



## How do you know?

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### Abstract

How meaning is created, circulated, and manipulated in the post-truth era is not self-evident. How are we to distinguish between the distribution and power of constructed information and knowledge production? These were questions at the core of the discursive project on epistemology entitled *How do you know?*<sup>2</sup> at KHiO Oslo National Academy of the Arts in 2017/2018. *How do you know?* was initiated by professor Apolonija Šušteršič, a Slovenian architect and visual artist whose work is related to critical analysis of public space, and Maria Lind, a Swedish curator, art writer, and educator. In this project, they focused on current ways of thinking and how these generate significance across fields such as art, philosophy, science, and

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<sup>2</sup> How do you know? was deliberately constructed as a project, not as a conference or one-time event, because it was performed through a series of workshops and seminars dealing with the epistemological challenges of our time. Three seminars were conducted during the spring of 2018. Each seminar/workshop consisted of two presenters – one practitioner and one theoretician – with one section open to the public and a second, closed section for KHiO students and staff. The series was accompanied by a reading list with texts suggested by the presenters and a reading group and workshop for KHiO students and staff. Each presenter was invited to conduct a group critique, a workshop, tutorials, or the like. Seminar 1: Sarat Maharaj (theoretician, professor, Lund University, Malmö Art Academy) and Matts Leiderstam (artist; professor, Malmö Art Academy). Seminar 2: Anna Daučíkova (artist; dean, Academy of Fine Arts, Prague). Seminar 3: Andrea Phillips (theoretician, professor; head of artistic research, PARSE; professor, Valand Art Academy, University of Gothenburg) and Fernando Garcia-Dory (artist).

education. In the following conversation, Šušteršič and Lind use their experience from *How do you know?* to look back on how they have worked together on several occasions since 1997. The conversation is conducted in response to a list of topics proposed by Olga Schmedling, editor of the current issue of *Researching public art and public space, part II*.

**Keywords:** art, curating, artistic research, methodology, institutional critique

## I. Constructive institutional critique

### *Light Therapy at Moderna Museet (1998)*

**Maria Lind (ML):** Which topic on Olga Schmedling's list would you like to focus on?

**Apolonija Šušteršič (AS):** Institutional critique, because this is the ground where you and I met, thinking about the art institution differently, from the 1990s onwards. The first time we worked together was on *Manifesta II* in Luxemburg in 1998, and after that you invited me to Moderna Museet in Stockholm to work on a new project in the series called *Moderna Museet Projekt*. I proposed to build a light therapy room as an answer to the Nordic context and the context of art museums at the time. The idea was to focus on the programming of architectural space, or the typology of spaces, within contemporary art museums; how they function as public space, as a social space becoming a healing device in itself. To me, this was an act of institutional critique.

*Light Therapy* became an addition to and a comment on the museum's visitors' program. It is clear that museums since the 1990s are not only functioning as an exhibition space; they have also become places offering their visitors various social activities, such as education and other discursive programs. They open the doors of their specialised libraries or reading rooms, cinemas and workshops, and restaurants and museum shops.

However, *Light Therapy* originated from the medical context; psychiatric hospitals might offer light therapy rooms to complement the treatment of depression or SAD – Seasonal Affective Disorder – which is a consequence of the lack of light common to the Nordic context in the winter.

I designed the room at Moderna Museet in the temporary project space in a former vicarage next door to the main museum building, with unique furniture and a generous amount of light simulating a bright, sunny day. The light elements used in the room were specially developed as a medical light affecting our behaviour. Everything in the room was white to keep the amount of light on the level of 10,000 lux. The room was furnished with white furniture; visitors were given white coats; all objects and furniture elements needed to be white. There were *Light Therapy* instructions on the wall for visitors to consider as advice on using the room.

Reading material was available to visitors. It was selected as a comment on the current issue, discussed in public in the specific situation or in the context in which the room was installed, for instance, about light and well-being, architecture and institutional critique, or the art museum as a device for urban gentrification. There were announcements for *Light Therapy* in local newspapers, and flyers were handed out in town to inform the public that light therapy was available to everyone for free. The logo for *Light Therapy* was adapted to reflect the logo of the hosting art institution, suggesting that such therapy is an authentic part and necessary addition to the art institution today. Moderna Museet purchased the work, and since then I have created many variations, adapted to specific conditions, at Bildmuseet in Umeå, Sweden; Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, Netherlands; MOCA Toronto; and VISUAL Carlow, Ireland.

