing Ltd., 2015), 1 - 254.



Figure 48 *Dough Portraits*, Marcus and Sarra at Andipa Gallery London, 2010, and *Katrine* at the National Art Gallery of Denmark, 2008. Søren Dahlgaard.

Have you ever tried to put a large lump of dough on your head and have your portrait taken? Can you imagine what it feels like? The case studies of this thesis invite the audience to participate by asking questions such as: Have you ever experienced, carrying an eight-metre long inflatable island across the schoolyard with your friends? Have you ever painted a garden gnome with a six-metre long stick, through a wall using a live video feed from a screen as your visual guide? Have you ever tried to shoot seed balls with an oversized medieval looking slingshot around in your neighbourhood?

Slapstick is a style of humour involving exaggerated physical activity, which exceeds the boundaries of regular physical comedy.¹⁵³ The slapstick and nonsensical

¹⁵³ The term 'slapstick' originates from a club-like object composed of two wooden slats used in theatre. When struck, the slapstick produces a loud smacking noise, though little force transfers from the object to the person being struck. Actors may thus hit one another repeatedly with great audible effect while causing no or only very minor pain. Along with the inflatable bladder (of which the whoopee cushion is a modern variant), it was among the earliest special effects. Speaking of inflatable bladders and whoopee cushions, the inflatable island *Fuppidhoo* does spring to mind as an oversized version. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slapstick>

elements, which are a part of the aesthetics in all three case studies of this research, are effective as a method of including spectators. The absurd aspects of the research case studies can, however, be understood as the opposite, namely sensible. Something, which seems absurd at first encounter, can indeed be logical and rational upon reflecting on the ideas behind. Because the absurd aspect of an artwork, such as Burden's *Flying Steamroller*, resonates with its opposite namely reason. It, therefore, makes one reflect on that perspective when experiencing the absurdity in the artwork; reverse psychology or philosophy even. The absurd is of course not its opposite, reason, but rather a way to put forward an idea that does not appear at first to make sense. The slapstick aesthetics is in this way a method for creating a dialogue between the artwork and the audience.

Inclusion through Generosity

I am fundamentally interested in making art, which extends an invitation to the audience to be included in the work in different ways such as, looking at (still or moving) images, walking around a sculpture object or becoming a participant in the physical completion of the work. In 2018 I asked, Annika Kristensen, curator at Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne if she could sum up her ideas about art and exhibition making in one word. She did not hesitate for long before she

In *All of a Sudden. Things that Matter in Contemporary Art*, Jörg Heiser argues about art, "When it's good," "art hits where it hurts, striking at the heart of an ossified status quo by, which it itself was brought forth. Perhaps this is something art since Modernism has in common with slapstick. Instead of just aiming to shock and outrage, it shows authority losing its grip. Instead of inflating itself, it deflates the pompous in the name of art." Quote: <http://www.sternberg-press.com/index.php?pageId=1218> accessed February 19, 2019. Jörg Heiser, *All of a Sudden: Things that Matter in Contemporary Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008).

said 'generosity'. She explained further her wish is for art exhibitions to show generosity by extending a sense of accessibility and inclusion, in other words, an invitation to engage. Kristensen's ideas about generosity resonate well with the premise of the case studies, which are:

1. The sculptural object is the starting point for collaboration.
2. The activating sculpture extends an invitation to play.
3. The invitation to play is a method to include audience members to become part of the process of completing the work.

The activating sculptures of this research show a gesture of generosity as activators of collaborations through an invitation to play.

Can generosity in art also be to receive a gift in the form of a piece of candy from Cuban-American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres's candy stack, *Untitled (Public Opinion)*, 1991,¹⁵⁴ and a poster with jokes in Arabic by Danish artist Jens Haaning, *Arabic Jokes*, 1996?¹⁵⁵ This kind of generosity is however charitable and entirely different to the idea of reciprocal generosity curator, and educator Mary Jane Jacob presents in the essay, *Reciprocal Generosity* in the book *What We Want is Free*.¹⁵⁶ A driving question for Jacob is, 'how can artists be more generous and encourage an experience of their art that is more open, allowing 'other' entry and equally appreciating their

¹⁵⁴ "Website of Guggenheim," <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/1512> accessed January 22, 2019.

¹⁵⁵ "Website of Jens Haaning," <http://www.jenshaaning.com/> accessed January 22, 2019.

¹⁵⁶ T. Purves, eds. "What We Want Is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art," (New York: SUNY Press, 2004).

experiences? How can art be an exchange?’¹⁵⁷ Jacob explains her notion about generosity in art: ‘Rather than illustrating ideas of gifts and charities, these works actually intended to embody them, to locate the ‘work’ of the artwork into a literal transfer of goods and services from the artist to the audience.’¹⁵⁸ The community art project *Flood* (1992-95) by the Chicago based art group Haha, was a hydroponic vegetable garden set up as a workshop depending on the participation of the local community to grow and distribute vegetables. In regards to Haha’s work Jacob states ‘Thus generosity became the medium, or methodology, and the subject, or product, of this project.’¹⁵⁹ Haha aimed to create community ownership of the vegetable garden and empowerment through the participation of local community members. Jacob’s notion of generosity suggests the desire to make the experience with art social.^{160, 161}

What does it mean for an activating sculpture to be generous? In the context of the three case studies of this research project, the generosity of the sculptures is a method, which facilitates an invitation to play. Play is a generous gesture afforded by the sculptures and a way to create a space for inclusion. The generosity is reciprocal, between the sculpture and the collaborator. On the one hand, the outcome of the process, which the sculpture activates, is a creative contribution to the completion of

¹⁵⁷ M. J. Jacob, “Reciprocal Generosity,” in *What We Want Is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art*, eds. Ted Purves (New York: SUNY Press, 2004), 3 – 10.

¹⁵⁸ Jacob, “Reciprocal Generosity,” x.

¹⁵⁹ Jacob, “Reciprocal Generosity,” 6.

¹⁶⁰ https://distributedcreativity.typepad.com/reading_group/2005/10/what_we_want_is.html accessed January 22, 2019.

¹⁶¹ “Website of Hahaha” <http://www.hahahaha.org/projFlood.html> accessed January 22, 2019.

the artwork and on the other, this process of completing the work affords an experience with the collaborator.

As mentioned earlier socially engaged art fundamentally rejects the idea of art as an object. My case studies specifically do not reject the art object. The art object is the origin of the total artwork, the prior artwork that activates the collaboration, which then generates another artwork, including its material and the immaterial processes of the collaboration. Helguera observes in his interview with me on this thesis:

‘Ironically, I think you (Søren Dahlgaard) could argue that it is socially engaged art (the case studies) as long as it is not married to the notion of sculpture in the traditional sense, and I would thus encourage you to define what you do with a different name.’ I coined the term ‘activating sculpture’.¹⁶²

The generosity of the activating sculpture is to enable inclusion as a strategy to activate a collaborative process.¹⁶³

Activating Collaborations Through Play

My methodology develops from Althamer, Nielsen and Wurm’s invitation to join the ‘magic circle’ of play, as Huizinga described as being both a part and not a part of life. And in addition with an art object activating the audience, inside or outside the white cube, to physically complete a new iteration of the work. This idea addresses the role of the audience and the art object by combining audience participation and a

¹⁶² Pablo Helguera, interview via email with Søren Dahlgaard, Colombo and New York, October 18 and 25, 2018, in the appendix to this thesis.

¹⁶³ I rely on my intuitive assessment, when I consider how to develop this methodology, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to cover the research area of intuition.

sculptural object into a tangible act of making and completing the artwork. I aim to create an environment, where people feel they can be part of the action in a physical way through conversation or play to complete the work.

The framework I develop for how to complete the artwork with the sculpture activators are associated with the rules of how games are played. As I develop the activating sculptures, I imagine ways to collaborate with these objects and consider what the rules connected to the interactions should be to allow somewhat open-ended outcomes. Wurm says of his instructional piece *One Minute Sculptures*: 'When you give instructions, you never know what comes out.'¹⁶⁴ Even though Wurm's instructions for the audience are rather specific, he suggests nevertheless the outcome produced by the audience is uncertain and out of his control.

My methodology of playing as a way to complete the artwork embrace Huizinga's magic circle of how play is at once part of, and removed from, everyday life. Making or completing an artwork through play is at the same time also work, thus in this sense creating a closer association between the notion of play and work. Bang Larsen points out how Nielsen's *The Model* afforded a situation where play became work in how play was utilised as a way to make iterations and complete artworks.¹⁶⁵ The methodology of my case studies allow to transform play not only into work, as Nielsen's *The Model* did, but into the artwork in that the play aspect becomes a process, and this process/action constitute a vital aspect of the artwork.

¹⁶⁴ Mark Rappolt, "Erwin Wurm" *ArtReview*, January & February, 2011, https://artreview.com/features/jan_feb_2011_feature_erwin_wurm/ accessed October 15, 2018.

¹⁶⁵ Larsen, Bartomeu, and Nielsen, *The Mass Utopia of Art Activism: Palle Nielsen's The Model – A Model for a Qualitative Society*, 35.

For the case studies produced for this project, an aim of the art making is to be a 'well-played game', as De Koven observes is a significant quality in itself.¹⁶⁶ The idea of playing well in the field of games for De Koven includes acknowledging the significance of the quality of the social experience within the play experience. I adopt this as a characteristic in my case studies, and it is, therefore, part of the methodology. De Koven recognises two seemingly opposing elements are needed to produce a well-played game – the purposeful drive to advance (in the game) and the purposelessness of playing for the sake of play. De Koven recognises the social qualities of the experience of playing together as he points to the spirit of play are about the relationship between players.¹⁶⁷ Play and game structures are furthermore open-ended in that the outcome is unpredictable. This is also a method of this research.

It is through a playful act in collaboration with the sculptures new iterations are created. In other words, the sculpture objects, in the case studies of this research, facilitate a process, which completes the work – be it a performative action or a staged situation, which can be captured by the camera. The photograph or video needs to capture the spirit (humour, playfulness, energy) of these actions.

Creating the staged photograph or video can take hundreds of hours of developing the idea, planning the event, the logistics, the production of the sculpture, fundraising etc. On the day of completing the work, it is often more laborious work of lifting, carrying, setting up equipment and so forth, before the action can take place in a

¹⁶⁶ De Koven, *The Well-Played Game: A Player's Philosophy*, xxiv.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, ix.

matter of moments or a few hours and similar to Signer's methodology in that regard. The sculptures can be viewed as game pieces, which activate collaborations through playing a game to complete the artwork.

Collaboration as a Method of Making

When producing the three case studies for this research, I engaged in many types of collaborations. I collaborate with people, both other artists and the audience, with elements of nature, such as the wind and gravity and lastly the materials of the activating sculptures.

When a sculptural object activates collaboration through play, you have a non-human element-activating agency, which constitutes a significant aspect of the methodology of this research. In other words, when I collaborate with humans or the non-human elements, such as the wind, gravity and air in completing the artworks, the collaborative aspect plays a central role in the outcome of the artwork. Many of the ideas and actions, happen as a result of the collaborations. The artist, audience and non-human collaborators all contribute creative input, which is part of the resulting artwork.

My desire to collaborate goes beyond a method to complete the work. The collaborative element as part of the methodology is a wish to play and venture into unknown territory with the possibility to discover something new and unexpected, which can lead to a new action, experience and artwork. One can play alone, but it is often more fun to play together as we learned in chapter one from De Koven. The same applies to this methodology. The collaboration with nature's elements, the materials of the sculpture objects and people is a collaboration, which includes

chance and risk, adventure and discovery. This process is a journey and an essential part of the methodology of creating the artworks.

Two of the three case studies are collaborations with other artists, given the role of play and open form as a principle in the project. Collaborating with a fellow artist and friend is different to collaborations with a group of visitors in a gallery or a workshop. My collaborations with fellow artist for this research develop over a long period of time. We discuss and develop ideas until we both agree it is worth doing. We want to do something different to our individual practices but still have each of our 'fingerprints' present in the work. The collaboration needed to contain an aspect of each of our practices, which would blend into a collaborative expression. Tully Moore makes a remark in my interview with him in chapter five addressing his notion on collaborating with fellow artists.

My idea of collaborating with other artists, the audience and nature's forces is born from an aspiration to create art, which is adventurous in the sense that I cannot predetermine the outcome. I wish to let go of the idea of controlling all aspects of the final outcome, which I hope is evident in the case studies.

Collaborating with Nature

Numerous artists since the mid-twentieth century have opted to allow different processes to affect the outcome as both a critique of the artist's authorship and arbitrary cultural conventions of composition. In this section, however, I consider specifically nature's role as a collaborator in action-sculpture and in relation to the methodology of the three case studies of this thesis.

As presented in chapter one nature's forces, and the laws of physics, is an integral collaborator in the completion of action-sculpture. Nature's forces furthermore affect the outcome of the work. In an interview from 1968, US artist Robert Smithson remarked that 'one pebble moving one foot in two million years is enough to keep me really excited'.¹⁶⁸ The forces of nature can also move much faster than the speed of geological movement, which Smithson refers. The forces of nature affect for example many of Signer's work at much higher speeds in comparison to the water slowly covering Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*,¹⁶⁹ but the principles are comparable in terms of how nature's forces influence and complete many works of land art and action-sculpture over time.

The laws of physics such as gravity, buoyancy, warm air rise in colder air all affect the outcome of the action. Elements such as the wind represent unpredictability and a lack of control, which can affect the action in ways one cannot foresee. In this way nature is not only a means for mechanical completion of the work, but nature is also a creative collaborator in the completion of the work. Nature adds details and aesthetic elements to the outcome of the work, which would not otherwise be there. Collaborating with nature furthermore makes a subtle yet notable reference to land art and ecological awareness. I must acknowledge that there are decisions by the artist as to the degree of 'collaboration' with nature. One decides how windy it

¹⁶⁸ *The Photographers' Gallery Magazine* London, September - November, 1998, 3.

¹⁶⁹ Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, disappeared under water for thirty years due to the rise of the water level in the Great Salt Lake in Utah after, which the water level declined. Something, which Smithson could not have predicted nor planned for, yet nature's forces, affected the work over time.

should be, i.e. if it was a hurricane on the day I was going to fly the inflatable island would I do it or wait?

When nature, materials and people are considered collaborators in the production and completion of the artwork, it also transforms the way you can think about the wind, for example. The wind is no longer only a natural phenomenon, which makes the leaves move on the trees, transport seeds or make the windmills go around. It becomes an active participant in the emergence of art. Signer reflects on his reason to collaborate with nature's forces: 'when I do an action it might turn out completely different. That's the adventure. I'm actually looking for small adventures in art'.¹⁷⁰ Signer here describes how his method of collaborating with nature's forces is both an open-ended process for the resulting work and an adventure for him.

Collaborating with Materials

What does it mean to collaborate with the materials of a sculpture? Working with different materials in art is a diverse process, and the nature of the materials is equally varied. In land art, the location is often site-specific to the work and can, therefore, be considered a material. Robert Smithson's *Glue Pour* and *Asphalt Rundown*, both works from 1969, where, as the title implies, glue and asphalt were poured respectively down a slope. In these two earthworks, Smithson chose a sloped location so the materials would react to the force of gravity. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's wrapping works are also site specific.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Senger, "Roman Signer." <http://bombmagazine.org/article/3176/roman-signer> accessed June 17, 2017.

¹⁷¹ "Website of Christo and Jeanne- Claude" <http://christojeanneclaude.net/>, accessed July 4, 2018.

In action-sculpture, the four elements, earth, air, water and fire are common materials that artists such as Signer and Fischli and Weiss activate. Furthermore, ready-mades are often used in action-sculpture and can be made from a wide range of materials such as wood, clay, metals, sand and rubber. An insight from working extensively with the substance of dough in art for twenty years I found amongst other things that no shaping of this material is required by either the artist or the collaborating audience to achieve new shapes and textures in each new iteration of a Dough Portrait photograph. This is a particular property to the material of dough, which I must understand.¹⁷²

Materials of the cases study sculptures are: wood, metal and elastic string for the slingshot; clay and paint create the garden gnomes; nylon rip-stock, a fan and air make up the inflatable island sculpture. In regards to collaborating with the inflatable island, in particular, the outcome of the actions was impossible to predetermine. The air, which is both inside and outside the inflatable island, affects the fabric and thus the shape in different ways depending on the air pressure and humidity of both the air and the fabric. Sunlight furthermore has changing effects on how the fabric of the inflatable island appears as the fabric is semitransparent when backlit. The weight of the fan also affects the balance of the inflatable island.

New Materialism¹⁷³ is a discourse in theory and has recently had implications not only in art but also for feminism, ecology and geography.¹⁷⁴ New Materialism

¹⁷² View a number of artworks featuring dough as the main material here: www.sorendahlgaard.com accessed February 7, 2019.

¹⁷³ Definition of New materialism by Fox, N.J. and Alldred, P. (2018) New materialism. In: Atkinson, P.A., Delamont, S., Hardy, M.A. and Williams, M. (eds.) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Research Methods*

examines the relationship of collaborating with materials and how materials influence artistic outcomes.¹⁷⁵ Australian artist and writer Barbara Bolt introduce the idea, grounded in Paul Carter's term 'material thinking' that it 'offers a particular way of understanding the world' and furthermore 'Material thinking offers us a way of considering the relations that take place within the very process or tissue of making.'¹⁷⁶ In a lecture, Bolt (2009) refer to the drawing process of South African artist William Kentridge as an example of the creative collaboration of working with materials in art. Kentridge reflects on the creative process in making one of his animation films, where he says:

When the process is working at its best, it is in the activity, that physical activity of drawing that new ideas throw themselves forward and become integrated into the film. Occasionally there is a breakthrough that

London: Sage. 'New materialism is a term ascribed to a range of contemporary perspectives in the arts, humanities and social sciences that have in common a theoretical and practical 'turn to matter'. This turn emphasizes the materiality of the world and everything – social and natural – within it, and differentiates new materialisms from a post-structuralist focus upon texts, 'systems of thought' and 'discourses', focusing upon social production rather than social construction.' 'The materialities considered in new materialist approaches include human bodies; other animate organisms; material things; spaces, places and the natural and built environment that these contain; and material forces including gravity and time. Also included may be abstract concepts, human constructs and human epiphenomena such as imagination, memory and thoughts; though not themselves 'material', such elements have the capacity to produce material effects.'

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320016117_New_Materialism accessed February 20, 2019.

¹⁷⁴ For further reading see: Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, "Material Ecocriticism: Materiality, Agency, and Models of Narrativity," *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 3, no. 1 (2012).

¹⁷⁵ B. Bolt, "Towards a "New Materialism" Through the Arts" in *Carnal Knowledges: Towards a "New Materialism" Through the Arts*, eds. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 1 – 8.

¹⁷⁶ Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

happens in the process, the actual physical process of drawing, repeating and repeating. It is what releases the new way of thinking.¹⁷⁷

Bolt notes that in the film animation clip by Kentridge, the mine owner is in his bed with a coffee plunger and the idea occurred to Kentridge to make a visual transition through the coffee plunger into the underground mine where the mine workers are. Kentridge concludes: 'It was certainly not something I knew in advance. It was in the process of drawing that new ways of thinking were released'.¹⁷⁸ Bolt concludes that 'Kentridge did not solve his problems theoretically by thinking about it, he solved it by drawing. Practical behaviour, as Heidegger says, produces its own kind of site.'¹⁷⁹

In socially engaged art the materials are often immaterial and can include feelings such as trust and the experience of the event. Cuban artist Tania Bruguera explains about her work for the Tate Modern Hyundai Commission 2018-2019: 'the material of my work is social behaviour. It is how we communicate with each other in society, how we are together.'¹⁸⁰ She frames her work as activism and 'socially useful art'. Bruguera's explains: 'My sense of aesthetics comes from what do you feel from being part of something, as opposed to looking at something. When you discover you can speak for yourself, when you discover you can be better than you think you can be, when you discover you are not afraid, that is beautiful.'¹⁸¹ Bruguera's artistic

¹⁷⁷ Barbara Bolt's video lecture, 2009, slow-tv. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3RV2tcNy1c>, accessed August 21, 2018.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ BBC HARD-talk Tania Bruguera, October 4, 2018 accessed October 6, 2018.

¹⁸¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laMaQbbLYiQ&feature=youtu.be> accessed October 6, 2018.

material is a feeling. Bruguera aims to evoke a feeling of empathy and compassion in the audience on the theme of migration. According to the artist, it is a social experiment.¹⁸² The experience of how each participating audience member and their perception of the exhibition is, of course, personal and unique, so the material of the emotion or feeling the artist aims to evoke is co-determined by each visitor. In the case studies of this research one aim is to evoke a sense of playing well together, a concept by De Koven presented earlier in this thesis. Playing well is a particular feeling familiar to us all. It is a satisfying feeling with social qualities. The sense of playing well is a material of the case studies.

According to Signer, the process constitutes the core element of his work. In both action-sculpture and socially engaged art, the process is, therefore, a material of the work. Some materials in art, and as presented in the case studies, are immaterial such as air, the process, social fabric, feelings and the experience. As shown in the examples in this section, the artistic process of making offers the possibility of creative collaborations with new and surprising materials and outcomes.

Collaborating with People

In the artworks of the case study, collaborating with people includes three distinctively different collaborations: one is when I, the artist, collaborate with the sculpture activating object, the second is when other artists, such as Meir Tati in *The Slingshot Planting Technique* and Tully Moore in *The Gnome Painting Technique*

¹⁸² Tate Modern video interview with Tania Bruguera November 16, 2018.
<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/hyundai-commission-tania-bruguera>,
accessed November 18, 2018.

collaborate. The third is other people (I interchangeably refer to as the audience). The audience complete new iterations of the work on the invitation of the activating sculpture and sometimes with the artist. The framework affords a spectrum of possibilities spanning between following the instructions with a minimum of engagement in the game-play to adding your creativity by making your own rules. The audience is thus free, to a certain degree, to add their unique mark on the outcome of the work depending on how they choose to play along. The methodology, therefore, offers the possibility of a wide range of actions and experiences for the collaborating audience as they take part in the playful process of completing a new iteration of the work. The methodology of collaborating with people through play furthermore involves chance and uncertainty to the outcome.

Through collaboration with people their role changes from physically passive spectators of the art object to active manipulators/creative contributors of the outcome. The audience therefore transforms into an active human material in the artwork, a material with a brain (and a sensing body) and thus the possibility to reflect and effect the course of events depending on their creativity, choices and abilities within the framework of the game structure.

Where is the Artwork?

The three case studies of this research share the three distinct phases, which also is prevalent in the action-sculpture examples mentioned in this thesis, which are: Before (setting up), during (the action) and after (resting but changed). The 'after' stage is several things.

1. The new artwork that is produced as a result the action with the collaborators i.e. a film, video (document).
2. The object at rest after the action, which may also bear the traces of the action on its form and therefore be transformed to some degree.

Stillness after the action and preparation for further action will be discussed in the later chapter. The artist starts a process, which the collaborators (nature's forces, materials or people) play a part in completing.

In regards to the three case studies, the artwork consists of all the aspects in the project, which are: The sculpture-activating object itself, playing the game of completing the work, the social experience of playing together, the creative and productive process of all the different types of collaborations and making, and finally, the photographs and videos from the process. The physical central 'game piece' is the sculptural object. The primary immaterial work is the process of the action-sculpture. The agency of the activating sculpture is what determines the rules of the game, and thus the actions by the collaborating persons.

The sculptural objects can be thought of as tools, with the purpose to activate a process of collaboration, which, as Helguera points out, is instrumental for the completion of the work.¹⁸³ This method of audience collaboration as a way to complete the work is similar to the methodology of Nielsen's *The Model*, Althamers *Slide* and Wurm's instructional sculptures. The completion of the work becomes a

¹⁸³ Helguera, interview with Søren Dahlgaard, in the appendix to this thesis.

performative action, and this process can have quality as an experience, and aesthetic quality, however, at the same time this process is also what constitutes the work. The collaborative process, thus the artwork contains all these elements.

Limitations and Obstructions as a Creative Force

Designing the work to have restrictions/obstructions is a method, which in my experience often generates creativity. The methodology of this research is not only shaped by the ideas and concepts described in this chapter. The methodology is also influenced by my financial reality and other factors such as family commitments and lifestyle choices. It must be noted that the methodology, how I work, make and develop the projects, is adjusted and negotiated (or compromised) in accordance to fit my life. To be aware of this aspect is not relevant for the audience of my work, but it is, nevertheless, a deciding factor in many of the choices I make when I do my work. If, for instance, I decide I need to do something, which is particularly time-consuming or expensive, I then have to come up with ways to make other parts of the project faster or cheaper to complete. These are given everyday realities for most people, but I mention this because it is within the limitations of time and finance that one must operate and make the most of the situation. In my experience limitations inspire creativity and solutions.

Summary of Chapter

Helguera challenged me to 'define what you do with a different name'.¹⁸⁴ This challenge made me realise the 'different name' is the activating sculpture. Helguera's

¹⁸⁴ Helguera, interview with Søren Dahlgaard, in the appendix to this thesis.

challenge helped me arrive at a clearer understanding of the interaction of my methods and my conceptual framework. As presented in this chapter my methodology is framed around how the agency of the activating sculptures can generate transformations through a game framework of playful collaborations. These involve aspects of slapstick aesthetics and generosity to facilitate inclusion, which help kick-start the process of creating new iterations of the work.

In the following three chapters I will present the three research case studies and their methodology.

3. Case Study One: The Inflatable Island

The aim of this chapter is to describe the new iterations produced with *The Inflatable Island* and consider them in relation to the context of practice and theory introduced in chapter one. I will then discuss how *The Inflatable Island* address the research questions through the methodology presented in chapter two.

Naming the Inflatable Island: Fuppidhoo

In Dhivehi, the Maldivian language, *fuppi* means inflated, and *dhoo* is the most common suffix attached to Maldivian island names and means island. As a consequence, it is natural to name the inflatable island *Fuppidhoo*. It sounds like a real island name for a Maldivian island. Some real-life examples include Kaashidhoo (coconut island), and Keyodhoo (banana island), and the island I resided on in the Maldives from 2002-04¹⁸⁵ is called Hibalhidooh. *Fuppidhoo* also has a playful ring to it, so it seems a name fit for the inflatable island.

Background

Before we explore the new iterations with *Fuppidhoo*, it is necessary to introduce the first iteration of this work, as it is the precursor that gave birth to this research project.

¹⁸⁵ Hibalhidooh is the name of the island where I initiated a vegetable farm. For further details on this project see *Growing Vegetables on a Coral Island Maldives* at www.sorendahlgaard.com and the book Araeen, Rasheed, Søren Dahlgaard, Eliza Tan. *Søren Dahlgaard: Growing Vegetables on a Coral Island Hibalhidooh*. Galleri Image, Aarhus Denmark 2011.



Figure 49 *The Maldives Exodus Caravan Show* and the community centre greenhouse at the gardens of Sierra de Giardini, Venice Biennale 2013. Image: Søren Dahlgaard.

I initiated the group exhibition *The Maldives Exodus Caravan Show* with curators Elena Gilbert (DE) and Paolo Rosso of Microclima (IT) for the Venice Biennale in 2013.¹⁸⁶ The exhibition's main aim was to promote environmental and political awareness about the Maldives. The exhibition consists primarily of non-physical artworks such as performances, videos, games and music and featured both internationally well-known artists such as Bik Van der Pol, Antti Laitinen, Christian Falsnaes, Superflex, Rirkrit Tiravanija and ten artists and music groups from the Maldives.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ *The Maldives Exodus Caravan Show* was part of the official collateral event *The Museum of Everything* shown at the community centre greenhouse and gardens of Sierra de Giardini located near the main entrance to the national pavilions at the Giardini in Venice.

¹⁸⁷ www.the-maldives-exodus-caravan-show.com, accessed August 1, 2018.

Within the relational and critical practice of contemporary art, this work can be approached in a variety of ways: as a referencing and reimagining of land art and sculpture, and as a public and participatory commentary on climate change and democracy.



Figure 50 *Political Climate Wrestle* with New Zealand artist Mark Harvey and an audience member in Laznia Art Centre, Gdansk, Poland, 2015.

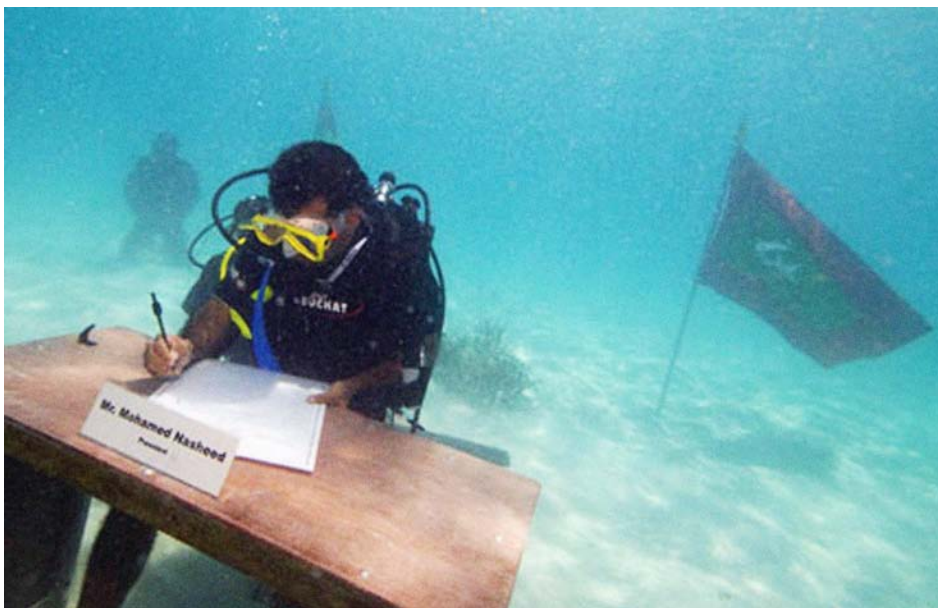


Figure 51 Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed, 2009, during his staged underwater cabinet meeting, an event meant to highlights the island nation's extreme vulnerability to climate change. Photo credit: wenn.com

The project gained its impetus from Mohamed Nasheed's political action in 2009 when he hosted a Cabinet meeting underwater to highlight the genuine concerns of his atoll island homelands and the need to act on climate change on a global scale. It was a highly performative and artistic political act in its own right.¹⁸⁸ American film director Jon Shenk's documentary *The Island President*,¹⁸⁹ 2011, about Nasheed's battle against climate change and the challenges he faced at the COP15 climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009, can also be viewed on small screens inside the caravan.

The caravan exhibition was designed to symbolise both home and mobility. The practical reality of working with a minimal budget to realise the exhibition in Venice compelled me to envision a cheap, yet effective solution that was visually and conceptually coherent. The combination of the caravan and the inflatable island situated on top created a sculptural object, which became an eye-catching image and at the same time an image of the art exhibit itself.

¹⁸⁸ Mohamed Nasheed, "Interview", transcribed by Søren Dahlgaard, 2016, where Nasheed explains how the Underwater Cabinet Meeting helped create a platform for the climate change campaign for him and Maldives.

¹⁸⁹ www.theislandpresident.com



Figure 52 *The Maldives Exodus Caravan Show* presented by the Te Tuhi Art Centre at the harbour in Auckland, New Zealand, 2014.

The inflatable island, ‘floating’ on top of the caravan, playfully signals the genuine and perennial threat of exodus, and indeed the precariousness of both politics and climate change for the Maldives, and us all. The proposition and actual possibility of an exodus and the threat of being made stateless are increasingly relevant to people in small island states.¹⁹⁰

Every day for months,¹⁹¹ I handled the inflatable island physically by unpacking it, inflating it, deflating it and packing it up. The playful agency of the inflatable island as an object and its material, lead me to continue wanting to work with it in order to further explore its potential. It has resulted in three series of iterations produced

¹⁹⁰ S. Dahlgaard, “When is a Neighbour a Stranger?” in *Art in Public Spaces*, eds. Agnieszka Kulazińska-Grobis (Gdansk: Laznia Art Centre, 2015), 54 – 57.

¹⁹¹ During eight different exhibitions of *The Maldives Exodus Caravan Show*.

during this research. Each of the three series of works explores a different approach concerning the conception of the activating sculpture.



Figure 53 From left to right: Artist Mark Harvey, Laznia Art Centre Gdansk Poland director Jadwiga Charzynska and her two grown children, in yellow t-shirt Eskil Dahlgaard (eldest son of Søren and Amani), Meera Nasheed (Mohamed Nasheeds eldest daughter), Søren Dahlgaard and curator of the games program Maldivian game-designer Amani Naseem, 2015.

Fuppidhoo Landscape Photo-Series

I have divided the iterations with *Fuppidhoo* into three overall groupings for a more precise overview. First, is a comprehensive photo-series of iterations with *Fuppidhoo* appearing in a diverse range of landscapes in several countries between 2015-18.¹⁹²

In these images, *Fuppidhoo* symbolises the temporary transformation of the landscape specifically, and climate change refugees more metaphorically.¹⁹³ Initially,

¹⁹² The inflatable island appears in over seventy locations in twelve different countries in this photo-series of which only a handful was presented at the PhD exhibition.

¹⁹³ The role of the inflatable island in *Maldives Exodus Caravan Show* remained as a sculptural prop on top of the caravan in each location the exhibition has been shown and acts as an eye-catching object drawing attention to the exhibition. For this research, carried out from 2015 to 2018, I use *Fuppidhoo* to create new work. I have made a series of iterations featuring *Fuppidhoo* out of an interest to explore

my idea was to illustrate Maldivian climate change refugees travelling the world in search of a new place to settle after their country disappears in the waves of the rising ocean. As the work progressed *Fuppidhoo's* role changed and expanded. It became vital to establish an explicit contextual reference and dialogue with land art in this series of photographs.



Figure 54 Left: Christo and Jean Claude's' *Wrapped Coast*, Little Bay, Australia, 1969. Image: Christo and Jean Claude. Right: Deflated *Fuppidhoo's* on the same rocks of Little Bay, Australia, 2017. Image: Søren Dahlgaard.

Visiting Land Art Sites

Land art and the concept of transformation are closely connected in that land art is often created from manipulating materials of the landscape itself, thereby transforming the landscape.¹⁹⁴ I wanted to create a clear connection between *Fuppidhoo* and land art to highlight the relevance of this art movement. To achieve this I decided to take *Fuppidhoo* to visit some well-known land art sites with the purpose of juxtaposing *Fuppidhoo* against these historic sites and works. The first in

how it might have a capacity to activate collaborations such as audience participation in new ways, through the approach of play as a method of working. The artworks with *Fuppidhoo* for this research case study are therefore new.

¹⁹⁴ Land art definition: Art that is made within or atop or involving a landscape or art that is made from materials drawn from the landscape. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STW0eZDsKVg> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_art accessed October 20, 2017.

the series was in 2017 on the east coast of Australia in Little Bay, NSW, (figure 53).

The site was the location of Christo and Jean Claude's' *Wrapped Coast* in 1969, (figure 52).



Figure 53 Fuppidhoo visits *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* by Robert Smithson, 1971, near the town Emmen in The Netherlands, 2017. Image: Søren Dahlgaard.

The next location near the town of Emmen in The Netherlands, 2017, (figure 53) was where Robert Smithson staged his famous *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* in 1971.¹⁹⁵ Here I placed *Fuppidhoo* on top of a large rock Smithson had placed at the centre of the broken circle. The spiral hill to the right in the image is now covered with plants and has a spiral-shaped walking path leading to the top of the hill from where one can view the broken circle and the rest of the gravel pit.

¹⁹⁵ www.brokencircle.nl accessed January 22, 2019.



Figure 55 *Fuppidhoo* pays tribute to Agnes Denes' *The Living Pyramid* (2015/2017) at Documenta in Kassel, Germany, 2017. Image: Søren Dahlgaard.

My final location was Kassel, Germany where I placed *Fuppidhoo* next to Agnes Denes' ecological sculpture *Living Pyramid* located in a park and part of the Documenta exhibition.¹⁹⁶ The images of *Fuppidhoo* photographed with well-known land art works represents only a small number in the landscape photo-series and can be viewed as locations where *Fuppidhoo* makes a stopover on its journey through various landscapes, borders and climate zones. They are subtle yet significant stopovers, in that they make temporary physical site-specific connections to land art and environmental art, while additionally acknowledging the role these historical artworks have played in my work.

The land art sites are specific locations while other landscapes in the photo-series with *Fuppidhoo* are less site-specific. Some can even be considered anonymous non-sites such as a desert, a beach or a mountain if their geographical location was not part of the title of each photographic image. The specific site of each place *Fuppidhoo* visits does, however, matter since I took *Fuppidhoo* to each place and the journey and

¹⁹⁶ www.documenta.de accessed February 7, 2019.

experience of this action affect the outcome of the work. Had I instead digitally manipulated and inserted *Fuppidhoo* into different random pictures of landscapes on a computer screen in my office, the resulting work would have been different. Producing images in nearly seventy different locations in over twelve countries between 2015-18 have revealed to me, that a large part of the pictures of the photo-series would not have been the same, had I not travelled there in person with *Fuppidhoo* and visited the sites.



Figure 56 Left image: *Fuppidhoo* is transported on top of a jeep in the Australian outback, 2017 (video still). Right image: *Fuppidhoo* on top of a tuktuk in Chongqing, China, 2015. Søren Dahlgaard.

Fuppidhoo represents the idea of transforming a fixed and immovable object, such as an island into a highly mobile one. During this process, it becomes a mobile piece of land art, and landscape, that relates to the places and contexts as it moves around.

Fuppidhoo is, therefore, literally a globally travelling piece of land art, joining notable land artworks that also toured, or whose remnants from a work's first iteration might be transported and reused.¹⁹⁷ The visits to historically significant land art

¹⁹⁷ There are other land art work, which also have travelled and been repeated in several localities such as Agnes Denes *Wheatfield – A Confrontation*, 1982, where the harvested wheat from the wheat field was distributed to a number of locations around the world. Also Beuys' *7000 Oaks* tree planting project, which was taken up in other cities after the first iteration in Kassel, 1982, and furthermore,

works (or sites) emerge out of a wish not only to place *Fuppidhoo* squarely in the context of these works but furthermore to create a dialogue with them while at the same time paying tribute by creating this responsive work.¹⁹⁸



Figure 57 Left image: *Fuppidhoo* on the dunes of Mungo National Park, NSW, 2017. Right image: *Fuppidhoo* in the Negev Desert, Israel, 2016. Søren Dahlgaard.

Firstly, as I transport and inflate the island-shaped sculpture in different locations, new ideas emerge. *Fuppidhoo* inspires me to explore new ideas for image compositions, how to frame the photograph or how to place *Fuppidhoo* in the landscape. Working site-specifically in the landscape is a creative process between *Fuppidhoo* and myself. I do not know what might come out of this process in advance. I may set out to create a new photograph but end up with a video recording instead. This represents the open-ended framework of open work and open source mentioned in the previous chapter. In this photo-series, I collaborate not only with *Fuppidhoo* but also the site, the camera and nature's forces such as gravity and the wind. These collaborations all effect the outcome of the work in different ways. The nature of *Fuppidhoo* affords me to behave in certain ways. *Fuppidhoo* sets the

Argentinean artist Nicolás García Urriburu's colouring of rivers intervention in Venice's Canal Grande in 1968 has subsequently been replicated in many other locations.

circumstance for a situation and allows me to do something. Affordance plays a role in how *Fuppidhoo* is an activator of a creative and collaborative process with me in completing a new iteration of the work.

There are perhaps more differences than similarities between *Fuppidhoo* in the landscape and many works of land art. Land art commonly uses the natural materials of the Earth such as soil, rocks and plants. Joseph Beuys' *7000 Oaks*, 1982,¹⁹⁹ consists, as the title indicates of trees, and the action of planting of them.²⁰⁰ Compared to nature's organic materials *Fuppidhoo* is an alien object in the natural landscape. But if we recall Christo and Jeanne Claude's and Rosemary Laing's work, presented in chapter one, *Fuppidhoo* does have contemporaries working in the context of land art and environmental art creating temporary interventions with fabric in the landscape.



Figure 58 Left image: *Fuppidhoo* by the Sea of Galilee, Israel, 2016. Right image: *Fuppidhoo* leaning on a hedge in suburban Horsens, Denmark, 2016.

Photographic images of land art and also performance and process art (such as action-sculpture) have a history of primarily being documentation and not photographic artworks. This observation responds to the question presented in

¹⁹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/7000_Oaks accessed October 24, 2017.