You supported my proposal, no matter how strange it sounded at the time, or how much work and financial effort was required. When we discussed the project later on, I was reluctant to confirm it as institutional critique since I thought that was a discussion of the past, of the 1960s and '70s. I thought about how “the institutional critique produced for the institution itself, within the art system, becomes, in the long run, quite ironic, when it does not produce any constructive resolution and when it does not affect changes in our political and cultural structures” (Lind and Šušteršič, 1999). You then continued our conversation by suggesting another formulation: “constructive institutional critique”. “Personally, I like to think about you and your contemporaries as a kind of constructive institutional critique, not based on negativity” (Lind and Šušteršič, 1999).

**ML:** Around this time, I elaborated on the notion of “constructive institutional critique” in some essays, and I believe it is still quite useful. It helps us distinguish the work of people like yourself, as well as some projects by artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija,

from the works of the first and second waves of “negative institutional critique”, first including some works by Michael Asher, Robert Smithson, and Hans Haacke around 1970, and then by Andrea Fraser and Fred Wilson around 1990. Whereas the first cohort primarily critiqued the institution from the outside, the second cohort did it from the inside. You and your contemporaries stayed inside the institution and critiqued it, aiming at possible improvements. You could also call it tough love, wishing for the art museum to transform for the better. There have been subsequent waves too, but that is a different conversation. Importantly, the waves are not consecutive – they do indeed co-exist.

**AŠ:** You expanded on the term “constructive institutional critique” within theoretical writing afterwards. Nevertheless, you also developed your ideas about what an art institution could be through your practice as a curator and a director of various art institutions. A lot of what I would call constructive institutional critique was developed within Kunstverein München during your tenure there (2002–2004) or at Tensta konsthall, in the Stockholm suburb of Tensta (2011–2018). Here I would like to mention the involvement of the local inhabitants on an everyday basis with the konsthall; for example, the Language Café, which is part of Ahmet Ögut’s art project *The Silent University*, and which has been running for seven years. In addition, there are various parallel projects within the Tensta neighbourhood, monthly gatherings and site visits in other parts of Stockholm with groups of women connected to the Tensta Hjulsta Women’s Centre, as well as researching local history and contextualising it within the wider context, nationally and internationally, in the multiyear project *Tensta Museum: Reports from New Sweden*.

A lot has changed, in the meantime. I believe art produced throughout the ’90s has made possible a variety of different forms of public engagement and has also impacted engaged art institutions. However, if we are reading Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), in their view “the artistic critique” is amputated and instrumentalised through the discourse of liberation as the leading motto of the new capitalism. I wonder how you see these changes within contemporary art and the role of the art institution today.

**ML:** Indeed, there have been many changes since we began collaborating in the late 1990s. Our personal lives, living conditions, the world, and economic, political, and social structures have all changed. When it comes to contemporary art, the way the system is working, if we look at a macro level, is also different from what it used to be

back then. I find it interesting that there is a greater acceptance concerning the kind of work you have been involved with, sometimes called social practice, sometimes participatory practices. That is welcome!

Slowly but steadily, it is written, and is something which I confirm. The downside to this is that it is sometimes considered useful in certain contexts where there is a perceived need for a sense of commonality or collectivity, creating a demand for art to fix something that other social structures cannot. We can even talk about failures of the past forty years to maintain even the most rudimentary sense of collective engagement beyond increasing nationalism and xenophobia. Either because the social structures are no longer there or never were. Nevertheless, there is a desire for some of the imagined effects to be present. Individualism, and hence atomisation, has triumphed. So, the terrain is different, and we have to navigate it in new ways. My view is not as gloomy as yours. It is important that artists like you can continue working; not in the same way as you did in 1999 with *Light Therapy* but keeping some of the concerns and red threads. At the same time, it also has to take other shapes and forms, around other questions. I think there is a big challenge in terms of continuity, making the niche initiatives, the micro tests that both you and I have been involved with, making them survive. Continuity is absolutely at the core of potential success at having some effect with art, which I believe is your aim.