²⁰⁰ Furthermore, the social experience of planting the trees together with other people is an example of what Beuys calls Social Sculpture of which *7000 Oaks* is one of them.

chapter two, where is the artwork? Images of the work by Christo, Smithson, Denes, Signer and Burden examples are considered documentation, not works of art. The physical installations or actions of these works are to be experienced on site and live. The *Fuppidhoo* photo-series along with Laing's photographic work *The Flowering of the Strange Orchid* (2017), mentioned in chapter one, are examples of temporary installations in natural landscapes made for the camera to capture. These photographs are artworks and the result of a creative process between the artist, the camera, nature's forces and the sculptural materials of the installation on site. These photographic examples did not have an audience present on site (in most cases), which is similar to many of Signer's actions. This mark a difference between how photography is often used in land art, performance and action-sculpture as documentation whereas the *Fuppidhoo* photo-series are photographic artworks and exhibited as such.

Staging Temporary Transformations



Figure 59 *Fuppidhoo* Kings Canyon, Central Australia, 2015. Image: Søren Dahlgaard.

The idea of the landscape (or part of nature) transforming into transitory mobile units transgresses nature's geological possibilities, as we know it. What does it mean to take the island into different landscapes concerning the research question?

Fuppidhoo moving to various landscapes alludes to the colonisation of indigenous land, for example at Lake Mungo, and also humanity's current overconsumption of nature's resources. While it is beyond the scope of this project to fully address the fraught issue of colonisation in Australia where most of the research has been conducted.²⁰¹ When *Fuppidhoo* is viewed in the perspective of an artificial imposed on

²⁰¹ I acknowledge the unseeded sovereignty of the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island first nations people of this land and pay my respects to Elders past and present.

the natural, it evokes what is known as the Anthropocene Epoch,²⁰² discussed earlier in this paper, climate change and environmental awareness.



Figure 60 Left image: *Fuppidhoo* nestled amongst pink foxglove flowers, Tasmania, 2016. Right image: *Fuppidhoo*, Mt Hotham, Victoria, 2016. Images: Søren Dahlgaard.

Humans have shaped and manipulated vast parts of the Earth's landscapes by shifting materials around to construct roads, cities, power lines, mining, forestry, agriculture etc. thus creating a new epoch. Is *Fuppidhoo* an obstruction in the landscape and might this sculptural object call attention to Human's relationship to the natural environment in a similar fashion as the Franklin Gordon River photograph and environmental campaign mentioned in chapter one? *Fuppidhoo* can for these reasons be categorised under the broad rubric of art and ecology and *Fuppidhoo*, the activating sculpture, is cast in the leading role to tell this story.

²⁰² See reference about the Anthropocene Epoch in chapter one.

Walking Fuppidhoo



Figure 61 Video still from *Walking Fuppidhoo*, 2016, at Princess Hill Primary School, Melbourne.
Image: Søren Dahlgaard. Video link: <https://vimeo.com/222189354>

In this section, I present the *Walking Fuppidhoo* action and video work. I will consider the game framework *Walking Fuppidhoo* offered including its rules and instructions and how it activated collaboration with a group of children through play. Furthermore, I will examine how *Fuppidhoo* created a magic circle of play as a way to complete a new iteration and how it initiated a well-played game. I shall review how the situation was open and to which extent the outcome was unpredictable. Lastly, I will reflect which ways *Fuppidhoo* demonstrated its agency as an activating sculpture of transformation through play.

In the action and video work *Walking Fuppidhoo*, 2016,²⁰³ I asked the school children to assist me in making an art video, which entailed carrying *Fuppidhoo* across the

²⁰³ Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/222189354>

schoolyard while I recorded the action on video.²⁰⁴ These were my instructions to the students. What I did not anticipate was the students' apparent excitement and delight as they carried the island and their surprising contribution to this iteration. In my opinion, their excited squeals of delight as they carried *Fuppidhoo* across the schoolyard created a better work than what I had anticipated. The video became something more than the envisioned transportation scene of *Fuppidhoo*; it became a work of collaboration that sparked the student's creativity.²⁰⁵ For me, this revealed a potential new direction to explore – *Fuppidhoo's* role as an activator of playful behaviour and how playing together can activate a creative and productive contribution in the artistic process. This is how I identify the activating sculpture.

Throughout my artistic practice, staging photographs has been a reoccurring practice as evidenced by the first series of iterations with *Fuppidhoo* and in earlier work such as the *Dough Portraits*, 2008-15. The element of participation, involving the audience in the process of completing the work, is a recent aspect with *Fuppidhoo* I believe holds yet untapped possibilities for new iterations of future work.²⁰⁶

Activating Play Through Inclusion

Walking Fuppidhoo appears at the outset to be an instructional work, similar to Wurm's *One Minute Sculpture*, presented in chapter one, but there are crucial differences in the methodological framework. In contrast to Wurm's method, who

²⁰⁴ 3rd grade of Princess Hill Primary School in Melbourne, 2016.

²⁰⁵ Such as this 10-second video clip of *Fuppidhoo* on a road trip in the Australian outback, 2017 <https://vimeo.com/235125104>

²⁰⁶ My most comprehensive work with participation as a key element preceding *Fuppidhoo* has been the *Dough Portrait* photo series produced between 2008-2015.

uses a specific instruction, I allow the freedom of play to generate unexpected actions and affects which can then potentially influence the outcome of the work in significant ways. Since I am present as the children help produce the new iteration with *Fuppidhoo*, I can encourage further input from the participants and allow the children's self-generating play take over the game. In this way, *Fuppidhoo* represented an activating vehicle for a creative collaborative effort afforded by the children. *Fuppidhoo* became the activating object for audience collaboration through play. The work was open-ended in the sense that the children not only completed the artwork with an outcome that could not be predicted, but also generated the type of play (rather than an instruction) to produce this new artwork.

We may find this impetus in the work of other artists already mentioned in the thesis, for example, Althamer's *Slide* project unleashed the joyful eagerness of children to take part and collaborate, as were *Walking Fuppidhoo* in the schoolyard in Melbourne. We – the 'adult' world – need the child's wildness, their joy in play, and their candour to turn thinking on its head that puts on a show of being wise to the world and all grown up, and pretends that there is no alternative to the prevailing politics of 'more of the same'.²⁰⁷ Althamer's *Slide* project and *Walking Fuppidhoo* show us new forms of creative collaborations and the freedom afforded by art.

The playful audience as evidenced in the works *Walking Fuppidhoo*, *The Model* and the *Slide*, may also be seen in this context: they are programmatically processual, the process stands in the foreground and not in any final result, whatever it may turn out

²⁰⁷ Boehle, Franzen, Potoroczyn, *Pawel Althamer Aachen Projects 1992 / 2010 / 2014*, 200.

to be. In all three examples, the work fulfils an important function, for it stands at the centre of the communicative and social process, which the artist enters with their temporary artistic collaborators. The works create situations that allow for collective, inclusive production and exhibit these processes instead of art objects. *Walking Fuppidhoo*, *The Model* and the *Slide* challenge the concept of art, the concept of the artwork, and in particular the long-entrenched idea of authorship and the genius artist – the latter is superseded by the collective production. A collaborating audience is activated through a playful game structure where their creative potentials are unleashed.

A Socially Engaging Island

According to Helguera's definition of socially engaged art *One Minute Sculptures* cannot be considered such work, whereas *Walking Fuppidhoo* does offer the core aspects of socially engaged art. Helguera's argument on this matter sheds light on how *Walking Fuppidhoo* can be understood as a socially engaged artwork on the one hand and moreover how it cannot.²⁰⁸ *Walking Fuppidhoo* is not just a dematerialised experience (socially engaged art) it is also an art object in the framework on action-sculpture. This is the difference that this iteration of *Walking Fuppidhoo* offers to the existing framework for socially engaged art and action-sculpture.

Let us consider one more example of a work of audience activation. The work titled *Zero to infinity* by London based artist Rasheed Araeen is designed for the audience

²⁰⁸ Helguera, *Education for Socially-Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, 5.

to create shapes with minimalist cube sculptures made by the artist. Araeen says about his intentions:

In this work I have minimized the role of the artist. I deliver the conditions and it is then up to the visitor to do something with it. Then they really use their creativity. Hence the title: what I do is 'zero', so nothing. What they do, the visitors, is 'infinite', so endless.²⁰⁹

Araeen does not do 'zero' as he claims, since 'he delivers the conditions', sharing a similarly methodology to Signer, Wurm and the *Fuppidhoo* work. Araeen's work is open, but he remains the game master since he 'delivers the conditions'. Araeen's work reminds me of visiting LEGO-land in Denmark, where you can play with lots of LEGO bricks. It is fun and engaging and makes you play. One aspect, which is different from Araeen's work in all the *Fuppidhoo* work, is that I stage and record a photo or video, whereas Araeen does not. Both Araeen's work and the *Fuppidhoo* works are in a sense 'games' with simple rules, where the audience is invited to take part and play as a way to complete iterations of the work. Araeen's game pieces are, as mentioned, minimalist cube sculptures.²¹⁰ LEGO bricks similarly set the limits of play and are a conceptual parameter that authors a framework for the collaborating

²⁰⁹ Rob Schoonen, "Rasheed Araeen's Retrospective Exhibition at the Van Abbe Museum," *ED* November 30, 2017, <https://www.ed.nl/cultuur/rasheed-araeen-retrospectief-van-een-bruggenbouwer-in-van-abbemuseum~acb75c46/> accessed November 5, 2018.

²¹⁰ They were first realised in 1968, which was before most minimalist cube work of similar style by artists such as Donald Judd, Carl Andre and Sol Lewitt. Rasheed Araeen's cube works were not only early in the history of western minimalist sculpture; he developed the work further than his contemporaries by allowing the audience to play with the sculpture cubes.

J. Fischer et al., *The Triumph of Icarus: Life and Art of Rasheed Araeen* eds. Jean Fischer (Karachi: Millennium Media, 2014), 176 - 179.

playing audience. It is interesting to note that Araeen's minimalist cubes are indeed unique sculptures and not ready-mades.

An Island Well-Carried

Did the children play well together during the *Walking Fuppidhoo* action? Did *Walking Fuppidhoo* offer the conditions of De Koven's concept of the well-played game? *Walking Fuppidhoo* offered a game framework with loose rules and instructions. It activated collaboration with a group of children through establishing a magic circle of play, which initiated a game. The game appeared to be well-played, in De Koven's terms, in that while playing, the children changed the game and thereby created several new variations to their actions, thus completing several new iteration, through playing well and changing the rules. The joy and excitement the activity generated for the children and its social qualities were evident to me. The situation was open and the outcome unpredictable. *Fuppidhoo* demonstrated its agency as an activating sculpture of transformation through play. *The Model*, for instance, had no instructions and in this way represents the essence of play. Within the activities of the playground games could develop but the framework was free and open and in this sense did not offer any game rules or instructions.

Flying Fuppidhoo



Figure 62 *Fuppidhoo* turns into a cloud, Apollo Bay, Victoria, 2016. Image Søren Dahlgaard.

This section considers how the methodology of the collaboration with nature, materials and people (the artist in this case) created new outcomes. In this series of iterations, *Fuppidhoo* takes flight for the first time. On what turned out to be memorable morning, for my family, some friends and myself, in Apollo Bay, on the Great Ocean Road, Victoria, *Fuppidhoo* did not only transform into a flying island, it turned, for a moment, into a cloud.

On the meadow at Apollo Bay, (figure 58), I intended initially to photograph *Fuppidhoo* on the meadow as part of the landscape photo-series. Due to the wind and because I had handled *Fuppidhoo* on many occasions previously, I knew it was light and could catch the wind like a sail. I soon tried to work with the wind rather than against it. Instead of considering the wind as an obstruction, which prevented me from executing my plan (to create a still photo of *Fuppidhoo* resting on the meadow),

I allowed the wind to become a collaborator to explore what might come out of this new collaboration. It turned out to be challenging to work with the strong wind, but it nevertheless produced one of the most surprising transformations images/artworks with *Fuppidhoo* so far. White fluffy clouds drifted past in the blue sky, and *Fuppidhoo* became one of them for a few moments. The transformation led me to imagine climate refugee was on board this giant zeppelin shaped airship. A flying island suggests a fairy tale adventure where anything is possible. Roald Dahl's adventurous children's novel *James and the Giant Peach*, 1961, comes to mind, where the boy, James, flies away from his evil aunties in a giant peach with the help of thousands of seagulls. Is it not a fabulous utopian idea if islands could rescue their inhabitants from the rising sea levels by taking flight?

The Environment Changes the Game

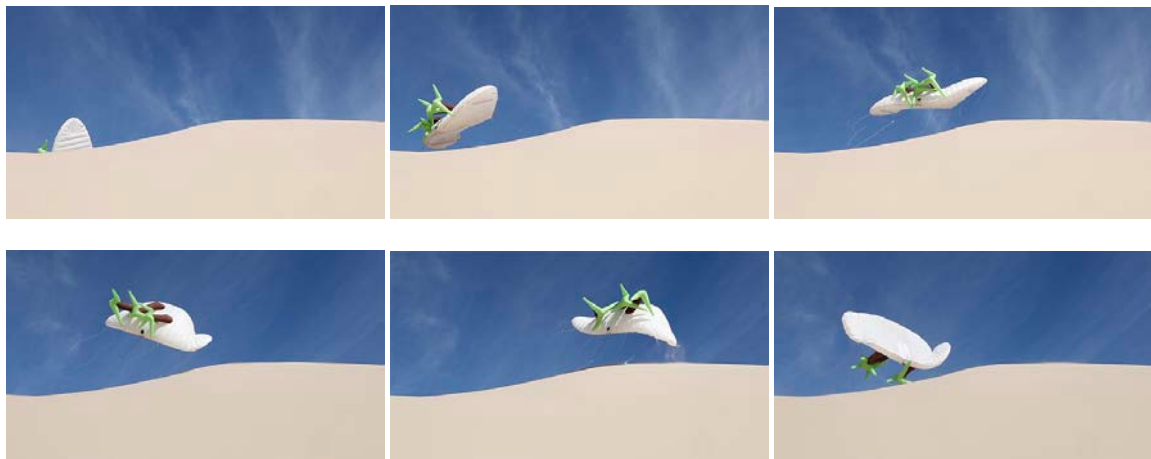


Figure 63 Video still from *The Flying Island's Last Dance*. *Fuppidhoo* is jerked around by turbulent gusts of wind and performs a poetic dance over the sand dune in Mungo National Park, NSW, 2017. Image: Søren Dahlgaard. Video link: <https://vimeo.com/262704713> password: island

In what became the video work, *The Flying Island's Last Dance* was the second time *Fuppidhoo* took flight and occurred much, in the same manner, I experienced in Apollo Bay (figure 59). I indented to photograph *Fuppidhoo* on the desert sand dunes

in Mungo National Park for the landscape series. Once again my unexpected collaborator, the wind, made an entrance, and offer, I could not refuse. The wind picked up the island from the sand dunes, and I was therefore not able to make the planned photograph. I quickly realised the wind presented the possibility of flying the island and I consequently switched the video camera on and took hold of the strings attached to the inflatable island to avoid it from blowing away.

In the video, *Fuppidhoo* appears slowly from behind a sand dune and rises into the cerulean sky. It flies up slowly at first, as a sail curved by a strong wind it appears somewhat steady. It then suddenly drops down behind the ridge of the sand dune to yet reappear and change shape resembling a pregnant whale and quickly moves across the frame four to five metres into the air above the sand dune. It lands for a brief moment on the ridge of the sand dune then bounces back up flipping sand into the air. This particular detail of the sand in the air convinces me this is not a computer-animated video but real.²¹¹

²¹¹ Video link: <https://vimeo.com/262704713> password: island.



Figure 64 Video still from *The Flying Island's Last Dance*. A moment later *Fuppidhoo* is flipped upside down and crashes on to the ridge of the sand dune. Image: Søren Dahlgaard.

I pushed *Fuppidhoo*, collaborating with the wind and the material properties of *Fuppidhoo* to the physical limit of its material. It was damaged in the process, with large tears in the fabric and a broken fan, irrespective, *Fuppidhoo* delivered an outstanding performance. To me, *Fuppidhoo* seems to perform a poetic 'last dance', hence the titles.

The Flying Island video evokes the nearly three-hundred-year-old tale of the Flying Island Laputa, in *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, 1726. Laputa is 7 km in diameter and hovers over the land of Balnibarbi ruled by the king from the flying island. *Gulliver's Travels* represent a British perspective to exploring and concurring foreign lands around the world, making contemporary connections to their colonial past and particularly given the finding of Indigenous burial sites on Lake Mungo.²¹²

²¹² *Mungo Man* ABC documentary, 2018: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-02-12/mungo-man-what-to-do-next-with-australias-oldest-remains/9371038> accessed January 28, 2019.

This iteration differs from action-sculpture in how it was only loosely organised. The initial set-up stage for preparing the event for the artwork did not work as planned, and I, therefore, adapted to the new situation within moments. The second stage turned out completely different from my initial plan due to the effect the wind had on the situation. The island was not designed for this collaboration with the wind, however, I embraced the situation and got something out of it. This is a part of the methodology; to be open for unforeseen possibilities and collaborations, since this may result in outcomes not possible otherwise.

Fuppidhoo Activates Collaborations

In Burden's *Flying Steamroller* once the work is set up, there is no space for variations, surprises and audience input/affecting new iterations. In this way, the *Flying Steamroller* is on a stage, and the audience is watching as physically passive spectators, a repetitive mechanical action with no new developments. The spectator cannot take part in the *Flying Steamroller* work in a hands-on way contrary to the *Walking Fuppidhoo* event, where the audience was able to add their creativity, thus co-producing the work. This difference in what the works offer may have something to do with being present at the live event. Burden is not present during the action of his *Flying Steamroller*. I am, on the other hand, present during the *Walking Fuppidhoo* event as my framework is different from Burden's. I am curious to observe as the audience engages in the game of ludic frivolity afforded by *Fuppidhoo* and record the result. This open and collaborative methodology presents me with the possibility of new surprising outcomes I would never have invented myself. At the same time, this framework represents the value of offering a new experience of playing well and its

inherent social qualities. In this way, I offer something and get something in return. It is a trade, and everyone seems satisfied with this arrangement.

Several of Signer's works are manifestations of presence and non-presence, the artist is present during the action and not present in the remaining artefacts from the action but often leaves a trace from his body, such as footprints in clay or the outline of his body on the wall after facing a blast of paint.²¹³ In *The Flying Island's Last Dance* video, I am not visible, but I am, nevertheless present as I pull strings attached to *Fuppidhoo* affecting its movements in the air in collaboration with the wind. I remain present, but out of sight, during the swift action of *Fuppidhoo*. This is another variation between Signer's methodology and mine, as Signer fully let nature's forces take over during the action itself. I remain physically involved as my action-sculpture unfolds.

The unpredictability of nature's elements, such as the wind, would furthermore not impact the work if produced from behind the computer screen. It is this detachment from the creation process of the artwork I wish to address, and this is a crucial aspect of my methodology. I do not want to be removed or disconnected from collaborations with nature's forces, and this is why my studio often is the outdoors. According to Laing, being in the landscape and how that effects the work is vital to her methodology and creative process. Similarly, Signer would not be able to remove his work from the landscape, as they are inseparable from each other as Signer

²¹³ Konrad Bitterli and Peter Zimmermann, *Roman Signer: The National Pavilion of Switzerland, 48th Venice Biennale* (Zurich: Swiss Federal Office of Culture, 1999), p. 35.

states; 'It was never enough for me to show something that is finished; I always sought change. Whether I introduce it myself or leave it to nature to do so.'²¹⁴

The way I work with *Fuppidhoo* represents an open work methodology where I choose to collaborate rather than control a predetermined idea of an outcome or sculptural shape. My methodology resembles action-sculpture, yet it is much more open and experimental. I, the artist, allow letting go of control to set up the experiment (stage one) as I am open for surprises/new collaborations throughout the event. Another significant difference to action-sculpture is that I repeat and make numerous iterations with the same object and can then pick and choose from the results whereas Signer, for example, can only do a 'one-take' until it works as intended. Wurm, on the other hand, does numerous iterations but he is not present and can therefore not respond in real time to the audience ideas and creative contributions.

Material Thinking

Material thinking is a collaboration with materials. In the essay *Materializing Pedagogies* (2006) Bolt recognise 'Material thinking is the magic of handling' and 'It is an understanding that originates in and through practice.'²¹⁵ Here Bolt describes a critical aspect of the human collaborations with the case study sculpture-objects. In *The Flying Island's Last Dance*, for instance, see figure 63, I was only able to fly *Fuppidhoo* over the dunes in Mungo National Park due to my understanding through

²¹⁴ Bitterli, Zimmermann, *Roman Signer: The National Pavilion of Switzerland, 48th Venice Biennale*, 35.