**AŠ:** I would partly agree with Boltanski and Chiapello and what they state. But on the other hand, this is just a moment in time; we must not lose faith! I am a bit cynical about it; it looks like things are falling back in time; art museums are becoming sites for blockbuster shows to attract crowds, scared of producing art or developing research. However, on the other hand, it has always been like this: art has many ends, and it depends on which end one finds oneself.

I agree that continuity is crucial; continuity creates the conditions for sustainability. But often we have to talk about resilience because the condition for continuity is not there. So, we need to insist, and repeat, and carry on. Here I would suggest learning from self-organised entities in society, with art practice being one of them. How to build continuity by working together and learning from each other through overlapping engagement within the production process and taking responsibility together as a society.

Continuity is not a quality that is appreciated by the neoliberal and populist-driven politics of today. Perpetual change and the production of the new to create bigger profits is the direction the world is going. It seems that art institutions, especially established museums today, do not have much news to offer; they seem to be strangled between their budgets and populist governments, at least in Europe. They become tools for manipulation in the hands of politicians, either as vehicles of the profitable urban development that initiates processes of gentrification, or as controlled producers of “national identity” – which is especially visible, even totally transparent, within Slovenian cultural politics at the moment. The new prime minister who came into office at the start of the pandemic in March 2020 – instead of making a constructive plan to fight COVID–19, the government started to swap people in key positions in cultural institutions with handpicked party members. The Museum of Contemporary Art (MSUM) in Ljubljana got a new director who had no relevant qualifications, knowledge, or networks within contemporary art.

Concerning the new forms of art production such as socially engaged art, participatory art, or artistic research, the contemporary art museum remained at a standstill, without much engagement; they are still serving and supporting conventional forms, hand in hand with the art market whose aim is the production of “desirable objects”.

However, as I remember a talk by Chris Dercon (director, Tate Modern, 2011–2016) some years ago at The Showroom in London, he talked about the impossibility of producing socially engaged and participatory art projects within established museums such as Tate Modern. They are trying to embrace and present a variety of new art practices, but they always fail. In his opinion, not everything is well situated within an established art museum. Therefore, we should support and value the importance of the smaller art spaces that might have the capacity and energy (if not the finances) to develop new art forms and new ways to communicate ideas to people.

**ML:** I know what you mean, but I am not sure if I agree. Tate Modern was one of the institutions supporting the first iteration of Ahmet Ögut’s *The Silent University* in 2012, together with The Showroom and Delfina Studios. After a while, they left the project; I believe it was too challenging on an organisational level. Otherwise, it is correct that not much has happened with mainstream institutions, such as Moderna Museet and Tate Modern, apart from maybe their inclusion of a few more artists with diverse backgrounds from other parts of the world. Furthermore, apart from a few projects

more like social practice-type work, Tate Modern invited Tania Bruguera to do the big Turbine Hall commission. That would not have happened in the 1990s. Even though it is highbrow, the problem is that they are not sophisticated enough; they are trying to be welcoming; they are trying to make sure that people who are not yet involved with art feel the desire to come.

Museums today, in general, have quite high visitor numbers. Nevertheless, the problem is that what they are doing is less and less interesting for me as a professional – an experience I share with many peers and colleagues. Whereas in the past, one of the main tasks of a mainstream art museum would be to be part of artistic and curatorial experimentation and development – for example, the Stedelijk in Amsterdam in the 1950s and '60s and Moderna Museet. Furthermore, museums would conduct proper research, which has become rare. Instead, research concerning contemporary art and recent art history has gravitated towards the universities on the one hand and towards the artists on the other.

**AŠ:** Indeed, it looks like the contemporary art museums of today are again falling back on conventional art-historical research, if at all, and they would have real difficulties with practice-based research in art or curating. However, smaller art institutions and organisations might dare to start practice-based research processes that aim to develop new methodologies and transfer knowledge within the artistic and curatorial field. At Tensta konsthall, you managed to combine historical research with artistic research. How would you describe this research process?