²¹⁵ Barbara Bolt, "Materializing Pedagogies," *Working Papers in Art and Design*, 4, (2006), retrieved February 19, 2019 from URL http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes_research/papers/wpades/vol4/bbfull.html

the practice of handling the material of the inflatable island in the natural environment from previous occasions. I therefore had a material understanding of *Fuppidhoo* and its relations with the physical surroundings. Bolt states, “This is material thinking.”²¹⁶ From the practice of handling *Fuppidhoo*, and the other case study sculpture-objects, “We can begin to talk of “skill with” rather than “mastery over” technologies, materials and processes”²¹⁷ Bolt concludes. Adding Huizinga’s notion of the magic circle of play and De Koven’s notion of the well-played game, I propose to extend the notion of; material thinking, to include play in the collaboration with materials.

Summary of Chapter

The iterations presented in this chapter have demonstrated *Fuppidhoo* as a facilitator of creativity and a range of collaborations. *Fuppidhoo* becomes a starting point for play, social relationships between people, similar to Nielsen’s *The Model*, 1969,²¹⁸ and an example of a socially engaged art project according to Helguera definitions.²¹⁹

The inflatable island first demonstrated the idea of mobility by visiting multiple landscapes and being carried by children, and lastly, *Fuppidhoo* flew in the wind. This movement of the island is a movement of an idea, which connects to art, ecology and climate change awareness. The photo-series of *Fuppidhoo* in a variety of landscapes including those associated with pivotal land art works of Christo and Jeanne- Claude,

²¹⁶ Bolt, “Materializing Pedagogies,” 4.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Theorised by Danish writer Lars Bang Larsen in *Social Aesthetics: 11 Examples to Begin with*, in the *Light of Parallel History*, Afterall Journal Autumn/Winter issue, 2000.

²¹⁹ Helguera, *Education for Socially-Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, 5.

Denes and Smithson, pointed at notions of humanity's mark on the landscape throughout many parts of the continents on Earth.

Walking Fuppidhoo demonstrated how it activated a group of people into co-producing their own experience with creative and social aspects as a way to complete a new iteration of the work. In this way the *Walking Fuppidhoo* work demonstrated to sit within the framework of socially engaged art. This iteration with *Fuppidhoo* illustrated how physical collaborations with people were required to complete the work. The iterations with *Fuppidhoo* furthermore demonstrated it as an action-sculpture, in how it transforms through a process of play, through three stages namely the static to the dynamic to the static yet changed state, as also evident in Signer's and Wurm's work.

Considering the different artistic media and strategies in the examples of iterations presented in this chapter, *Fuppidhoo* (iterations one, two and three) have much in common with land- and ecological art, action-sculpture and socially engaged art. But as demonstrated, *Fuppidhoo* does not fit squarely into any of these categories or is wholly similar to any of the examples described from these artistic fields of practice. The way *Fuppidhoo* activates a process of transformation through play can, therefore, be said to comprise a particular combination of genres and methods.

Considering *Fuppidhoo* as an activating object allowed me to create new iterations with unexpected collaborators and outcomes. The framework offered by *Fuppidhoo*, furthermore, extend beyond conventional understandings of socially engaged art in that the object is clearly a sculpture, while it facilitates interactions with the different collaborators. *Fuppidhoo* also extended notions of collaboration as a method of

making new iterations through play. *Fuppidhoo* demonstrated its ability to activate new collaborations with the wind, the children and myself to complete new iterations. The aspect of play and playing well demonstrates an essential aspect of the methodology in this case study.

A limitation or challenge of the methodology is the element of uncertainty of the outcome due to the dependence on collaborators (the wind, people, etc.) to complete new iterations. The new iterations (the process, experience, event and image) only exist due to the different collaborators. Paradoxically this limitation or challenge may be the critical aspect in this methodology, offering a potential for new unexpected artworks/iterations and experiences.

4. Case Study Two: The Slingshot Planting Technique

The aim of this chapter is to describe the iterations produced with *The Slingshot Planting Technique* and consider them concerning the context of practice and theory introduced in chapter one. I will then discuss how *The Slingshot Planting Technique* addresses the research questions through the methodology presented in chapter two.

I will consider the game framework *The Slingshot Planting Technique* offers including the rules and instructions and how it activates collaborations with nature, materials and people through an invitation to play as a way to complete new iterations.

Furthermore, I shall examine to which extent the outcome was unpredictable and consider the social and experiential qualities of the game situation. Lastly, I will reflect on which ways *The Slingshot Planting Technique* demonstrated its agency as an activating sculpture of transformation through play.



Figure 65 *The Slingshot Planting Technique* in Holon, 2016. Meir Tati and Søren Dahlgaard.

Since 2008, Israeli artist Meir Tati and I have formed the artistic duo, The Kaboom Process, and completed eight projects and exhibitions most of which have taken

place in Denmark and Israel.²²⁰ *The Slingshot Planting Technique*, 2016, is a collaborative project by The Kaboom Process. We created the work on the invitation from the Digital Art Centre in Holon, Israel. Tati and I developed the idea behind *The Slingshot Planting Technique* in response to the Digital Art Centre's wish to host socially engaging art projects in the neighbourhood surrounding the art centre. Tati and I decided to create a large medieval inspired slingshot as a seed-planting device for the public parkland near the art centre.

Ecological Awareness and Guerrilla Gardening

The Slingshot Planting Technique responds to a range of writing on the ecological crisis, commencing with writing such as Carson's earlier mentioned *Silent Spring*,²²¹ which started an ecological awareness in the US and more recently the frequently debated new human-shaped geological era known as the Anthropocene Epoch.²²² Another environmental aware movement is the straw revolution, a Buddhist agriculture philosophy created by Japanese farmer Masanobu Fukuoka.²²³ His practice and concept of using seed balls is an inspiration to *The Slingshot Planting Technique*. The Land Foundation located in Northern Thailand initiated by Thai artists Rirkrit Tiravanija and Kamin Lertchaiprasert in 1998 references Masanobu Fukuoka and his agricultural philosophy as a key inspiration for their ongoing social farming

²²⁰ <https://kaboomprocess.wordpress.com/> accessed October 14, 2018.

²²¹ Carson, *Silent Spring*.

²²² Paul J. Crutzen, "The "Anthropocene": In *Earth system science in the Anthropocene* (Berlin & Heidelberg: Springer, 2006), 13-18. (See Anthropocene definition previously in this thesis).

²²³ Gaweeewong, Gridthiya and Patrick Flores. *Nothing: A Retrospective by Rirkrit Tiravanija and Kamin Lertchaiprasert* (Bangkok: Office for Contemporary Art and Culture, 2004), 140.

project.^{224, 225} There are several other significant writers on ecological issues, who relate to the framework of *The Slingshot Planting Technique*, for example, the American Timothy Morton and his concept of Object-Oriented Ontology. Morton's writing on Hyperobjects, a term describing impalpable concepts, such as climate change, is also relevant to mention concerning trying to grasp the concept of climate change.²²⁶ Writers, such as Vandana Shiva, Donna Haraway, Tim Ingold, Jean Fisher, Henk Oosterling and Ine Gevers,²²⁷ have also contributed important essays and books in the ongoing debate and research into humanities impact and understanding of the ecosystems of the natural world from a perspective of the humanities. Buckminster Fuller's ideas on humanity's impact on the Earth's resources and futuristic and visionary designs and inventions in the 1950s-60s also serve as a general backdrop of inspiration.²²⁸

In 2014, only a few months before starting this PhD research, I took part in a large international and inter-disciplinary conference titled *The Anthropocene Curriculum* hosted by Haus der Kulturen der Welt - HKW in Berlin, where I contributed to writing an article published by the museum.²²⁹ Besides, from 2002-04, I initiated a two-year vegetable farm project on the small coral island Hibalhidhoo in the

²²⁴ <http://www.thelandfoundation.org/> accessed October 4, 2018.

²²⁵ I should furthermore mention the two-year long vegetable farm project I initiated on the small coral island with the name of Hibalhidhoo in the Maldives from 2002-04, as this project shaped my awareness and understanding of many aspects in food production and plant biology. Working at this vegetable farm gave me the opportunity of comprehensive hands-on experience.

²²⁶ Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*.

²²⁷ Gevers, Bouvier, Dolphijn. *Yes Naturally - How Art Saves the World*.

²²⁸ R. Buckminster Fuller. *Education Automation: Comprehensive Learning for Emergent Humanity*. (City: publisher, 2009).

²²⁹ <https://www.anthropocene-curriculum.org/pages/root/campus-2014/slow-media/deconstructing-fences/mobile-hedges/> accessed October 4, 2018.

Maldives,²³⁰ as this project shaped my awareness and understanding of many aspects in food production and plant biology. Working at this vegetable farm gave me the opportunity of comprehensive hands-on experience. *The Slingshot Planting Technique* is developed with inspiration from the Guerilla Gardening concept, which is to plant seeds in abandon pieces of land, often in urban areas. Influences of Dada, nonsense and slapstick are strategies Tati and I adapt to convey the ecological message.

Interview with Collaborating Artist Meir Tati

Meir Tati and Søren Dahlgaard in conversation in Jaffa, Israel, 24th of November 2016, on the occasion of producing *The Slingshot Planting Technique* together.²³¹

Søren Dahlgaard (SD): This interview will be part of my PhD thesis. It is important to have the presence of your voice, as one of the case studies, *The Slingshot Planting Technique*, is a collaboration between the two of us. Let me begin by asking you to describe *The Slingshot Planting Technique* project briefly?

Meir Tati (MT): There are two main aspects of the work, the slingshot and the seed bombs. The seed bombs represent an old planting technique where compost, seeds and clay are mixed to form the seed balls. It is a method that preserves the seeds. More recently this technique has been used in urban guerrilla farming around the world.

²³⁰ Araeen, Dahlgaard, Tan. *Søren Dahlgaard: Growing Vegetables on a Coral Island Hibalhidhoo*.

²³¹ Meir Tati currently works in the Israeli Centre for Digital Art as a manager of public and educational programs. Previously he worked in a similar role at the Bat Yam museum, Israel.



Figure 66 Tati is mixing seed balls with cow dung and clay, Holon, Israel, 2016. Image: Søren Dahlgaard and Meir Tati.

The project takes place in collaboration with the Israeli centre for digital art. The art centre is located in the neighbourhood of Jesse Cohen in the city of Holon. Jesse Cohen is an immigrant neighbourhood and widely considered to be one of the worst (of low socio economic status) in greater Tel Aviv. The art centre relocated to Jesse Cohen as a part of the city's attempt to bring change to the neighbourhood through artistic processes. Our project is part of the art centre's plan move from an exhibition-based program to research and process-based projects. The idea is to use the art centre as a starting point for artists, activists and local residents to developing ideas, which will benefit the local community rather than the art world. The overall concept is to make a series of projects that are not connected to an exhibition or is driven by the motive of an exhibition. The idea is to create projects that will bring awareness to the role of the Israeli centre for digital art in the neighbourhood and the function of art as a process for change. The basics of the project are to research and develop a model that can create a small change. The art centre has previously invited artists and artist groups whose practice is widely considered socially engaged art, such as the Danish art group Superflex and Bik Van der Pol from The Netherlands.

The Slingshot Planting Technique has several stages:

1. The design and construction of the slingshot with the assistance of industrial designers.
2. To identify and reintroduce local seeds, some of which do not grow in the neighbourhood any more.
3. Identify suitable places to plant the seeds.
4. Planting the seeds by shooting the slingshot.
5. Return to the location to see if the seed germinates and grow into a plant.

The participants of the project are: the two of us and the local people of the neighbourhood; some people we meet when we work in the neighbourhood; and some people through the art centre.

SD: What are some of the cultural references and aesthetics that inspire your practice in general, which you bring into The Kaboom Process collaboration?

MT: Israeli society is heavily militarised, and the presence of guns in public space is common. In my practice, the basic idea is to take army aesthetics and turn them around and make them work for society, either by making a work of art or doing a workshop for kids with 'art weapons.' In The Kaboom Process, we take the same approach and connect it to the playful ways of your practice.

SD: Please explain about the particular area called Jesse Cohen we are working in Holon. What is it we want to do, what is the problem we have defined and how are we responding to it?

MT: Jesse Cohen is predominantly a neighbourhood for recent immigrants and was built in the 1950s from a large donation by a wealthy American Jew by this name.

Jessy Cohen has experienced a couple of 'immigration waves.' The last one was in the early 2000s where immigrants arrived from Ethiopia. The city of Holon, where the neighbourhood is located, is generally a rather well off city. Jesse Cohen is the last neighbourhood to remain poor regardless of various efforts by the city. There is a highway cutting through Jesse Cohen with high walls along either side. The public space alongside the walls is a narrow strip of a mostly abandoned wasteland. Some private houses have expanded their yards and occupy some of this land. The starting point of working in this public space is to ask: If we plant seeds that used to grow there, could this be a way to draw focus on this abandoned public space and create a process for the community to start thinking and discussing what they could do with this land?

SD: How do you see the particular methods we have developed influencing the outcome of the work?

MT: We use an old method of making seed balls, which brings back to light old gardening methods. Utilising the slingshot adds a sense of humour that helps people connect to the method. The idea behind The Kaboom Process is to show that the way you do something can be significant. When we were shooting the seed balls people wanted to join in. *The Slingshot Planting Technique* attracted interaction with the people of the neighbourhood in a way we would not have if we just sowed seeds by hand.

SD: How do you think this project might be different if you had worked alone? What different aspects or approaches does each of us bring into The Kaboom Process?

MT: In every project by The Kaboom Process each of us brings a different approach to our collaboration. When you work alone as an artist you are limited to your own ideas, knowledge and methods. The combination of working together expands our practice and we develop ideas we would not have otherwise.

SD: Thank you.

The Slingshot Planting Technique in Holon

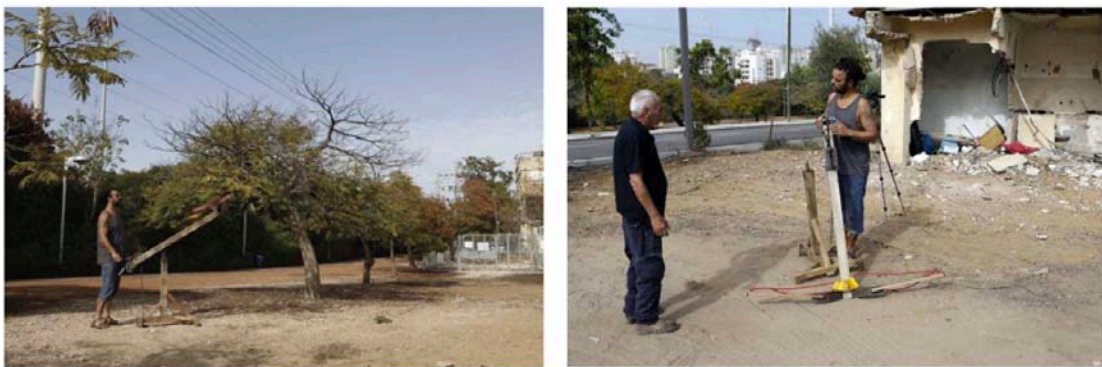


Figure 67 *The Slingshot Planting Technique*, Holon, Israel. By Meir Tati and Søren Dahlgaard, 2016. A curious resident stops to have a chat about what we are doing. He also wants to try out the slingshot.

Tati and I developed *The Slingshot Planting Technique* project as a response to the state of the public areas surrounding the art centre, a wasteland, which we imagined potentially could turn into a beautiful recreational park area for the local community. With a budget of AUD 1,000 and one week, we had no intention to transform the public areas of the neighbourhood in any significant or permanent way. What we did set out to achieve, was to create a sculptural instrument, which we could operate and document the actions in the neighbourhood. The idea behind planting seeds using an oversized medieval looking do-it-yourself (DIY) slingshot as the seed-planting device was initially to create a fun way of planting the seeds for the two of us to enjoy. What I have come to learn through this project, from building sculptural objects that offer a

game framework and are playful to operate, is how unexpected collaborations, situations and thus outcomes tend to occur around these objects. They become the activating sculpture. This approach marks a significant starting point for framing the methodology of this research.

Initially, Tati and I had envisioned a more pragmatic use of the slingshot. We set out with a plan to follow the germination of the seeds over time with the intention to collect data about if and how the seeds sprouted and grew into plants and monitor how the new plants might change the appearance and use of the public wasteland. As we shall see, this vision shifted during the project.

The Slingshot Activates Conversations

As Meir and I moved around the neighbourhood with the large slingshot on wheels, the seed balls, a camera and a tripod, several residents approached us curiously, asking what we were doing. Some of them wanted to try the slingshot and did.

During these actions, we had conversations with local residents about their neighbourhood and asked them what they wanted from the public space, which was currently a wasteland. We discovered the slingshot became not only an activator for the action of operating it to shoot seed balls in the public area, but it also became, perhaps more interestingly, an activator for conversations around issues in the neighbourhood. While the slingshot resembles a medieval weapon of war, it actually becomes an instrument for building relationships rather than destroying them. A discussion between residents emerged about the potential of their recreational areas and how, in their view, they might be improved. We realised that the focus of the project had shifted from planting seeds to having conversations with local residents.

The role of the slingshot had expanded from shooting seed balls to activating conversations about the use of the local public area.

Helguera presents a point about different types of conversations in socially engaged art, distinguishing between open and closed formats. Closed formats of conversations include a lecture, speech, and debate. The open formats are everyday dialogue, such as small talk and casual exchanges with people we encounter during the day. According to Helguera, participants are the most passive in the closed formats and more activate in the open ones.²³² The conversations activated by the slingshot between Tati and the residents of Holon, were casual and based on curiosity toward the actions by the object. What was happening? What were we doing? Several people seemed to think; it looks fun, I want to know more and perhaps even try the slingshot. The slingshot afforded a casual format of conversations, which is a method to include people to participate in a dialogue. Shooting seeds with the slingshot is a method too, for evoking what Schiller, in chapter one, describes as 'the instinct of play', for the audience to take part physically and through a framework of play.²³³ In this way, the slingshot afforded an invitation to join the action and play. The strategy of including the audience through the generosity of offering to play and is in this way similar to Nielsen's *The Model* and Althamer's *Slide* project, as presented in chapter one.

In socially engaged art projects practised by artists throughout the world today, the conversation is the medium. In his book *Conversation Pieces* Kester presents

²³² Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, p. 45.

²³³ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A study of the Play-Element in Culture*, 168.

examples of dialogical works such as *The Roof Is on Fire* (1994), a performance with two hundred and twenty teenagers by Suzanne Lacy, Annice Jacoby and Chris Johnson, Oakland, California. Kester further present an intervention by the Swiss art collective WochenKlausur for local sex workers, politicians and journalists to discuss drug policy on a boat on Lake Zürich in Switzerland also in 1994. According to Kester, these socially engaged art projects move away from object making to become providers of context rather than providers of content.²³⁴ The slingshot is an object and provides content, and appears in that regard different to how Kester describes socially engaged art projects. At the same time, the slingshot is a context provider, and facilitator of conversations, much in the same spirit of the projects Kester discuss in his book. *The Slingshot Planting Technique* can be thought of as an instrument or sculptural object, which facilitates a conversation through play and inclusion. The aspect of play, shooting the seed balls, is a game framework the slingshot offers. This activity provides social interaction and conversations, similar to the examples by Kester.

The slingshot resembles an historical artefact, similar to the artefacts of natural history museums of the medieval period in Europe. Tati and I have liberated this artefact-like object from behind the glass display of the museum and taken it to the streets of Holon, where we use it for its original intended purpose (action rather than exhibition). Viewed in this way, the slingshot work sits within the relational aesthetics paradigm (according to Bourriaud's manifesto of relational aesthetics presented in chapter one) in that the slingshot creates a social situation similarly to

²³⁴ Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, 1 - 5.

Tiravanija's work serving rice and curry in bowls *Phai Thai* (1990). There are however aspects, which set the slingshot work and Tiravanija's food event apart. The slingshot is an object, built by the artists (with the assistance of industrial designers). It is a unique sculpture and not just a representation of an artefact. Tiravanija's bowls are on the other hand mass-produced everyday, objects and bear little artistic value as objects.

The sculpture functions as, and indeed resembles, a familiar object, namely a slingshot yet it is also a unique sculpture object. *The Slingshot Planting Technique* alters the use of the slingshot as a weapon, for shooting projectiles such as rocks, into a seed-planting instrument, slinging balls of seeds mixed with soft cow dung and small pieces of clay. This unconventional use of a familiar looking object creates a transformation, similar to how Signer, Burden and Wurm transform the notion of everyday objects through the absurd actions in their work. Shooting seed balls make the slingshot an action-sculpture.

The Slingshot in the Negev Desert



Figure 68 The slingshot and the inflatable island in the Negev Desert (production stills), 2016. Søren Dahlgaard and Meir Tati.

After the seed shooting activity in Holon, Tati and I wanted to operate the slingshot in a contrasting environment and context to Holon. We decided to take the slingshot

on a road trip to the Negev desert, located three hours drive south of Tel Aviv, where we could be alone with the slingshot in the desert landscape. It was to be the second of two entirely different series of actions with the slingshot. In the desert, we produced a video work of the slingshot and the inflatable island together. The slingshot then shifted away from being a seed-planting instrument and activator of conversations, to becoming a prop in a surreal art video, where the relationship between *Fuppidhoo* and the slingshot became central in the narrative of the work. In the video, we aimed and shot seed balls at *Fuppidhoo* in the vast space of a meteor crater. Tati moves the slingshot forth and back on a hill with *Fuppidhoo* placed near the top. At the end of the video, seed balls hit *Fuppidhoo* and deflate, as if punctured (figure 32).

This iteration of the slingshot work did not include an audience, or a dialogue and did therefore not sit within a socially engaged arts practice. The slingshot in the desert is however similar to action-sculpture practice where the sculpture objects are set up and prepared for an action, which then completes the work. The three stages: A static state leads to a dynamic state of action, which then returns to a static but changed state. The slingshot and *Fuppidhoo* resemble action-sculpture as we too prepared them for an action, did the action in collaboration with nature's forces and returned to a static but changed state. The slingshot and *Fuppidhoo*, however, marks a significant difference within the framework of action-sculpture produced by everyday objects of those employed by Signer, Burden and Wurm, in that the slingshot and *Fuppidhoo* are unique sculptural objects, and perhaps even with an aura, as Benjamin suggests.

Well-Shot Seed Balls

Tati and I were working with our instrument, the slingshot, handling it, loading it, releasing the lever, repeating the action. We adjusted the angle of the crossbow, we fixed the wheels when they came off and observed how the seed balls flew. We played, reflected on our actions and repeated this process again and again. Here we parallel Schön's theory of 'reflection-in-action' as discussed in chapter two.²³⁵ We were shooting seed balls with the slingshot, as it was designed to do, we did not make a fire out of the wood of the slingshot to cook a meal for example. In this way, our actions were not completely free but directed by the properties of the slingshot. We collaborated with the site, the materials of the slingshot and the seed balls, nature's gravity, the video camera and each other. All these elements influenced our actions and, thus, the outcome of the work. For example, the slingshot did not shoot as far as first anticipated, so Tati moved it up the hill closer to *Fuppidhoo*, and I had to adjust the framing of the image in the viewfinder of the video camera. The wheels on the slingshot broke and Tati then had to carry it, which was heavy and difficult. However, Tati and I both agree we played well during those hours in the Negev Desert. Perhaps this is due to the open framework we decided, as we did not have to produce a certain outcome. We allowed ourselves to play around and experiment with shooting seed balls with the slingshot and recording the actions on video.

For Tati and I, playing around with the slingshot in the desert presented the opportunity to experiment freely and 'work things out as we go along', a method formulated by Kaprow and presented earlier in this thesis. We wanted the process to

²³⁵ Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action*, 131.

be rather open, as Hansen's framework *Open Form* since we did not have a specific narrative or idea in mind as we started and wanted our physical engagement with the slingshot, *Fuppidhoo*, the video camera and the site to help determine the outcome of our desert iteration. Tati and I entered the magic circle of play as we prepared the slingshot and inflated the island. We wanted to play well together and with the two sculptural objects. For me playing well constituted making a new video work of new actions. Tati seemed to be more focused on shooting the seed balls well. Tati and I had individual criteria for "playing-well." Tati wanted to refine the action within the process to shooting seed balls and I was focused on producing a new video of this process.

Here we can return to De Koven's concept of the well-played game, presented in chapter one, where he states, 'A game can change. The game we are playing can become something we never intended it to be. The game can change for the better. A game can establish a new way of seeing and playing together.'²³⁶ Furthermore, De Koven explains; the purpose of purposelessness in that games offer purpose but play purposelessness, and he concludes: 'the harmony that is created between purpose and purposelessness. This is the game well played.'

In chapter one Huizinga stated; the 'important characteristics of play was its special separation from ordinary life'.²³⁷ Huizinga's concept of the 'magic circle' of play expresses the concept of how 'play is at once part of and removed from everyday

²³⁶ Koven, *The Well-Played Game*, 39.

²³⁷ Ibid, 19.

life'.²³⁸ As demonstrated in this chapter *The Slingshot Planting Technique* use play as a method of making and completing the work. While the play element is fun and enjoyable, it is nevertheless part of how the work is made. In this way, *The Slingshot Planting Technique* does not separate the idea of play and work. Huizinga recognises an 'important characteristic of play was its special separation from ordinary life.'²³⁹ I demonstrated, how playing becomes productive in how it helps complete new iterations of the artwork, hence it can be said the play aspect is work. My methodology of playing as a way to complete the artwork thus embrace Huizinga's magic circle (of how play is at once part of and removed from everyday life).

Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I have presented *The Slingshot Planting Technique* iterations in Holon and Negev and identified the work within the context of the four fields of practice outlined in chapter one, which is: land art and ecology, action-sculpture, socially engaged art and play.

Operating the slingshot revealed that is it perhaps not the most efficient seed planting technique invented. On the other hand it generated conversations between people about the use of their public space through a game framework. The slingshot activated a social situation and a creative, collaborative process through play. The intended focus on ecology in the public park area shifted and became about personal relations, playing well and the qualities embedded in these encounters for the

²³⁸ A. Naseem, "Playing with Dough" in *Dough Portraits: Søren Dahlgaard*, eds. Andrew Brown and Søren Dahlgaard (Art Books Ltd., 2015), 72.

²³⁹ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A study of the Play-Element in Culture*, 2-3, 19.

residents who took part in the slingshot work. *The Slingshot Planting Technique* in Holon revealed parallels with Kester's definition of socially engaged art/dialogical art; it provided context. However, the slingshot also provided content in the form of play and action, and thus demonstrated the slingshot as also an action-sculpture. Moreover, within the action-sculpture framework, the agency of the slingshot activated collaborations, the play experience and social relations through a game of slapstick aesthetics and simple instructions to shot seed balls in the surrounding landscape.

In the next chapter, I present the third case study titled *The Gnome Painting Technique*.

5. Case Study Three: The Gnome Painting Technique

The aim of this chapter is to describe the iterations produced with *The Gnome Painting Techniques* and consider them concerning the context of practice and theory introduced in chapter one. I will then discuss how *The Gnome Painting Techniques* address the research questions through the methodology presented in chapter two.

I will consider the game framework *The Gnome Painting Techniques* offers and how it activates collaborations with nature, materials and people through an invitation to play. Furthermore, I shall consider the social and experiential qualities of the game situation. I will explore how the methodology was influenced by the artistic collaboration between Moore and myself. Lastly, I will reflect on the agency of *The Gnome Painting Technique* as an activating sculpture/installation/game-structure of transformation through play, and consider the bodily experience through the philosophy of phenomenology *The Gnome Painting Technique* afforded.

Obstructions and Frivolity



Figure 69 Duchamp's happening in 1910 in Paris, where a donkey produces a painting with its tail while Duchamp and friends pose for the camera while having a drink.

The actions by the Japanese Gutai group such as Yoshihara Jiró's instructional work, *Please Draw Freely*,²⁴⁰ 1956, influence my approach to painting specifically and art making broadly. The spirit and aesthetics of Duchamp's obstruction installation *One Mile String*, presented in chapter one, and his painting happening in Paris (1910), where Lolo the donkey produces a painting with its tail, trickle through this case study.²⁴¹ I have a history of constructing painting experiments with custom designed

²⁴⁰ Tiampo, Munroe, *Gutai: Splended Playground*, 84 – 85. In the work *Please Draw Freely* by Yoshihara Jiró, visitors were invited to create a collective artwork on a black board installed in a public park.

²⁴¹ <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mqr/2016/03/lolo-the-donkey-and-the-avant-garde-that-never-was-part-1/> accessed February 9, 2019.

devices such as an ‘explosion’ belt (a collaboration with Meir Tati 2008-2009)²⁴² or arranging physical obstructions between myself and the painting such as *Wall Riding Painting Technique* (2001)²⁴³ or masterminding peculiar rules for how to paint such as the *Dough Warrior landscape painting* (2008).²⁴⁴ Common to all these prior works is how the process of making is revealed to the audience and thus becomes part of the work.



Figure 70 Paintings by Tully Moore, where everyday objects such as a fried egg, a slice of tomato, and a piece of bacon are depicted in figurative detail.

Tully Moore's²⁴⁵ relation to painting is somewhat different. He has a highly skilled figurative painting practice, where he applies paint to paintbrushes and then onto stretched canvasses on frames. However, at the same time, Moore has a more experimental painting practice where he has painted a car to appear as wood or a fried egg and bacon over a man's head, see figure 70. Moore has ventured into several collaborations with other artists such as Tony Garifalakis and Jon Campbell and even

²⁴² <https://kaboomprocess.wordpress.com/> accessed February 9, 2019.

²⁴³ <http://sorendahlgaard.com/?portfolio=wall-riding> accessed February 9, 2019.

²⁴⁴ <http://sorendahlgaard.com/?portfolio=landscape-painting> accessed February 9, 2019.

²⁴⁵ Tully Moore, born 1980, is an Australian artist educated at Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, where he has taught for several years. Tully Moore and Søren Dahlgaard meet at Gertrude Contemporary studio residency program in 2014 and decided to make a collaborative work for the annual group show of artist in the studio program at Gertrude in 2015.

produced a significant socially engaged art project with Fitzroy secondary school in Melbourne, which consisted of transforming a football field into a giant painting. The painting was made from the student's sketches and was viewable from the roof of the neighbouring tower block. The students played a football match wearing Moore's art uniforms on the completed field painting. This project thus included play and social experiences and fused socially engaged art with collaborative painting in the public space.

Vertical and Horizontal Painting Techniques

Moore²⁴⁶ and Søren Dahlgaard have created two versions of *The Gnome Painting Techniques*, namely *The Gnome Painting Vertical Technique* at Gertrude Contemporary Art Centre in 2015 and *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* at Margaret Lawrence Gallery in 2016.

²⁴⁶ Interview with Tully Moore via email October 28, 2018.



Figure 71 *The Gnome Painting Vertical Technique*, Gertrude Contemporary, 2015. By: Søren Dahlgaard and Tully Moore. Left image: Tully Moore paints from the studio above the gallery with a 6-meter long stick through a hole in the floor, while he looks at a live video feed on the screen. Right image: View of the painting process of the gnome in the Gertrude gallery below.

In *The Gnome Painting Vertical Technique*, Gertrude Contemporary, 2015, Moore and I painted from the studio above the gallery with 6-meter long sticks through holes in the floor. A live video feed on the screen was our view of the painting process of the gnome in the Gertrude gallery below, see figure 71. The audience were in the gallery space below us and were only able to observe the painting actions from there. The audience were separated from Moore and I, and, thus, our actions in the studio above the gallery was not revealed to the audience. Furthermore, the audience remained spectators, as they were not invited to physically complete a gnome painting. Since Moore and I had serious fun in the studio with the new game we had invented, we decided to create another version of *The Gnome Painting Technique*, which would accommodate the audience, the possibility to try this game, or painting technique,

and hence become active collaborators in the physical completion of the painting process.

In the later iteration, *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique*, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, 2016, a new white garden gnome was placed on top of a specially constructed totem pole at the beginning of each day during the exhibition. The totem pole was placed inside a small garden measuring 2 x 2 meters, consisting of Astroturf and surrounded by a neat white garden fence. On either side of the totem pole, cans of paint hung from sticks just beneath the gnome.



Figure 72 *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* the Margaret Lawrence Gallery, 2016. Installation view from the corridor where two people paint the gnome with the long sticks while viewing the painting action on the screen via a live video feed. Søren Dahlgaard and Tully Moore.

Two tall chairs are mounted on the wall in the corridor behind the main gallery space of Margaret Lawrence Gallery, with two sticks resting to the side of each chair (figure 72). Through holes in the gallery wall, separated by approximately one meter, two six-metre long sticks with small paintbrushes attached at the end reached the gnome. Members of the audience could operate the long paint sticks while seated on specially constructed high chairs in the corridor on the other side of the gallery wall. From the high chairs, they could view the gallery space and gnome installation on the other side of the wall, via a live video feed from a video camera placed inside the gallery space. The screen was positioned between the two holes in the wall. The

action and experience of looking at a screen and playing with a remote control-like gadget in your hand resemble popular video games (figure 72).

Each day during the exhibition members of the audience painted the gnome, and the results was different each time. Some gnomes ended up mostly in one colour at the end of the day, while others had paint marks of all six colours. Some gnomes were painted quite neatly, while others were messier. There were gnomes with many layers of paint suggesting there had been a significant effort and time spend painting them throughout the day and perhaps by many people. At other days the gnomes only had few paintbrush strokes suggesting less activity.

According to the gallery manager, a French couple on holiday in Melbourne spent three hours painting the gnome. ‘They had a lot of fun’, she told me. In the short video clips shown in the PhD exhibition, an older couple takes turns painting the gnome and observing each other. In one instance, half of the gnome’s head breaks off, and the man giggles uncontrollably and quickly run to the corridor to tell his wife the incident she caused. In another instance, two people observe and discuss for several minutes while someone is painting the gnome. They laugh and then discuss philosophy.²⁴⁷

The Gnome Painting Vertical Technique did not offer the possibility of the audience to actively complete the work as the horizontal version did. In this way, *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* marks a development and additional layer in the discourse of my action painting practice. Moore and I agree the ladder version, *The*

²⁴⁷ Link to video <https://vimeo.com/234803584>

Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique, was more interesting, as it offered audience participation and collaboration as a core element. I will therefore mainly discuss the second version, *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique*, as the audience were able to paint the gnomes and the outcomes of this version are relevant in relation to the research question.

Interview with Collaborating Artist Tully Moore

Søren Dahlgaard (SD): This interview will be part of my PhD thesis. It is important to have the presence of your voice, since one of the case studies of my research, *The Gnome Painting Techniques*, is a collaborative work between the two of us. Let me begin by asking you to describe *The Gnome Painting Technique*?

Tully Moore (TM): *The Gnome Painting* (horizontal) is an interactive painting technique, where participants are called upon to paint a gnome with elongated paintbrushes through holes in the gallery wall. The audience-painters are separated from the exhibition space while they navigate painting the gnome through a live video feed.

SD: What was the aim of this work?

TM: The work aimed to invite viewers and participants to interact with the action in real time, also to promote a sense of play and comic relief.

SD: What can you say about the particular method of painting we developed?

TM: I guess what is most interesting to me is the slapstick nature in the technique. Its absurdity reaches out too many strands of painting and art-making, the painting techniques do-it-yourself (D.I.Y.) character is similar to a 'Sunday painter' coming up

with his or her contraption to create their own way of painting. It also parody's action painting and strips away the machismo associated with some of these painters.

We wanted to open up an interaction between the operator and the audience and to promote a live happening or play situation that has an unscripted life of its own even though there are parameters set in place by the artists. As I have touched on earlier, it crosses genres, but what is important is it always comes back to painting. The essential parts about painting for me is a sense of fun and play, and the best way to do that is to push around mud and create something out of nothing, and that is what happens with the *Gnome Painting Techniques*.

SD: Parts of your painting practice is somewhat traditional whereas I have a history of making action painting, which are reactions to traditional painting practices at large. How do you think this project might be different if you had worked alone?

What different aspects or approaches does each of us bring into *The Gnome Painting Techniques*?

TM: It is hard to say. I think what the best thing about collaborations of any nature is it allows you to free up and do things you wouldn't attempt in your own practice. For some reason, I feel less reticent to try new things and not care so much about the consequences or outcomes in a collaborative work with another artist.

SD: What were the main differences between the two iterations of *The Gnome Painting Techniques*, *Vertical*, 2015, and *Horizontal*, 2016? Do you find one of the

works more interesting than the other and if yes, why? Did you discover anything of significance from making these works?

TM: The main difference is the operator and duration. The *Vertical* had your good self and me as the operators of the brush. It only lasted the two hours of the opening. In the *Horizontal*, the crowd was actively part of the work during its creation, spectators of sorts. The stronger element of the horizontal version was that the viewers were also the creators in the painting of the gnomes. In that we gave away the creative license in a way, the fact the gnome was changed every day for the four-week duration of the show also allowed the work not to remain static. The horizontal painting version is more effective in its encouragement of audience participation.

SD: Thank you.

Activating Audience Collaboration through Play

The nature of *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* installation set up possibilities for the involvement of the audience without written instructions on the wall.²⁴⁸ The rules of how to play the game are self-explanatory. The audience cannot do anything wrong. The audience is thus invited into the game of painting the gnome by the hospitality the installation affords. Since one can take part without any prior reading or explanation of how to play the game, is it straightforward to start painting the gnome. The intuitive 'game framework' worked as intended but the outcome of the work, the audience completing it, was open, within the framework of the

²⁴⁸ See figures 10 - 15 from the PhD exhibition and figures 63 and 64 from the original installations of the two gnome versions.

installation, and unpredictable. The game strategy attracts audience members to get involved in painting the gnome actively. Due to the straightforward rules one immediately is able to de-code the installation that enables the viewers to join the game. Often when confronted with participatory art one is not sure what to make of it. Can I touch the objects and what am I allowed to do? These are, in my experience, common questions and frustrating situations in contemporary art exhibitions. This type of experiences can often make the audience feel excluded from the situation and artwork.

An aim with *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* was, therefore, that the artwork should create an inclusive situation, in which the audience easily can connect and physically take part. The audience picks up a paintbrush stick and starts painting the gnome. When one, for example, see a hammer, nails and wood you immediately know what you are supposed to do and how to do it, without instructions. *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* is similar to a hammer; it is intuitive to use.²⁴⁹ However, *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* installation does not include a familiar constellation of objects, like the hammer, nails and wood. This art installation is made up of everyday objects, such as garden gnomes, paintbrushes and wall paint. The familiarity of these casual objects erases the distance between a contemporary artwork and the audience members. The transformation of everyday objects in *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique*, combined with the intuitive user design, is part of the reason, I believe, this work activates the audience to play the simple game activity of painting a garden gnome

²⁴⁹ In computer games and touch screens this is called the design enter-phase.

with six-meter long sticks through a gallery wall. This artwork is an activating sculptural object in that it activates the audience to collaborate and complete new iterations of the work through a process of play.

The game-like situation is a crucial element of the installation. The choice of kitsch objects, such as garden gnomes, plays a vital role in the casualness of the aesthetics and an invitation-to-play for the audience. Gnomes are familiar everyday objects, and arguably kitsch in their style and aesthetics and therefore often associated with 'low' art. The transformation of an everyday kitsch object, such as a garden gnome, into the leading role in an art game in a gallery space, is a way to create an accessible work that feels inviting and casual for the audience to approach. According to the Italian writer and philosopher Umberto Eco's, everybody knows what kitsch is and how to detect and affirm it, but nobody knows how to define it.²⁵⁰ The aesthetics of 'kitsch and bad taste', as Eco argues, is largely a bourgeois phenomenon defined to set kitsch in dialectic opposition to the 'high' culture proposed by the avant-garde.²⁵¹ The garden gnomes help attract the attention of the audience through their kitsch low status and familiarity and thus the play framework of *The Gnome Painting Techniques* extends 'an invitation to play.' The gnome installation offer a feeling of inclusion and the possibility to paint a garden gnome with a friend, inside Huizinga's 'magic circle' of play. As Huizinga stated in chapter one; the 'important characteristics of play was its special separation from ordinary life'.²⁵² Huizinga's

²⁵⁰ Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

²⁵¹ Ibid, 183 - 185.

²⁵² Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, 19.

concept of the 'magic circle' of play expresses the concept of how 'play is at once part of and removed from everyday life'.²⁵³ *The Gnome Painting Techniques* demonstrate Huizinga's magic circle of play as both being inside and outside of everyday life.