## **II. On practice-based research**

### ***Tensta Museum: Reports from New Sweden and Hustadt, Bochum, Germany***

**ML:** *Tensta Museum: Reports from New Sweden*, for example, was a six-year-long inquiry into the history and memory of the late modernist suburb of Tensta, located twenty minutes on the subway from the city centre of Stockholm. For this project, the konsthall, whose governance structure is a private foundation started by a local artist in 1998, “played museum”. We took on the role of a museum engaging with the history and memory of the people living and working in the neighbourhood and with the physical location. Artists, researchers, local associations and inhabitants, historians, activists, and others contributed in various ways within formats such as group exhibitions, solo presentations, workshops, symposia, walks, and courses.

Many aspects of the suburb, often painted in dark colours in the media, came across, filtered through a variety of experiences and competencies. Ninety per cent of the population in the area have a trans-local background, which was elaborated on next to studies on the archaeological remains from the Iron Age next to the konsthall. We interviewed people, read, studied objects and buildings, watched films, delved into archival material, and discussed; that is how we conducted our inquiry. We never called it research. We are just now completing a book on the quilt-like project, where I hope that its heterogeneous character will be palpable.

**AŠ:** I appreciate your engagement with Tensta konsthall. I am quite sure it was a huge challenge. Myself, I worked on a research project within a neighbourhood resembling Tensta called Hustadt, in Bochum. The project became part of my doctorate at Malmö Art Academy (2008–2013). However, my research project evolved from a conventional public art commission from the City of Bochum, and no art institution could support the project apart from Susanne Breidenbach (owner, *Galerie m*) and Bettina Eickhoff (a friend). The project developed pretty much as a self-organised process. However, through the project I established good cooperation with the so-called “Aktionsteam” – activists and others who wanted to be engaged in the neighbourhood – and the official “neighbourhood office”. With their help, the project became sustainable in its own way, and it is still alive; it has continuity.

This experience produced the research questions for my doctorate, which addressed the position of the artist within urban regeneration; how an artist can maintain a position of independence that allows for a critical approach when working in a context beyond the walls of the art institution. Is it possible to avoid gentrification, or at least to raise awareness and develop tools for public engagement and participation? It took me several years to conclude this research. It was not only a project that I did in Hustadt; the research also comprised a reflection on my practice, the documentation I produced through the project, and writing as part of my practice. My research method was, in part, dialogical or conversational; my texts are written as dialogues and conversations, which are continued through an analytical epilogue. I used a lot of my visual material, photos, and videos as references that complemented the text. I gave numerous talks, presentations, and lectures about practice-based research based on my dissertation: *Hustadt Inshallah: Learning from a Participatory Art Project in a Trans-local Neighbourhood* (2013); it would make sense to publish it as a book. Nevertheless, it just never happened; the research is published only on the Lund University website.



### III. Approaching artistic research

#### *How do you know? (2017–18) at KHiO Oslo National Academy of the Arts and beyond. Distinguishing between investigation/inquiry and research.*

**AŠ:** So, I understand research at large both as academic research and as that taking place within an artistic research practice, which may relate to several projects (experiments or case studies) seeking answers to one or several research questions. When we talk about artistic research that is produced at art academies or university art departments today, there seems always to be quite a claustrophobic situation; one would expect that these platforms would connect to academia as a wider research context in order to communicate the findings of artistic research or practice-based research, but that is often hindered, or not really possible or even desirable.

When I reflected on my recent experience in art education at KHiO, and my attempts to introduce artistic research and PhD study into their curriculum, I saw the confusion. They fight with many ghosts hidden within the art context; one of them is, for example, short-term employment politics. Temporary professorship jobs (six years) are good for circulating a variety of knowledge within the institution but not very handy when one wants to develop serious research platforms connected to academia at large. That would make artistic research comparable to academic research with transdisciplinary partners. This situation is, of course, very different at universities with tenure-track positions.

The advantage, as I see it, of artistic research is perhaps its directness – first-hand experience, unlimited imagination, and ground-level knowledge production and communication with people, either a general or specific public. It is not a hermetic academic situation where artistic research is situated and presented.