Elements of kitsch are regularly present in Moore's individual artwork. Our collaborative work *The Gnome Painting Techniques* also makes use of kitsch objects. However Moore makes a significant point in the interview in this chapter when he addresses the issue of artists collaborations, 'collaborations of any nature is it allows you to free up and do things you wouldn't attempt in your practice. For some reason, I feel less reticent to attempt new things and not care so much about the consequences or outcomes in collaborative work with another artist.' Does Moore's point, that he does 'not care' so much about the consequences when it is a collaboration, suggest he feels less responsibility in a collaboration? Or might collaborative work have less importance for Moore, as it does not represent his more serious individual artistic practice and he can therefore muck around? What are the implications of the artist's collaborations in regards to the methodology? Moore seems to suggest our partnership present an opportunity for a more risk-taking and experimental approach. One of my motives to engage in artistic collaborations is to allow a more open work methodology and thus outcomes to emerge. The collaboration with Moore, therefore, offers new possibilities and thus feed into the methodology of *The Gnome Painting Technique* case study.

²⁵³ Naseem, *Playing with Dough*, p. 72.

The Well-Painted Gnome



Figure 73 *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* the Margaret Lawrence Gallery, 2016. Installation view from the gallery space where two sticks with paintbrushes attached at the end paint the gnome. Søren Dahlgaard and Tully Moore.

According to De Koven, to play well together requires a minimum of two players. *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique*, therefore, accommodates two audience members to paint the gnome simultaneously side-by-side. The game-like activity of painting the gnome is not a competition, with a winner and a loser, but rather a social game. The quality of the social experience, which the two painting audience members share, is a significant aspect and quality of this work. According to De Koven's concept of 'playing well together,' it is a feeling you immediately recognise.²⁵⁴ One player might break the rules or change the rules of the game by suddenly painting in a messy way but, nevertheless, remain within Huizinga's 'magic circle' of play.

There is something absurd about painting a garden gnome placed on a totem with tiny paintbrushes attached to 6-meter long sticks poking through a wall. This set up insinuates a frivolous type of play may be on offer. In chapter one I introduced,

²⁵⁴ De Koven, *The Well-Played Game: A Player's Philosophy*, 1 - 8.

Sutton-Smith's concept of ambiguity in play, 'play is difficult to understand because it is ambiguous.'²⁵⁵ Sutton-Smith extends his point on the ambiguity of play, that it, 'creates a feeling of identify in the participants.'²⁵⁶ Sutton-Smith, furthermore, introduces art historian and philosopher Herbert Read's argument, in 1935, with play theorist Margaret Lowenfeld, which says; 'While Lowenfeld regards art as a form of play, I [Read] regard play as a form of art.'²⁵⁷ I understand Read's point to address the notion of 'the art of playing well', which includes a particular mastery of playing, whatever you are playing, but also De Koven's notion of the well-played game. Read's notion of 'art' suggests its capacity beyond the everyday, of being something that has achieved a higher level.

Sutton-Smith suggests the concept of frivolity in play is subjective; 'They [all players] are not frivolous in their own eyes, they are seriously at play.'²⁵⁸ Sutton-Smith propose frivolity is a play-form and furthermore states; 'the greater the frivolity, the greater the transcendence.'²⁵⁹ I include an aspect of the frivolous in the case studies of this research, for the reasons brought forward by Sutton-Smith.

Duchamp's collaboration with Lolo the donkey, figure 69, is an example of a collaboration with nature (the donkey), and the frivolous, which offered a framework of unpredictability and an external collaborator to complete the work. The work is an example of the process, collaboration and idea being of more significance than the

²⁵⁵ Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, 214.

²⁵⁶ Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, 110.

²⁵⁷ Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, 134.

²⁵⁸ Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, 208.

²⁵⁹ Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, 212.

physical result of the painting. The painting, regardless of how it looks, remains a document of evidence of the idea containing traces from the process and collaboration with the donkey. As presented in this chapter, the gnome painting technique shares several aspects with Duchamp and Lolo's collaborative prank in Paris in 1910, such as a familiar slapstick strategy. There is however one notable difference between these works; *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* collaborated with people to complete the painting. Lolo's painting was a well thought out prank by Duchamp, *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* was a well-played game.

When I initially developed the gnome painting work with Moore, it was not apparent whether it would become one of the case studies of this research. However, the gnome-painting project turned out to respond to my research enquiry in unexpected and significant ways, by helping me to discover a crucial insight, which is the methodology itself – the sculpture-as-activating object and how the audience literally can become collaborators of the artwork through a framework of play. Furthermore *The Gnome Painting Technique* extends the discussion on the well-played game and the magic circle of play as a methodology of how a sculptural object activates a process of transformation through play.

Analogue Reality

The experience of moving the long stick from the paint bucket to the gnome, in *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique*, transmits the action of the stick directly to your hand. But more than that, it is as if your senses extend through the screen (and wall) into the gallery space with the gnome on the totem pole in the garden plot.

Popular video games generate a similar embodied sensation with vibrating controls responding to the actions on screen. Moving a stick, with which you can manipulate the action on the screen in front of you, is thus a feeling familiar to a broad segment of the public today. The combination of the long sticks with paintbrushes attached at the end, the garden gnome and a video game feel created with the video screen, resembled in my personal observation, a familiar video game situation. The audience paint from the other side of the wall in the real physical space of the gallery. Via the screen they navigate a situation resembling digital video games. It is not a digital illusion but an actual physical action in space. *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* is thus a collaboration with the medium of the video screen, the long stick, the motor skills of the participant and how you negotiate and communicate your painting efforts with the fellow player seated next to you.

I announced earlier in this thesis I was not going to address the research question through the conceptual framework of phenomenology. A relevant observation from the philosophy of phenomenology has, however, subsequently come to my attention. Writer Andrew Feenberg states the concept of the extended body, as a form of bodily experience is 'the lived experience of being the object of action.'²⁶⁰ In *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique*, the participating audience members use instruments, the paintbrushes on long sticks projecting through the gallery wall, in which their awareness of the consequences for bodily objectivity and the subject's awareness of those consequences simulate the issue Feenberg addresses. Feenberg considers an

²⁶⁰ A. Feenberg, "Active and Passive Bodies: Don Ihde's Phenomenology of the Body," in *Postphenomenology: A Critical Companion to Ihde*, eds. Selinger, Evan (New York: SUNY Press, 2006), 190 and 190-192.

example by American philosopher Don Ihde, drawn from the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in which a blind man's cane is an extension of this body in the sense that he senses the world around him through the cane. According to Feenberg's example, the painting stick is the 'medium of perception'²⁶¹ for the participating audience member. 'Merleau-Ponty thus describes the cane not as an instrument used by the blind man but as an 'extended sense organ'.²⁶² To get used to a cane, eyeglasses or a hat 'is to be transplanted into them' or 'to incorporate them into the bulk of your own body.'²⁶³ The painting sticks in *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* thus represent the cane of the old man and functions as an 'extended sense organ.'

Phenomenologically considered, *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* makes a connection to popular video games in the sense that, the painting stick, the 'extended body', goes through the wall and is perceived, with visual aid from the screen. The perception of your 'extended body' (the painting stick) on the screen, appears as virtual reality, in a digital space, but is taking place in the real physical space of the gallery, even though you cannot directly see the gallery space, from the corridor behind the wall. The participating audience players of *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* perceive not only these extensions on or 'through' the screen but also as a physical bodily awareness. Is the participating audience disembodied while they paint? Their physical bodies are not present in the gallery space of the gnome they

²⁶¹ Feenberg, "Active and Passive Bodies: Don Ihde's Phenomenology of the Body," 191.

²⁶² Ibid, 191.

²⁶³ Ibid, 191.

are painting, yet they physically feel and sense the gnome and paint buckets through their extended body – the stick, thus affording a sensory experience of analogue reality.

Summary of Chapter

As presented in this chapter *The Gnome Painting Techniques* has evident attributes to action-sculpture, socially engaged art and play however not specifically to land art or ecology as the two other case studies. *The Gnome Painting Techniques* offered a game framework and activated collaborations with nature, materials and people through an invitation to play with the kitsch aesthetics of garden gnomes. From the interview with Moore, we learned how our collaboration influenced the methodology in a more risk-taking and open manner. Furthermore, De Koven's well-played game concept was examined through the social and experiential qualities of the game. Sutton-Smith's writing on frivolity in play was moreover synthesised with the observations and experience with *The Gnome Painting Techniques*. Additionally, I considered the agency of *The Gnome Painting Technique* as an activating sculpture/installation/game-structure of transformation through play and lastly considered the bodily experience through the philosophy of phenomenology *The Gnome Painting Technique* afforded.

The following chapter will consider the activating sculptures of the three case studies in the PhD exhibition and the iterations created previously with the activating sculptures on display.

6. The PhD Exhibition

The PhD exhibition comprised the three projects of this research, namely: *The Inflatable Island - Fuppidhoo*, *The Slingshot Planting Technique* and both versions of *The Gnome Painting Technique*. The key idea of this research investigates how a sculpture object activates a process of transformation through play. Sculpture activating describes how the process itself becomes the artwork. Through the exhibition of the three case studies, this thesis examines the different outcomes generated by the activating sculptures.

All three projects in the PhD exhibition have a unique sculpture-object as a central starting point. Each sculpture had, before the exhibition, activated the artist, the audience or non-human collaborators in different ways. The work is manifested in videos and photos showing how the actions became the new iterations. Three videos of actions with the inflatable island (*Walking Fuppidhoo*, *The Flying Island's Last Dance* and *The Slingshot Planting Technique* from the Negev Desert) were projected onto it, thus partly transforming *Fuppidhoo* into a projection screen for the video. The video projections animated the inflatable island, thereby creating a physical connection between the resting sculpture and the iterations it had activated previously (see figures 16, 22, 26, 30 and 31). Initially, I was not pleased with the video from the Negev desert of the slingshot and *Fuppidhoo* on its own. However, once a video projector was strapped to the slingshot and projecting onto the surface of *Fuppidhoo*, the video beam created not only a physical connection between the slingshot and *Fuppidhoo*, it also illustrated the flying path of the seed balls from the slingshot towards the inflatable island (see figures 30-33).

The three case studies activating sculptures were situated in a gallery as static sculptural installations. This presentation was different from how they have been presented before. Originally, both *Gnome Painting Techniques* also took place in an art gallery, however, in the PhD exhibition, presented them as installations cut out of their original environment.²⁶⁴ In the vertical version, the painting sticks went through the floor of the studio and into the gallery's ceiling in the space below. The installation was presented with a 120 x 220 cm construction imitating of the ceiling/floor partition between the gallery and studio spaces (see figure 6). This presentation of the *Gnome Painting Vertical Technique* transforms the iteration into a static art object/installation. The video displayed on the screen is a recording from the original installation and action at Gertrude Contemporary, which in the PhD exhibition functions as a documentation of the earlier action.

The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique is in the PhD exhibition similarly a constructed look-alike gallery wall from the Margaret Lawrence Gallery with a screen showing a video documenting the original painting action by members of the audience (see figure 13). These sections were resembling 'building cuts' were displaced in the gallery in a formal style of exhibiting static sculpture or installation objects as a way to illustrate the original installation when the gnome painting was a live process.

²⁶⁴ The Gnome Painting installations reminds me of American artist Gordon Matta-Clark's floor, ceiling and wall cut outs of buildings in the 1970s. The Gnome Painting installations are, however, not real cutouts, as Matta-Clark's, but constructed to resemble a floor partition and a gallery wall. Matta-Clark's 'building cuts' were site-specific, whereas the floor and wall sections of the Gnome Painting installations present a resting version of the action's *The Gnome Painting Painting Technique* activated earlier.

<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/07/towards-anarchitecture-gordon-matta-clark-and-le-corbusier> accessed December 29, 2018.

The videos and photographs in the exhibition document the actions activated by the sculptures. Some of the videos and all the photographs serve not only as documentation, but they are also artworks in their own right. However, I consider the video of the slingshot actions in Holon, shown on a screen on the gallery wall, a documentation of the project rather than an artwork on its own.

The Sculpture Activators Take a Rest

In the exhibition, the activating sculptures were exhibited in a state of rest for the first time. The audience in the exhibition could not be activated physically by the sculptures. They could nevertheless imagine the experience of shooting the slingshot or carrying *Fuppidhoo* (in the *Walking Fuppidhoo* video projected onto the island in the gallery space). The sculpture activator in 'rest' has a durational limit, unlike the static sculptural object, which is a fixed condition. Just because an object is 'still' and at rest or not in flux with the 'obvious' action, does not mean that it is static. The action will occur again as identified. Moreover, in this state of 'rest' from the actions that the sculpture-objects activate, they are multitasking doing the unexpected. Such as the video strapped onto the slingshot.

However, during the opening of the exhibition several people from the audience started to paint with the *Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* installation, (pictured in its resting state on figure 11 and 12). This action was a surprise, as I did not anticipate that the audience would be activated with no live video feed on the screen. Several members of the audience still went ahead and painted the gnome poking their head around the sides of the wall to coordinate their movements of the

paintbrush towards the gnome. The *Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* was therefore not left in a state of rest for long during the opening of the exhibition.

The Potential of New Actions

The audience in the exhibition were not able (or supposed) to complete new iterations of the work physically with the activating sculptures, yet in the exhibition, the sculptures could activate and inspire new actions within the viewer's mind. The activating sculptures are full of potential for new iterations. They seem to pose the question to the spectator; which new actions and outcomes can you imagine?

The installation of the activating sculptures presented the earlier actions and collaborations with the aid of videos and photographs. Some visitors to the exhibition did, however, decide to paint the gnome with the paintbrushes attached to the long sticks, which went through a section of a wall. The action changed the work from static to an active. It was not the intention for this to happen, but when it did, during the opening, it only illustrates the appeal of how the sculpture activated the audience to play and thus create a new iteration of the work. This illustrates the agency of the activating sculptures. In a sense the unexpected incident mentioned above is a case in point for that reason.

The greatest revelation from the exhibition is perhaps the idea of rest that is introduced to the concept of the activating sculpture. Any activating-object, which is constantly at work, needs a rest to recoup in order to summons the energy to commence work again. Because the sculpture activators are in use again and again, they propose a cyclical process of action, thus connecting the traditional action-

sculpture stages; the set-up, the action/transformation and then the static but changed state into a continuous circle of iterations.

7. Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the outcomes of the iterations of the three case studies presented in chapters three, four and five and synthesise them with the research questions. Additionally, I shall compare the findings to the context of practice and theory from chapter one and discuss how and which ways the sculptural objects activate a process of transformation through play. Lastly, I will consider in which ways the different aspects of the methodology, presented in chapter two, influenced the outcomes of the three case studies.

The Agency of the Activating Sculptures

There were multiple actions within each of the three case study projects. All the artworks are iterations - a repetition with a difference - through collaborative play. This PhD project investigates how the sculptural objects of the three case studies, within the context of land art and environmental art, action-sculpture and socially engaged art, can activate a process of transformation through play. These case studies have assisted in the development of the methodology and in raising the questions:

1. How does the methodology of conceiving sculptures as activating objects generate new artworks through collaborative play?
2. How does the methodology of conceiving sculptures as activating objects develop new understandings of the role of collaborative play?
3. How does the methodology of conceiving sculptures as activating objects extend notions of socially engaged art and action-sculpture?



Figure 74 *Fuppidhoo* on a meadow with children running around it, Western Zealand, Denmark, 2017. Søren Dahlgaard.

Is it possible to depict what constitutes the agency of the sculptures of the case studies that make them activate play and relations? In what ways can they be said to influence and have an effect on the artist, collaborators, audience members and myself? Why did six children, between the age of six and fourteen, run around *Fuppidhoo* for fifteen minutes on a meadow one summer evening in Denmark in 2017? They were not instructed to do this or to do anything for that matter. I asked my friend Mikkel, who was standing next to me, and father to three of the children, and he responded: 'Because that is what you do when you are a child, and there is an eight-meter-long inflatable island. You are excited and run around it.' The children's behaviour revealed the agency of *Fuppidhoo*. From observations such as this, I can summon the sculptural objects in the three case studies to facilitate play behaviour

and speculate they do this by resembling everyday objects made of familiar materials.

What is the agency of the activating sculptures of the case studies? The sculptures activate a process of play and transformation, similar to the process of transformation in action-sculpture is its core element. As I have argued, the process is a material of the artwork. The process features some elements, which are: collaborations, play, a social experience, participation and generosity, which are similar to some socially engaged art. These attributes are connected and constitute the agency of the activating sculptures. Other elements of the activating sculptures agency were Benjamin's concept of the aura of the original art object, introduced in chapter two, which suggested the sculptures possess an aura, that made them appear even more exciting to engage with than ready-made objects. Furthermore, Eco's presented the notion of kitsch objects affording an inclusion and accessibility, opposite to the exclusiveness high art objects afford. And lastly, how the aesthetics of slapstick, also contribute to creating an invitation to participate.

The agency of the activating sculptures of the three case studies includes the collaborations with people, as addressed in previous chapters. When I held the strings of *Fuppidhoo* flying in the wind over the sand dune in *The Flying Island's Last Dance*, presented in chapter three, I developed an awareness of *Fuppidhoo* as an extension of my body. When Tati and I used the slingshot over and over, we also incorporated the actions into 'the bulk of your own body.' In *The Gnome Painting Techniques* Moore and I, and the audience in the horizontal version, experienced the

painting sticks functions as an 'extended sense organ.'²⁶⁵ This idea appear similar to everyday experiences such as how a tennis racket becomes an extension of your arm, when you play tennis, or a pencil an extension of your hand when you write. The essence of this phenomenological attribute of the three case studies is how they afford a physical and unique experience during the collaboration and making of a new iteration.

Playing By Your Own Rules

How predetermined are the rules of the game, or do they emerge in interaction with what the sculptural objects allow through their affordances? If you make your own rules, you create your own game. The methodology I have developed through the course of this research frames a particular lens of art making. What I do in my visual art practice is similar to my drumming methodology mentioned in the footnotes.²⁶⁶ I study and analyse the field of practice I most closely relate to and then challenge some of the fundamental methods within the field as a method to create my artistic language. *The Gnome Painting Technique*, for instance, alters the way you apply paint onto your object into a kitsch tongue-in-cheek scenario and actions, which opens up

²⁶⁵ Feenberg, "Active and Passive Bodies: Don Ihde's Phenomenology of the Body," 191.

²⁶⁶ It is similar to how I created my own unique style of drumming in my rock band, Silo, from 1995 - 2014. I changed the rules of how drumming usually is practiced in rock music. Most rock music is played in 4/4. Some is 3/4 and at times 6/8 and rarely you come across a 7/8-drum pattern, including even the most experimental areas of rock music I am aware of. My drumming strategy was to not play 4/4 at all during the course of three albums created within the span of eighteen years. I refused to follow the common rules of rock drumming and it became a starting point for my methodology. It was challenging to make it work but once I managed to develop my particular 'unfunky' drumming style, in patterns such as 9/8, 13/8 and 15/8, I had created my own unique way of playing drums in the rock genre, a narrow genre, known as math rock, which make use of polyrhythmic (overlying several types of beats). This changed the feel and expression of the music in such a way that our music sounds like no other I have heard.

possibilities of unexpected outcomes. *The Slingshot Planting Technique* similarly offers a playful and silly way of doing a common task. *Fuppidhoo* extends notions of the agency of a sculptural object. All three case study projects of this research are an exploration of a similar methodology. To investigate and extend some of the established methods and preconceptions about how action-sculpture exist, its agency and the behaviours they afford. The three case studies of this research exemplify this methodology as indicated in previous chapters.

Action-Sculpture Extended

The case studies demonstrate that all iterations begins with a static state, then moves to a dynamic state of transformation and action and ends in a static but changed state. As an additional element to the action-sculptures of Signer, Fischli and Weiss, Burden and Wurm the case studies continue to have a potential for further actions. There is no end or finish for the activating-sculptures as they are in a transitory state still filled with potential, even when exhibited in the gallery, as observed and demonstrated in chapter six. The sculpture activators, thereby, propose a cyclical process of action, thus connecting the three traditional stages of action-sculpture; the set-up, the action/transformation and then the static but changed state, into a continuous circle of iterations.

The activating sculptures act as a means to collaborate in the production of multimedia artwork. The main function of the activating sculptures is to set the circumstance. The activating sculptures hereafter accommodate a process over time. The process, consisting of time, action and transformation, and the collaborations are the core components of the artwork. The process consists of several elements, which

are all significant parts of the work. The quality of each of these elements, constitute the success or quality of the entire work.

1. The process is an action as in action-sculpture.
2. The action is a situation as in socially engaged art.
3. The situation may consist of several elements, which all are part of the work and they are an inclusive social experience through collaborative play.

In chapter two, Benjamin's pointed out, how an original artwork, thus sculpture-object, has an aura and therefore more appeal to the audience than an everyday object. Benjamin's notion therefore suggests original sculpture-objects might be preferable as facilitators of collaborations with people in both socially engaged art and action-sculpture, over the commonly used ready-made objects in these two fields of artistic practice. I thus suggest the original sculpture-objects of this research extend notions of both socially engaged art and action-sculpture, by having Benjamin's concept of the aura.