**ML:** It is less important to define what artistic research is or how it works differently, as we know with every artist. In my understanding, artistic research might borrow certain methods from academia, like ethnographic methods or social research methods, at the same time as it is inventing new methods specific to art production. This is the case with the artists in *How do you know?*, namely Matts Leiderstam, Anna Daučíková, and Fernando García-Dory.

**AŠ:** Many art practices have a research component in how they work, but not every art project is a research project. As Sarat Maharaj has repeated in his lectures: “Art is a form of inquiry, of being in the world, of knowing the world and coming up with new ways of knowing that world. Art knowledge is both at one with and at odds with other forms of knowledge production ... each has its own set of procedures and processes of getting to know and grasp something.” The way we think about knowledge determines what is and what is not knowledge. However, the question is: How do we know? As artists, we produce many different forms of knowledge; therefore, as Maharaj would argue, there is not just one singular form of knowledge that is inspiring and liberating (Maharaj 2018).

**ML:** Artistic research within academia, specifically art education, is only interesting as long as it generates relevant and interesting art projects. My starting point is the great examples of how artists work, how they practice some kind of study, inquiry, or investigation. “Research” is a demanding word. Whenever an MA student throws the word around, I think we have to stop and distinguish between a study – an inquiry, an investigation – and research. What does it mean to look into something? Furthermore, what does it mean to research something? These are very different things.

Artists who have never been close to formalised artistic research within academia would be abhorred if their work was compared to that, like Philippe Parreno or Haegue Yang; I would still argue that their practice involves some research. The same goes for the practice of artists like Dora García and Måns Wrangé, as well as people like yourself, or Matts Leiderstam, who indeed have been involved in formalised, academic artistic research. I am really worried about this development, in how artistic research is being academicized, and how the particular sensibilities of the arts in developing new methodologies are becoming more and more complicated and codified and hindering the outcome of great art projects.

Artistic research has become a category of its own, which I find problematic. This category can be described as “bad art” – it would rarely fly within professional art contexts. Along the way, it is producing its stakeholders who have accumulated a certain influence, building positions, which they, of course, are reluctant to leave. In my current work as the counsellor of culture at the Embassy of Sweden in Moscow, I see a parallel in how culture is used within diplomatic contexts. Many of the projects within this sphere are produced for other diplomats and the ministries “at home”; they

have very little relevance for the field of culture beyond diplomacy. Therefore, diplomatic, cultural projects are their entity – with their stakeholders eager to maintain their influence – which is not relevant to the rest of the field of culture, and this is how much artistic research is being carried out today.

**AŠ:** Indeed, “artistic research” is becoming a category of its own. However, I am afraid I disagree that this is a context for producing “bad art”; there is a lot of “bad art” around that does not claim to be artistic research.

I see two extremes in artistic research: one is when artists become theorists and forget about their art practice; the theoretical part stands on its own, and the results of the art production have nothing to do with their writing. The other extreme is when every art project is proclaimed as research without reflection on the transfer of the new knowledge or the contribution to the academic discussion.

Maybe the difficult part within the production process of artistic research is to theorise out of one’s research-based practice – not to apply theory on the art project, but to complement, to question, and to develop new knowledge out of one’s practice. Moreover, at the end of the day, as I mentioned earlier, artistic research needs to better communicate its findings with other fields of academic research, not only with the general public, but with museums and other art spaces. Methods and research questions and their findings, or final results within art, are very different but valuable contributions to overall knowledge production. Thinking the world differently is what art can do.

#### **IV. Artistic research in production beyond academia**

##### ***Suggestion for the (Next) Day (2019), Art Encounters Biennial, Timișoara***

**ML:** I would suggest that your project for the Art Encounters Biennial in Timișoara in 2019 is an example of a kind of artistic research that is readily available for people beyond academia. When my co-curator Anca Rujoiu and I invited you to make a new work, you responded by proposing the recycling an old project. A gesture which we liked a lot!

**AŠ:** I agree, but only partly. *Suggestion for the (Next) Day* is not an artistic research project, but rather another experiment within my research-based practice. I was invited to do new work, but because I am more interested in reintroducing methods

that I developed in the past to new situations and seeing what would come out of the process, I proposed something else. I wanted to recontextualise an art project from twenty years ago called *Suggestion for the Day*, commissioned for the group exhibition *What If: Art on the Verge of Architecture and Design* at Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 2000, which you curated. The project eventually became part of the Moderna Museet collection.