On the Edge of Socially Engaged Art

In this section, I discuss the implications of the activating sculpture in relation to socially engaged art. Additionally, I address the implications of authorship, which arise when collaborating with people in art.

Creating an inclusive experience with *Walking Fuppidhoo* and *The Slingshot Planting Technique* is paramount to achieve any level of engagement with the audience and is, therefore, an important aspect of this research practice. Helguera argues: 'All art invites social interaction, yet in the case of socially engaged art it is the process itself

– the fabrication of the work – that is social.’²⁶⁷ The making of the work, in the case of *Walking Fuppido*, can thus be understood as an example of a socially engaged art according to Helguera’s definition.

In my interview with Helguera, he notes: ‘I think your research has to do a deep consideration about why the majority of major socially engaged artists do not employ sculpture in their work.’²⁶⁸ Here, Helguera articulates a significant difference between socially engaged art and the case studies of this research. As I articulate to Helguera in the interview, the sculpture activating objects of my case studies have a dual function. They are both facilitating objects of a social process, thus fit into the definition of socially engaged art, while simultaneously, they are sculptures in their own right. From this perspective, the sculpture activating objects both make and break the commonly acknowledged role of an object in socially engaged art.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis Kester notes, ‘socially engaged art creates context’. The sculptural objects of the case studies provide concrete content, which activates a process, and this activating aspect sits as demonstrated within socially engaged art. According to Kester’s definition of socially engaged art, the sculptural art object is another rule breaker. However, according to Helguera, the object can be part of a socially engaged art project if the role of the object is to facilitate the social process. The sculptural objects of the case studies are, however both providers of context and content. They, therefore, have a dual role thus setting the activating

²⁶⁷ See the interview with Helguera in the appendix to this thesis.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

sculptures apart from facilitating objects in socially engaged art.²⁶⁹ The methodology of conceiving sculptures as activating objects thus extend notions of socially engaged art.

Autonomy or Human Material

As shown in the case studies, people physically perform or interpret the work as a way to complete a new iteration. In this way, the exhibition guest has an opportunity to physically become part of the creative process of the artwork insofar they perform and carry out the instructions by the artist. Within the game-framework set in place by the activating sculpture and me, the artist, there is a space of freedom for people to perform and act out their interpretation, as presented in the example of *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique*.

Huizinga combines, as mentioned before, the idea of ‘rules with freedom’, which raise the question of the aspect of freedom in the completion of instructional or game-structure works in the case studies. The nature of the instruction determines the degree of freedom present for the participating audience to manoeuvre. There is nonetheless a gradual scale between freedom and obeying the instructions of the artist. Instructions may be restrictive yet represent possibilities and a space of creativity. Collaborating with an audience-as-players to complete the work within a particular game-rule structure thus represent a methodology located somewhere between control and uncertainty, between instructions of human material and free play. As presented, the activating sculptures of this case study have developed a

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

methodology where the collaborative play situation is located somewhere between free play and human material.

The issue of authorship is fraught in socially engaged and participatory art. Often the artist initiates and plans the project, which would automatically make the artist the principal author, yet artists active in the field of socially engaged art often frame their projects as having either no or a fully shared authorship.²⁷⁰ The artist initiates the work (object, situation, game-rules, framework), which the audience completes with some degree of input and creative freedom. This does not, however, mean an audience cannot feel ownership and agency of their experience in contributing to completing the work. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to go further into the implications of authorship in social art practice, as this is a comprehensive and diverse area of research. However, feeling ownership of our own experience as in a game well played represents a quality in itself and I would argue it solves part of the issue around authorship.

Walking Fuppidhoo initially sets out as an instructional piece, thus, as presented in chapter three, during the process of completing the iteration transformed into a creative collaboration between the children, *Fuppidhoo* and myself. During this process, the participants co-determined the choreography through their movements and the freedom they had within the game framework. How exactly the children would move, I could not predict. However, the concept and the aesthetics of the work, determine in advance the overall conditions of the performance. The children

²⁷⁰ See interview with Helguera in the appendix to this thesis.

entered into the game-like situation in which they productively contributed to the outcome of a new and unique iteration. In the process, the children began to talk and help one another, an element of teamwork occurred in this collaborative action.

Walking Fuppidhoo proves to be a participatory work, which allows the performers to collaborate in the work's production.

Similarly, *Walking Fuppidhoo*, in context to Wurm's *One Minute Sculptures*, (1997-ongoing), also known as 'do-it-yourself sculptures',²⁷¹ offers instructions for actions to be executed by members of the audience. For instance, Wurm's *One Minute Sculptures*, a woman lies on oranges with extended arms and legs for, as the title of this performative sculpture announces, the duration of one-minute, or you have to hold objects under your arms. The significant difference between Wurm's concept of *One Minute Sculptures* and *Walking Fuppidhoo* is that Wurm deploys the audience, in a more or less authoritarian manner, instructing specifically what they have to do. The participants are human material, with which the artist uses to complete the work.

Another difference between these two works is that I was present during the actions by the participants whereas Wurm is not. I can thus make adjustments in the situation and respond and engage directly with the participants. I do not intend for the participators to be human material in my work, however, this is what they are to a certain degree. The difference with Wurm's work is that my human collaborators

²⁷¹ Paulo Herkenhoff, *Lebt und Arbeitet in Wien* (Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, 2000), 216.

contribute their own will to the process of transforming the original sculpture object, whereas Wurm still maintains his authorship via the instruction.

My curiosity to explore possibilities and outcomes I cannot imagine or produce myself, affords my framework of collaboration through play, thus, I outsource a creative element, which is an opportunity for both the participants and myself. The issue of authorship, however, remains unresolved. Regarding *Walking Fuppindhoo*, the essence lies not least in the fact that those taking part, as previously described, can make decisions of their own within the 'rules of the game'. Hence the visual results of such a processual collaboration are not wholly predictable for the artist. In *Walking Fuppindhoo* the audience performers remain human beings similarly to Deller's *We're Here Because We're Here*, as described in chapter one, where the volunteering soldier-actors were allowed to interpret their roles with a fair degree of freedom. In the works presented by Wurm and *When Faith Moves Mountains* by Alÿs, on the other hand, the participants remain, to a further degree, a material or means for the artist to complete the instructions and thus the work envisioned by the artist.

I need to address one further aspect of the implications of authorship in regards to the collaborations with people. When the participants complete an iteration of the artwork, they earn a degree of the agency of that iteration. I, therefore, propose the notions of authorship can be opened into a state of plurality. The agency of the activating sculpture and the collaborators expands authorship beyond simple binary notions. Bang Larsen notes the children playing in *The Model* were included as producers of the work thus Nielsen subverting 'individual authorship by choosing to

omit or erase his signature.'²⁷² I do not attempt to 'erase his own signature' as Nielsen claimed *The Model* demonstrated. I do however propose a notion of a more nuanced understanding of authorship in collaborative artistic practices.

In Fisher's essay on Alÿs' *When Faith Moves Mountains*, he interestingly does not address the question of the participant's role, in terms of the instructional element. My enquiry relates to whether the participants have the possibility, within Alÿs' framework, to add their individual mark on the outcome of the work.²⁷³ Fisher does not make it clear if the participants are 'human material' for Alÿs to complete his vision or if his human material is given credit as co-authors or collaborators. Alÿs' mentioned framework sits closely with instructional pieces, such as Würm's *One Minute Sculptures*, whereas Deller's or Althamer's more open-ended methodology, do allow the participants a real aspect of freedom and recognition. Würm clearly states the instructional element of his *One Minute Sculptures*, thus the role of the participant in his work as human material. Avoiding the same clarity, Alÿs leaves this issue unresolved.

Constructing Christo and Jeanne-Claude's large-scale work, such as *Wrapped Coast* as presented in chapter one, require the assistance of many people, as Deller's project *We're Here Because We're Here*. Christo and Jeanne-Claude credit the many people who help realise the labour intensive works but do not, to my knowledge, allow their

²⁷² Larsen, *The Mass Utopia of Art Activism: Palle Nielsen's The Model – A Model for a Qualitative Society*, p. 73.

²⁷³ Fisher, *Francis Alÿs*, 108 - 121.

assistants a level of autonomy as collaborators of the work.²⁷⁴ My process of working with people is therefore significantly different from Christo and Jeanne-Claude's in that the collaborators retain a degree of autonomy when they physically complete the work of the three case studies. I can thereby conclude, the audience is not autonomous but predominantly remain human material in the works mentioned by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Alÿs' and in Wurm. Huizinga, thus, states: 'Freedom is a significant characteristic of play'²⁷⁵ and 'Play to order is no longer play.'²⁷⁶ According to Huizinga's concept of play, the audience is therefore not playing in the instructional artworks mentioned with the stricter framework. Instructional artworks can, however, be playful to interact with.

There are always parameters with degrees of 'openness/freedom' within an instruction. As demonstrated in the case studies of this research, the works present a framework with a space of freedom to move and are thus partly open, as in Hansen's open work framework, yet not wholly or without restrictions determined by the agency of the activating sculptures and its collaborators. The participating audience has a degree of freedom to add their creativity to the new iteration of the work where they take part. Instructions as a method to complete the work are an aspect, which is similar to action-sculpture presented by Wurm and Signer. However, the aspect of a more open framework offered by the case studies constitutes an additional layer of unpredictability in the methodology.

²⁷⁴ "Christo and Jeanne-Claude's website." <https://christojeanneclaude.net/> accessed February 21, 2019.

²⁷⁵ Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, 7.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

Sculpture as Activating Object

The everyday-like sculpture objects of my case studies represent a transformation, similar to the ready-made art object in conceptual sculpture such as Signer's work. Signer creates new iterations of similar actions but with new objects. He only shows us the result of one action/iteration with each of his experiments. Signer's methodology is iterative. There are various ways in which his actions happen that instigates an object to move, such as when an ignition sets off an explosion, or a stool is slung out of a window. By comparison, the case studies of this research produce similarly repetitive iterations, but are activated by the same sculpture-object multiple times. Signer's and my iterations share the action as the outcome from a repetition with a difference.

An aim of the strategy of creating absurd transformations, such as the flying island, is for the audience to recognise the sculptural object as resembling a game piece. The familiarity of a game piece helps create a feeling of inclusion and understanding the idea of transformation, which brings us to the next step of the artistic strategy of the activating sculptures.

The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique, for instance, stands out from the other two case studies, in that the artist is not present when the audience completes the work of painting the garden gnome on the totem pole. It represents a higher degree of unpredictability in the collaboration between the audience members and *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique* as the artist is not present to affect the actions by the audience in person. My non-presence, however, offer a situation where the audience member may feel more autonomous, which could affect how they interact and play.

The gnome painting audience members may feel a stronger sense of ownership of their contribution in the collaboration with *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique*, as they are without direct instructions, written or verbal, as to how they can interact.

The video work, *The Flying Island's Last Dance*, 2017, is a recording of a collaborative process, which includes the inflatable island, the wind, gravity and my physical actions in accordance to a particular idea I wished to try out. The process consists of the material of the inflatable island, its weight and airworthiness and it includes my ability to control and fly the inflatable in the wind. All these elements are live for the video camera, in the sense that my interaction with the inflatable island sculpture, the wind and gravity is a one-take. I am part of the action of the action-sculpture. There is a real presence of urgency in getting the work done for this video, making the island fly, since I expected the fabric would tear in the wind at any moment, as the *Fuppidhoo* was not designed for this use. The process is transparent and thus authentic and cannot be repeated, as the circumstances will never be the same. Collaborating with the wind is unpredictable, and this unpredictability during the process of completing a new iteration of the work is an integral part of the methodology. Unpredictability represents an opportunity for surprising and new outcomes within the framework of this methodology as shown in this iteration with *Fuppidhoo*.

There are, as described, many ways collaborations occur in the three case study artworks. A uniting factor of all the collaborations is they are initiated by the inherent agency of the activating sculptural object. This strategy shapes a

considerable aspect of the methodology, as developed through this research and demonstrated throughout this paper.

The process of play afforded by the sculptures is a process of transformation. This process constitutes part of the artwork. Each time one of the sculptures activates a process, either by an audience member or myself, the result is different. Sometimes there is only a slight difference to a previous iteration, at other times the iteration activated by the sculpture is transformed completely. This agency applies to all three sculptures; *Fuppidhoo*, *The Slingshot* and *The Gnome Painting*. Iterations of activating *Fuppidhoo* have produced a wider variety of outcomes visually, in diverse landscapes and methods of transportation. Conversely, shooting the slingshot and painting the gnomes appears visually with less physical and visual variations.

In the thesis, I have considered the different types of collaborations and how they impact the play, process and transformation of the iterations with the activating sculptures. The collaborators include the natural elements and forces of the wind, air and gravity but also the material of the island, both the nylon fabric, the electrical fan and the strings attached to the island around the edges and of course fellow artists, people of the audience and myself.

The Well-Played Iteration



Figure 75 Production still from *Walking Fuppidhoo*, 2016, at Princess Hill Primary School, Melbourne.
Image: Søren Dahlgaard.

As presented in the methodology chapter the methodology itself is a particular framework for making the artworks. A methodology can be understood as a recipe. It may appear I follow this recipe when I initiate or produce new iterations with the case study artworks yet it is the other way around. My practice is led by the practice (Schön's reflective theory), and subsequently, I describe, reflect, analyse, contextualise, and synthesise the what, how and why to arrive with conclusive findings. This way of working is, as mentioned in chapter two, practice-led in the literal meaning of the words; my artistic practice with the activating sculpture objects leads the research.

In this section, I identify De Koven's notion of the well-played game as a process of completing new iterations of the work through a collaborative effort. De Koven refers to a particular spirit of play, we all recognise but struggle to articulate, in his book *The Well-Played Game*. De Koven continues to explain how the spirit of play is about the relationship between players.²⁷⁷ Playing well is thus social and inclusive, qualities I aim my sculpture-objects facilitate.

De Koven furthermore projects the idea of changing the game as an accepted element of the well-played game.²⁷⁸ In iterations with all three of the case studies, I experienced a 'change in the game' due to how the various collaborations affected the game in unexpected ways. The students carrying the inflatable island in *Walking Fuppidhoo*, see figure 73, changed the game, in two of the iterations, not shown in the PhD exhibition. In one iteration, they decided to rotate the island as they made their way across the yard, in another, they hid under *Fuppidhoo* and then rose up. The students created a number of new actions, as small play narratives. In this way the students changed the game in the spirit of playing well, and within the framework of the instructions I had given them. The students were both human material in this work but at the same time they did have a portion of autonomy to affect the outcome of the action.

De Koven's notion of the well-played game is also present when two people paint the gnome in *The Gnome Painting Horizontal Technique*. Game designer Eric Zimmerman refers in the foreword of *The Well-Played Game* to De Koven's insight of 'the

²⁷⁷ De Koven, *The Well-Played Game*, p. xv.

²⁷⁸ De Koven, *The Well-Played Game*, p. 39.

purposelessness of playing for the sake of play' as being a necessary element of De Koven's concept of playing well.²⁷⁹ The action of painting the gnome seems perhaps purposeless, however, it represents an essential element of De Koven's concept. The element of facilitating an experience of playing well (together) constitutes, in my view, a significant quality of the work. The play situation is not only pleasurable, but it is also productive, a means, to produce the artwork. As De Koven states: 'The harmony that's created between purpose and purposelessness. This is the game well played.'²⁸⁰ Another example of an iteration, which I felt included De Koven's 'harmony that's created between purpose and purposelessness'²⁸¹ was my sudden collaboration on the dune in Mungo National Park when the wind picked up *Fuppidhoo* and carried it away. Nature played a trick on me by changing the game but it was done in the spirit of the well-played game. I recognised this was an invitation to play and thus picked up the strings to fly *Fuppidhoo* for the video camera to capture, see figure 62-63, and also for the sake of the game. *Fuppidhoo* included me to play and collaborate with the wind, and in my view we played well.

The Slingshot Planting Technique in Holon also demonstrated De Koven's concept of the well-played game. As described in chapter four, the initial game changed from planting seeds to initiate conversations. Who changed the game in this instance? We continued to shoot seed balls with the slingshot while Tati explained the idea of the slingshot and the public space and a dialog germinated between the residents and

²⁷⁹ E. Zimmerman, "Foreword," in *The Well-Played Game*, eds. De Koven, ix.

²⁸⁰ De Koven, *The Well-Played Game*, 139 - 143.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, 143.

Tati. The dialog about the public space was the game changer and it had the spirit of the well-played game, as the dialog was social and inclusive.

As demonstrated in this thesis the three case studies have inbuilt a framework for playing well through the collaborative engagement activated by the sculptural objects.

The Never Ending Game

When or how is the work completed? During this art practice-led research I have come to comprehend the nature of the activating sculptures is the work is never fully complete. Each collaboration with the activating sculpture only represents a new iteration in a line of potentially never-ending iterations. Thus, when I mention completing the work, I refer to completing a new iteration.

The exhibition also continues to change. The PhD exhibition in May 2018 displayed the actions from iterations until that point in time. Had the exhibition been in August 2018, for example, or now, it would have changed in that the work continues to expand with added iterations, if I continue to initiate new iterations. The works are, therefore, never completed and remains in a state of flux and an ongoing process of expansion and transformation and potential.

The iterative methodology of numerous collaborations through play, hence, affords the activating sculptures to remain in a processual state of time, actions, and new possibilities for new games/play/outcomes can happen.

Summary of the Research Outcomes

The research project has allowed new insights into the role of the sculpture-object within the genre of action-sculpture and it complexifies the traditional divisions between socially engaged art and notions associated with the aura of art as identified by Walther Benjamin. It articulates how the sculpture-object is an activator of a collaborative process of play with human and non-humans and moreover is able to identify specific notions of play that the work harness: that of the well-played game and the magic circle of play. With my observations after the PhD show it also articulates the cycle of work of a sculpture activator, from it being a sculpture-object, to the activations and collaborations it provokes, to the new unexpected processes and then outcomes to a state of rest before new actions are generated. Once again, this offers an expanded understanding of the role of the non-human sculpture-object within action-sculpture.

Challenges and Opportunities in the Research

Had the iterations of the three research case studies been carried out at a different time, the circumstances might have been different and therefore resulted in other outcomes. I may for instance never have experienced to fly the inflatable island over the sand dune in Mungo National Park had the wind not picked up the moment I was there thus the flying island video would never have been.

This practice-led research project has developed in ways I could not have anticipated when I first endured on the journey. From my initial starting point to where this research ends there have been significant shifts and changes. It has been a process where my questions have developed ideas, which have cross-pollinated and

influenced the methodology in surprising and exciting ways. I hope my findings will have an impact on the practice-led research paradigm.

Future Research



Figure 76 The inflatable island imagined transforming into a Zeppelin airship and hot air balloon, 2017. Drawings: Søren Dahlgaard.

I hope my research findings can be a point of reference and serve as a platform for future researchers looking to extend notions of action-sculpture and socially engaged art through a process of play. I wish to test further the methodology I have developed during this research, with new activating sculptures.

8. Conclusion

The Research Outcomes

In this thesis, I propose the term ‘the activating sculpture’ as a way of describing a sculptural object activating a process of transformation through play. The idea of the activating sculpture extends to the discourse of socially engaged art and action-sculpture within a context of art and ecology.

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the activating sculptures produced non-material outcomes such as an experience embodied through a physical action, which is inclusive, creative and social. Findings of a more physical nature include the installations as presented in the PhD exhibition, photographs and video. The photographs and video are sometimes documentation and at other times artworks. The physical traces from the actions range between sculptural installation art and traces from actions. However, I view both non-physical and physical outcomes as being part of the artwork. The methodology of the case studies prescribes the conditions for how the iterations with the activating sculptures unfold.

Within the three established fields of practice, namely land art and ecological art, action-sculpture and socially engaged art, the case studies of this research belong and do not belong. As I have argued, they largely fit the criteria but also extend notions in each of them. The case studies demonstrate a new framework of working in all three genres.

Outcomes of this research relating to the existing genre of action-sculpture are; the work continues to expand for each new game/action/interaction, iteration. Each case

study is one project/work consisting of many, potentially endless, iterations – subworks, thus the notion of endless iterations. The work is never completed. It remains in a continuing process of potential and new iterations. Furthermore, the repeated iterations are afforded with the same object and the sculpture-objects are original. The aura of the original art-object also determines a unique attribute offered by the activating-sculpture within the field of action-sculpture.