The project in Stockholm debated affordable housing and extreme segregation in the city, involving architects, urban planners, activists, and others in open and closed discussions, as well as a borrow-a-bike service and a suggested tour to contentious sites, as suggested by invited participants in the project. In Timișoara, I started to study the city's situation by meeting people concerned about the city and its development, asking them what their "suggestion for the day" would be when talking about the city to a stranger such as myself. Air pollution and environmental conservation in the city and its surroundings emerged as the most pressing issue. However, this does not mean that affordable housing is not an urgent question in a post-Communist country, but rather that there is "something in the air" that needs immediate addressing.

Thus, *Suggestion for the (Next) Day* took the form of an environmental-awareness campaign that engaged various public media and platforms to bring about cognizance of air pollution among the inhabitants of Timișoara. Together with the artists Ana Kun and Livija Coloji and theatre director Victor Dragoș, we acted under the name Zephyr to develop a project, with contributions from many more people forming a project network.

In addition to an art-installation hub in the Tram Museum – one of the biennial venues that housed material related to the issue of environmental pollution, climate change, and capitalism – Zephyr posted agitprop posters all over the city. We also organised a roundtable discussion at the City Hall, where people in key positions in the industries that surround the city were invited, together with medical workers and researchers, environmentalists and activists, the mayor and representatives from the city administration responsible for urban planning and environment, architects and landscape designers, artists, and others interested in the subject of urban environment and pollution. Finally, during the last week of the biennial exhibition we organised a forum theatre, drawing on the research done while working on the project. Forum theatre is a form of participatory theatre where nonprofessional actors

and the audience work together on the issue presented to them, creating awareness and finding possible solutions to the issue in question. It worked very well in Timișoara, at Basca – a small neighbourhood theatre run by Victor Dragoș and his team. I was very happy with the whole process of the project, which created a new network for me as an artist and researcher, as well as for the other people involved.

We carried out a small investigation concerning air pollution in Timișoara – and I was hoping we were going to develop this research further, but at the moment it is standing still. Maybe later we will pick it up again and develop it. We used the opportunity to participate at the Art Encounters Biennial to study the situation and reach the public; hopefully, we also managed to produce some awareness among the people in Timișoara. We used methods, models, or manuals that are flexible, acknowledging the specificity of the locality being appreciative of the varied cultural, political, and economic context.

**ML:** It was a great reaction from your side to an open invitation to recycle and rethink, or even re-enact, a “suggestion for the day” from twenty years ago. At Moderna Museet, it was part of a group exhibition looking at how artists related to architecture and design, with your work becoming a project that looked at the condition of contemporary architecture in Stockholm. It did so through the eyes of several young architects who pointed out interesting and problematic areas, based on which you made a map and organised a bicycle service so that visitors to the museum could come and borrow a bicycle and a map, and follow the map, learning what these young, energetic architects wanted to convey about the city. There was also a series of roundtable discussions involving the architects and other stakeholders, including politicians and developers. It was not initially planned as a long-term project; it became one, with numerous roundtable discussions over the years, hosted by Moderna Museet and eventually by the International Artists Studio Program in Stockholm (IASPIS), and, in the end, even by the Museum of Architecture in Stockholm.

**AŠ:** Yes, I was curious how the project would develop, using the same methods within a very different context. The whole methodological setup was rather similar; meeting selected individuals who are concerned with the city’s development and what is at stake there. My question to them this time was the same as in Stockholm: What is your “suggestion for the day”? Conversations followed, and at the same time I kept in contact with the participants, continuing the debate during the whole process

of doing the project. A roundtable discussion, albeit closed to the general public, invited politicians and other professionals to participate. It enlarged the network through local actors, creating specific tools for public communication.

The group that we formed in Timișoara was very active in the research and activation of locally engaged professionals dealing with the issue of air pollution. For the roundtable discussion, which was set up in the main hall of Timișoara City Hall, we invited various people who otherwise would never have come together. It was quite a confrontational setup, and the city's mayor cancelled his participation at the last second. It must have been too heavy for him, just before the elections. However, there were representatives of the Mayor's Office and representatives of the polluters in the city, along with medical doctors presenting the terrifying situation of increasing cases of lung diseases in the city. These environmental activists talked about the real statistics, among other things.