I have considered sculpture as an activating object and investigated how a sculptural object activates a process of transformation through play. What are the learning's from this research? Signer states: 'Learn to play more.'²⁸² I expect Nielsen, Althamer and Wurm would agree. The Swiss curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist has said, 'I believe the exhibitions we remember are those, who invent new rules and frameworks for presenting art.'²⁸³ This seems an adequate response to the quote by Kierkegaard presented at the beginning of chapter two.

I would like to take on the challenge presented by Duchamp in chapter one, where he suggests using a Rembrandt painting as an ironing board. Duchamp's idea was to reverse the transformation of the everyday object into a work of art by suggesting the opposite: the transformation of an artwork into an everyday object. What would the implications be if the slingshot, the gnome painting installation and the inflatable island transformed into everyday objects? They would cease to be art. Would the

²⁸² Senser, *Roman Signer*.

²⁸³ https://kunsten.nu/journal/hans-ulrich-obrist-i-separationens-tid/?utm_source=kunsten+media+nyhedsbreve&utm_campaign=2ff1cd5f69-Uge_44_mandag_COPY_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d80ebf2ae6-2ff1cd5f69-200642789, accessed 19 August 2018 accessed November 17, 2018. The translation is mine.

actions they activate be the same? How would their function change? Duchamp's idea of reverse transformation draws a line between play transforming into work. Is there a connection between Kaprow's notion of connecting art to the everyday experiences and Huizinga's notion of the relationship between play and work, and work and play, which are relevant for addressing Duchamp's mind game? The notion of an experience created from the process of collaborating with the activating sculpture as a method to complete a new iteration through play, does suggest the idea of the experience being both part of the artwork and life. Thus in this way the artwork transforms from a work of art into an everyday 'object' even though an experience is not an object, this idea then offers a de-materialised art 'object' to transform into an everyday object, as Duchamp suggested one-hundred years ago. However, this is the case of most socially engaged art, which leaves me unsure if I am able to address Duchamp's challenge with a more original contribution.

Finally, I would like to summarise the research findings of the activating sculptures. Which possibilities does this methodology afford? The methodology itself stands at the core of the research findings. Several of the images in the inflatable island photo-series could have been created in Photoshop on the computer but were not. Inserting the island in a landscape image in Photoshop would express the same initial idea visually, but the process of making the image would be different. Collaborations in the landscapes lead to discoveries, such as flying the island and the walking island. Developing works with *Fuppidhoo* behind a computer screen would not have generated the same collaborations, play or experiences.

The process of sculpture as activating object through play is the core of the artwork. More specifically, the entire process constitutes the artwork, including the sculptural object, the performative action, the photograph, the video, the experience of playing well and the collaborative encounters.

The Never Ending Process

The methodology of the sculpture as activating object consolidates two new notions within the discourse of action-sculpture:

1. The activating sculpture is an original artwork (object).
2. The sculptural object activates unexpected and last minute collaborations during the setting up stage.

The methodology of the sculpture as activating object consolidates two new notions within the discourse of socially engaged art:

1. The dual role of the activating sculpture as the facilitating object of a social process and as an original work of art.
2. A more nuanced understanding of authorship.

An additional research finding is how the methodology of sculpture as activating a process through play allows the audience members to have a new role with the artwork. The collaborating audience is afforded a degree of freedom by the activating sculptures to play and add their creativity and imagination to the work as opposed to the more limiting instructional paradigms. The audience is, therefore, able to add

their physical mark on the work. The audience can hence be said to complete new iterations of the action.

The final research finding is the development of a new concept - the activating sculpture, as Helguera suggested to me in the interview, which is useful in discussing sculptural work concerned with processes and collaboration.

To briefly summarise: The research outcome is a methodology, the process of that methodology, the physical collaborations this methodology affords and the new concepts that emerged from the research.

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Appendix

The role of the interview in the following appendix to the thesis is to add more nuances to the research questions. The interview is furthermore a unique one-on-one with an influential writer and practitioner in the field of this research. Critical insights from the interview is referenced and discussed in the main thesis text.

Interview with Pablo Helguera

Pablo Helguera is a Mexican artist, educator and author of several books, most notably on socially engaged art and education. Helguera is the Head of the Department of Adult Learning at the Museum of Modern Art – MoMA in New York.

Pablo Helguera and Søren Dahlgaard in conversation regarding the research questions of this thesis, via email 18th and 25th of October 2018.

Søren Dahlgaard (SD): I am pleased to be able to have a conversation with you about your field of expertise, socially engaged art (SEA), and artistic methodologies within or perhaps on the edge of socially engaged art. This interview will be included in my PhD thesis. I am hopeful your knowledge will enrich the discussion of my research question.

(SD): Have you come across artists practicing a methodology framed within a similar context to the one I outline in my abstract?

Pablo Helguera (PH): I have. I first should state that the topic of ‘co-creation’ is very fraught and problematic, mainly because it implies that whoever is working with the artist is an equal contributor in the conceptualization and making of a particular work. In reality, artists who pre-conceptualize a process and structure and mainly need the participation of the public to make a work happen use this term. There is nothing wrong with this approach, but it is wrong to pretend that the participant had true agency or co-authorship (as the term “co-creation” implies) in the conceptualization of the piece. This is clear when you speak about the artist’s work: the participant is usually alluded to as an anonymous, often faceless partner while

the credit goes primarily to the artist. The only true example of co-creation in my view is the case of collectives, where ideas and product are (usually) equally distributed amongst the members of the group.

I often think of interpretive performance as the second closest way to argue for co-creation. I am thinking in this case of other disciplines like music and theatre, where the performer can realistically argue that they are adding substantially to a score or a play through their interpretation. Thus the 'versions' of how they interpret can be seen almost as an act of co-creation. But even in this case you can't argue that they invented the material from which they are making this interpretation.

Speaking of sculpture, I would pose Lygia Clark's 'Bichos' (her metallic interactive sculptures) to exemplify how misguided is the idea that by interacting with an art work you become its co-creator. No one, as far as I know, has made it into art history by folding Clark's Bichos in a particularly creative angle. Ultimately, it is part of Clark's genius that such an interaction and a variety of possibilities are available.

Therefore, we cannot speak of co-creation. We can however speak of a process by which a methodology, structure, or "score" is created by an artist and then the public, as a performative interpreter, can partake on (perhaps in not such a dissimilar way to instruction pieces by Fluxus artists). But that, I would argue, is not co-creation.

SD: Thank you for your elaboration of the term co-creation and the examples you mention. It appears I have a different idea of the meaning of co-creation, so let me clarify and perhaps there is a better word for what I am trying to communicate. With co-creation, I do not refer to an idea of co-authorship or co-ownership of the artwork.

I, the artist, remain the owner and initiator of the work. I refer to the aspect of audience members adding their own creativity, however small, to the outcome of the work, as they play/interact/take part in the process. In other words, as making part of the work together, perhaps in part instructional, in the sense, there are some rules I have framed from the start, but the participating audience also has an opportunity to add their own creativity and thus mark on the outcome of the work. An example is my *Dough Portrait* photo series (2018-2015). I prepare the framework and rules and people complete the work as they participate and add their own creativity/mark with the way they pose, what they wear and the shape of the dough over their face. I should thus adjust my terminology from the fraught term co-creators to 'collaborators completing the work'.

PH: Thanks for clarifying. I would still argue that, at least in the way I have seen the term used in the past, 'co-creation' tends to imply that everyone is involved in a joint, team task, to produce a final result. We do not tend to call studio assistants co-creators of the work that artists produce in the studio, not as artist, we credit those who invented the technologies or methodologies that we employ in our work.

Otherwise, I would need that I am co-creator with Paulo Freire, Joseph Beuys, (and even the guys who invented Photoshop and iMovie) of all the works that I do. Of course, this can get rather silly! Finally yet importantly, I would argue that what you are creating, which is perhaps an outline for an artwork, is fundamentally different from the particular work that the potential participant is doing. In that sense it is not equivalent nor should it be called "co-creation".

SD: Are you aware of the Open Form way of working introduced and practiced by the Polish architect Oskar Hansen in 1959? The Open Form methodology inspires the contemporary Polish artist Pawel Althamer.

PH: Yes. In my view, it is not too dissimilar to Open Source. But we do ourselves a disservice by conflating the employment of a set of tools created by someone and the imagining and creating of those tools, or that language, as the same thing. By using a piece of software, I should not receive the same credit as its creator, for instance. There is also a false democratic spirit behind those (perhaps good) intentions. It reminds me to Frank Lloyd Wrights do-it yourself homes, that for a time he conceived and promoted. You could build your own house, but with the elements acquired from and designed by FLW. Whatever creativity you would have in constructing your own house would still be determined by the material and design decisions of the architect.

SD: Are you familiar with the work *The Model*, a playground by the Danish artist Palle Nielsen, first shown at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden, 1968? Nielsen placed a sign by the playground in the museum, which read: It is only an exhibition for those who do not play. The Danish art writer Lars Bang Larsen brought this work into the more recent discourse as he exhibited and wrote about it in the context of relational aesthetics and socially engaged art.

PH: Yes. His work featured in an exhibition I worked on at MoMA titled 'The Century of the Child'. As a museum educator for nearly 30 years, I am constantly inspired by innovators in the field of education, who have often placed the quality of experience and the depth of knowledge gained by an interaction at the centre of communication.

I believe this spirit and philosophy is critical to socially engaged art, which in my view has attempted to go beyond nominal participation and interactions with audiences to truly effect change and social transformation.

SD: Pawel Althamers work is similar in many ways to Palle Nielsen's *The Model*. In your view, does Althamer manage to expand on the idea of art, play, learning and creativity in his work in ways Nielsen did not?

PH: I could be wrong here, but my sense is that Althamer, who exists firmly in the art discourse and his practice operates directly from there, while Nielsen did not (as far as I know) seek to explicitly centre his work as part of the art discourse, aside from declaring it as art. I am not familiar with their respective works to comment, but I would say that the main question that should be explored on works like these, in my view, would be on what is it specifically that the work contributes to the art practice, and what is it that it contributes to education.

SD: Are you aware of the game writer and theorist Bernard De Koven's concept of the 'well-played' game? I find it quite interesting to connect the concept of the sculpture activating objects activating the audience to play well together, where the playing well together becomes part of the work and a quality of the work.

PH: I have. I am personally very interested in the subject of games. I organized a conference a few years ago titled 'Critical Play' (after the title of a book by artist and game theorist Mary Flanagan) and have produced many game –based art works (some featured in a solo exhibition in 2015 titled 'Strange Oasis'). In my view, the risk of employing game structures is that the leisurely dimension of play can stay

relegated to the realm of entertainment and fun, without making the participant have to confront hard questions. It is the criticism that the so-called 'Edutainment' receives: entertainment disguised as education, instead of the other way around. A few years ago I presented a performance work that employed the Dictator Game, a game invented by experimental economics that tries to demonstrate what is described as "inequality aversion", that is, the rancour generated in one person when s/he feels not remunerated enough in relation to their equals. The game tries to prove that our human impulse is to see less opportunity applied to all, than seeing a few rewarded unequally. So, going back to 'playing well together', the question becomes what exactly constitutes 'good' play. In my view, it would not mean simply having fun or being entertained, but being engaged and willing to enter into a space of criticality that allows you to see your reality in a different light. The perfect example of this is Augusto Boal's theatre of the oppressed exercises.

SD: I understand your point but cannot help to ask if fun and critical thinking cannot be combined in an artwork? Considering Huizinga's concept of The Magic Circle of Play, in which play is at once part of and removed from everyday life. Playing can be a serious activity and the acts of playing can become playful. When we frame our actions (of my art methodology) within this magic circle, the participant take home a fun experience and 'food' for thought. The risk, however, is that the participants do not reflect on his/her experience on a deeper level and therefore miss the opportunity to consider the criticality, which is the underlying message of the work. In my methodology, the fun aspect is a way to create a sense of inclusion and connection with the audience and once I have the attention of the audience, due to the playful nature of the 'sculpture activator', the audience can interact. However,

and perhaps more fundamentally, and a clear deviation from socially engaged art core methodology, is that my works are firstly designed to satisfy me. What I mean is that I, the artist, want to create something, which has a critical aspect, but at the same time invites to an activity I want to do. In this way, my work only succeeds as (socially engaged) art (or audience involved action-sculpture), if the audience happen to feel a similar attraction to the activity the object proposes, as I do. The *Dough Portrait* work, which is similar to the case studies of my research in many ways, is an example of an activity I find amusing to engage in and many spectators too are eager to join. In other words, if it works for me, it may do the same for other people and the sum can be a high quality work of art.

PH: Of course, I never meant to say that art that entertains is doomed! I have certainly produced many works that are essentially entertainment (mainly my artoons, a book that I wrote titled *The Pablo Helguera Manual of Contemporary Art Style*, and even a puppet play titled 'Laughing Gas'). The ultimate goal of these and other works, however, is to stimulate critical thinking. If they fail to do so, then they become simply one-liners, superficial distractions. The field of education offers many ways to assess on whether people had fun or if they learned something (or reflected on something). As to whether an art work satisfies you: I certainly try to be my own and most demanding critic, and as artists we need to always play that role for ourselves, but I think we also have to be careful of falling into self-indulgence - that is, making ourselves the only frame of reference of what we do. This is something that you can always see in young art students in the American system, who tend to make work only about themselves and see themselves in the romantic tradition of the artist as lone genius in the studio. This mentality creates a fundamental schism

with the real world as they do not develop the skills to listen and engage with the rest of the world, and especially they do not develop the most difficult skill for an artist which is to understand, learn, and appropriate the cultural languages that are being spoken around them. I learned about this through my work in museum education: what I do at the museum is first a collaborative work, which cannot ever be about me but about two other things: the work on view and the audience experience. Working that way has been critical for my artistic practice.

SD: A quote from your book states: 'Socially engaged art rejects the idea of art as an object', however the starting point of my work is a sculpture object. The 'sculpture activating object' addresses the common feeling of exclusion shared by many audience members, which is an issue you address in your book. My methodology includes the audience through an invitation to collaborate. The entire process constitutes the artwork, including the sculpture object, the performative action, the photograph, the video, the experience of playing together and the collaborative efforts of the audience.

The methodology of sculpture as activating a process through play allows the audience members to have a new role with the artwork. In these works, they are free to play and add their creativity and imagination to the work (with similarity but difference to instructional art). The audience is, therefore, able to add their own physical mark on the work, thus, becoming co-producers of the work. Do you have any reflections or thoughts on the research findings I briefly presented here?

PH: In 1994, Brazilian artist Ricardo Basbaum initiated a still ongoing project that might be of interest to you. The piece is titled "Would you Like to Participate in an

Artistic Experience?" and consists in providing a participant or group of participants with an odd looking object, made out of iron and paint to which you can do anything you want- even destroy it, if you wanted to. In this particular instance the work is central to the relationship the artist is proposing, and to the resulting experience. But there is really nothing quite out of the ordinary about the object that would determine the experience one could create with it (except that it is very hard to destroy, as a few artist friends could confirm when they tried to do that a few years ago!). My point is that the crucial aspect of this project was not the formal visual aspect of the object but the social proposition that the artist is making and in fact you could do it with practically any object with perhaps equally interesting results. When I write that social practice rejects the art as an object I do not mean that social practice refuse to make objects, but that we do not see the object as the sine qua non of the art work. We question the primacy of the object that has dominated the history of modern art until the rise of conceptual art, and we engage with that tradition by acknowledging that while we live in the real world and we engage with objects, these merely are vehicles and tools for us to create experiences. There is nothing inherently in any object that would constitute an experience itself. Returning to the other Brazilian artist I mentioned, Lygia Clark, her 'Bichos' are in fact very much rooted in modern aesthetics: they are visual compositions that while we can transform them and move around, they are very much about themselves, introspective, like most pre-conceptual art. To say that the object is the experience is like saying that the pieces of a game of chess are the game, when in fact the game is what you make happen when you employ those pieces. I try to further this idea in my book *Art Scenes*, where I argue that the only value that art can have is extrinsic value,

which produced through conversation and not through the inherent qualities of an art object.

In sum, I do not pretend to say that the art object does not matter, which is absurd, but that particularly in socially engaged art, the art object is not needed, and if/when employed, it is only a vehicle to the experience but not the experience itself in the old fashioned modernist sense.

I should add that I am particularly sceptical of the use of the term 'sculpture' as opposed to 'object'. The reason is that precisely the term "sculpture" refers to me to an artistic object, one, which inherently can trigger the art experience (like a Rodin or Michelangelo sculpture). The limitations of using this term were not lost on Duchamp, whom I believe rather avoided the term by embracing the found object. You can speak about kinetic sculpture, but that still is an object that as I described is self-contained, and presents a problem when you want to extend the experience beyond its boundaries. Thus the need to abandon the term 'sculpture' and use 'object' or 'prop' instead.

SD: I see the distinction you make between object and sculpture, which is an interesting point. Perhaps my idea of sculpture differs from yours. The reason for stressing sculpture and not only object in my case studies is the notion they are unique sculptural objects. I agree with you that the objects (or sculptures if it is a unique object and I consider it to also be a sculpture) are primarily tools/instruments to initiate a process. In this regard, I change the idea of what is considered a sculpture, in the modernist sense, by changing the function of the

sculpture and at the same time, I insist on a sculptural quality of the object/installation before, during and after the action/encounter.

Traditional artwork objects, such as photo, video, or installations, are produced too from these action/collaborations/social games. They are perhaps secondary as art compared to the experience of the process but they are too nevertheless art objects. Perhaps I am old fashioned in the sense that I combine the production process and the art object into one? In a sense, you can view my work as an open studio situation where the audience is invited to witness and/or take part in the making of the work. By reviling the production process, I remove the mystery of the artist working alone in the studio using secret techniques to create his/her masterpiece. My methodology is to include the audience in the making process, rather than isolating the two. My practice is rooted in action-sculpture (ref Roman Signer's everyday objects, which he activates, or is activated by) where the creative process is revealed, while at the same time inviting the audience to try it out too. I should perhaps refer to action-sculpture rather than sculpture to clarify my notion of sculpture.

I am not trying to argue that my methodology fits squarely as socially engaged art, I am merely trying to explain my practice and you can consider how it may or may not sit in socially engaged art practice in your view.

PH: Ironically, I think you could argue that it is SEA as long as it is not married to the notion of sculpture in the traditional sense, and I would thus encourage you to define what you do with a different name. I think if you look at Century old art history, you know that many artists invented their own terms that adhered to their own understanding of what sculpture could be, like found object, constructions, "Gluts"

(Rauschenberg's term), surrogates (in Allan McCollum's terminology), multiples, and much more. When Spanish novelist Miguel de Unamuno was told that his novels were not such (since they did not have the traditional structure of a novel), he decided rename them 'nivolas', arguing that perhaps they were just a new form. Hence, why not do that with your specific understanding of 'sculpture'? I would suggest that if you want to take your practice in the direction of socially engaged art, it is important to detach from the old baggage of previous language, and a project that is not considered sculpture would be much freer from that range of historical baggage independently of how you personally understand or define that term. I personally contend on a regular basis on Beuys' 'Social Sculpture' term, which I do find very problematic. Anyhow, that is a different issue. One random thought: perhaps you might want to consider your work as 'sculpture a large'.

SD: In your book, *Education for SEA*, you do mention play on a few occasions. Have you considered play as a strategy to activate an audience? And have you given any thought to the idea of a sculpture, within the context of SEA practice, which extends an invitation to play?

PH: I have considered, and employed, both play and objects (rather than sculptures, I would say) to produce an experience. I have often created card games, which is a wonderful way to involve a participant in a conversation and reflection, and a very low-stakes proposition for participation.

SD: And finally, to your knowledge, have any other writers on SEA discussed the methodology of sculpture as activating object?

PH: Interestingly, I see a big gap between the scholars/writers to engage with SEA and art historians who generally conduct object-centred study. I would suggest reading the catalogue of the MoMA retrospective of Lygia Clark, “The Abandonment of Art”, 2014). I think your research has to do a deep consideration about why the majority of major socially engaged artists do not employ sculpture in their work (unless if they make sculpture in more traditional formats, like in the way Joseph Beuys made his vitrines as old-fashioned art works while also making his ethereal “social sculptures”). You can also look at the exhibition ‘Escultura Social’ at the MCA Chicago in 2007, an exhibition that looked at the work of various artists from Mexico City.

SD: Thank you for the many references to other artist’s works you have mentioned. The new terminology I coin to describe my practice is ‘the activating sculpture’ within socially engaged art – or as the title of this PhD thesis: Sculpture as Activating Object.