The installation within the Tram Museum was a kind of hub where we gathered and presented some information related to air pollution. We built a structure to display information using environmentally friendly materials, thinking a lot about what was necessary. We created a green space with plants from the local greenhouse that produce higher amounts of oxygen. We displayed information on air pollution in Timișoara in real time, as well as with a digital measurement device developed by Romanian activist Radu Motișan (uRADMonitor). Also, people could delve into our data collection and read from the books we had collected during the research. Throughout the biennial, we had several discussions with visitors to the exhibition and school groups who were curious about our project. People brought in their suggestions and ideas, which we collected in a notebook that was part of the project, which also served as complementary data for our forum theatre performance later on at Basca Theatre.

Also, we decided to engage in an illegal action by putting up posters with a clear message: "Something in the Air? Respiratory disorders are the most prevalent affliction in Timiș County" (in Romanian and English). Most of the time, we attached the poster to the signboards next to the official voting posters. However, that project concluded when the Art Encounters Biennial closed its doors. Still, it has been resonating for a while among the people in Timișoara. Moreover, our environmental campaign has initiated other projects and writings, like the publication *Air* by Ana Kun and the Architectural Biennial a year later, which picked up where we left off and

continued developing the engagement with environmental pollution in the city. They presented the theme with a green setup in the Tram Museum. Moreover, Ana Kun, as the Zephyr representative, was invited to talk about our project a year later.

## **V. Methods connected to collaboration and participation**

**ML:** This touches on another question from Olga: namely about methodological change connected to collaboration and participation. The methods you employed in 1999 and 2000 in Stockholm and in 2019 in Timișoara were very similar. How would you describe this method?

**AŠ:** A major part of my practice is cooperation with others and creating conditions for participation. Because I am usually not local – and nowadays I am not exactly local anywhere, not even in the country where I was born (which does not exist anymore) – I am seeking a constructive dialogue with people I meet during my research for a specific project. Not only is it a place that I do not know, but it can also be another expertise that I do not have, which is leading me to find people to cooperate with. That is also how I continuously learn from different places and the people I meet.

The methods I am developing through my practice are related to a specific situation, which therefore transforms the process of research. I would not call the methods I use ethnographical or social scientific, because I never follow them strictly. Because the methods are shaped by the situation, they might be called a “situated method” that shapes the practice-based research.

In *Suggestion for the Day*, the project for Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 2000, I used a dialogical and conversational method adapted to the research process. People I met who shared information about housing in Sweden talked about the “burning questions” in the city. They were mainly interested in participating in discussions with politicians and city authorities; they were not interested in developing a project with me. Therefore, I created a platform for the meeting as one part of the project. However, the situation in Timișoara in 2019 was different; people I met and talked to about the city were very motivated to work with me and to think about the potential project; some of them became my collaborators, and together we decided to form the Zephyr group. We studied air pollution in the city and developed a scenario for the environmental campaign. Through the officially closed discussion, we created an opportunity to bring together people who do not agree with each other

but live under the same sky. That method of creating conditions for participation was similar to the situation in Stockholm. However, there the *Suggestion for the Day* debate continued over the following two years because the participants found the discussion constructive and important. In Timișoara, our suggestion was transferred into another context – the Architectural Biennial – or even another level, in the form of a new green policy for the city’s development, as demanded by the local actors.

This is a perfect example of a situated method, as I suggested earlier. I describe such a method of research as based on an embedded position or a context-specific situation. Famously, Donna Haraway (1988) makes the argument for situated knowledge against the possibility of universal knowledge, or what she calls “playing the God trick” – pretending to see from an abstract, invisible “nowhere”, like an eye hovering indefinitely above. Situated knowledge appreciates the knowledge on the ground and the specificity of the situation. Therefore, in the artistic research process one can use a specific method developed from the artistic process and follow its transformation, which is caused by the new situatedness. I would describe this as a situated method that creates new and different outcomes and produces situated knowledge.

## About the authors

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