

Introductory lecture Gloria Lauterbach, 23.09.2022

Honored Custos,
Honored opponent,
Dear colleagues, friends and family:

My doctoral thesis is a study in imagination. It is both a thought experiment as well as a space of rehearsal. It is a time travel or, more accurately, a circular expedition around memory and imagination. My work can also be described as a study on habitation, dialogue and nomadic subjectivity. And, as it turns out, it also is a study of death and dying. It is an encounter of and a dialogue between the human and the more-than-human realm. The latter for some brief but fierce moments. And lastly - and this is what I personally cherish most about it - this research simultaneously is a shelter amidst of turbulent conditions and a gust that wants to shake the canvas of a tent.

Regardless of how one reads this work, the cooperation of materials is in the center of inquiry.

A cooperation of materials, as I consider it here, occurs between, and thus entangles, the living and non-living, the material and immaterial, as well as the human and nonhuman. Being a process of entangling, disentangling and re-entangling with one another implies that material cooperation, firstly, takes place continuously and, secondly, spans the no-longer and the not-yet, the here and the there as well as the processual and the relational. The space that forms is a space of becoming, with cooperation as its guiding principle. This cooperative space is the focus of this study and framed as a space of "one", "other" and the in-between of both.

After researching this rather tangly topic of material cooperation for some years now, I would like to establish for you in my lecture in the next 20 min the following:

To regard in my thesis the time we live in as a time of non-habitation means to establish a link between the manner we understand cooperation and the way we understand habitation. The term non-habitation I borrow from dialogical philosopher Martin Buber. With this term Buber outlines humans' existence as non-inhabiting the world.

With both eyes on the manifold crises we live in, Buber's term non-habitation allows me

- to combine the crises we experience
- to express the gap between humans and world, represented in the crises,
- and to argue for the necessity to reimagine a cooperation between humans and world, or respectively, between "one" and "other".

In this light, the climate emergency, the collapse of biodiversity, mass migration, the floodings, the meltings, the deforestations, the pandemic are, in essence, crises of "one" and "other".

And each one of the crises signifies, before anything, that the space in-between “one” and “other”, as a space of cooperation, requires being re-envisioned in order to understand living or inhabiting as inhabiting-with, and, moreover, as living that is fundamentally based on the existence **of** the other.

To make it short: to research material cooperation means for me to revisit it, and more, it means for me to re-envision what else cooperation could mean.

As an artistic researcher I research my topic in a two-fold manner: I investigate material cooperation from its conceptual perspective and I investigate it from its material perspective. It is not a practice that takes place separately, it rather is like infusing the one with the other and observing what then happens.

Artistic practice is a big part of this study. Through my artistic practice I have developed 4 artistic methods that seek by exploring the space in-between “one” and “other”. The 4 methods I have developed are knotting, twining, rehearsing and speaking-with.

With the help of these methods, I artistically work myself into the space between “one” and “other” to from there exchange gazes, observe my cooperative partners and express what I find to make it experienceable to others. To bring it into being. This is what my title says: to become a knot with a storm-sculpted roof, to speak-with from Within.

In this in-between space that I temporarily inhabit, both cooperation and habitation have a huge variety of faces. Different faces, not restricted to the one how we understand cooperation and habitation commonly.

The in-between spaces that I have visited over the course of the last 6 years to encounter, observe, excavate and expose a different gesture of cooperation come in pairs:

One such pair that offers to my thesis a partly radical and partly hidden take on cooperation is Finnish sculptor Eila Hiltunen and the Sibelius Monument, built between 1961-1967.

Another cooperating pair that inspired this thesis from the beginning on is my grandfather, his stories, his material knowledge and his skills as a traditional roof-maker.

The third pair is the writings of dialogical philosopher Martin Buber and the critical posthuman theory by Rosi Braidotti.

The fourth and last pair I want to mention is the meteorological event, storm Niklas, as it occurred 2015 in Europe, copper, the public artwork Kreuzstrasse which is the artistic component of this thesis, and myself as the artistic researcher.

I am aware that my definition of a pair is a quite loose one, yes.

Honored opponent, dear audience: when preparing this lecture, I was advised to walk you step by step through the multiple layers of groundwork my thesis is built on. It was an excellent advise, however I decided to pass. I will not guide you gently through the layers of

this research, simply because 20 min do not seem to be enough to unfold this research in a logical manner to you. And also because in this lecture, rather than explaining my research to you, I instead would like to make you *feel the thoughts* my artistic component “Kreutzstrasse” as well as all other cooperative pairs have stirred. The thoughts that quite radically changed my own perspective on cooperation, habitation, dialogue I would like YOU to hear, memorise and imagine, because these thoughts *desire* to be carried further. Explanations often lack this beautiful quality.

So.

Between 30 March and 1 April 2015, a storm by the name Niklas turns Europe into a hostile environment, killing eleven people and leaving immense damage to the infrastructure and many buildings behind. Niklas’ eagerness reaches up to 192 kilometres per hour, documented on Germany’s highest mountain, the Zugspitze. Niklas stubbornly travels towards the South.

Together, we are in Zurich, Switzerland now:

When Niklas passes the City of Zurich, Niklas grabs a piece of a copper church roof, opens the seams and spits an approximately 300 square-meter copper roof piece to the street.

We all have encountered pictures as this one manifoldly. We might have even experienced something like this in person. Crashed roofs, crashed buildings, fallen, uprooted trees, buried cars. We all know the main *troubles* with an occurrence like the one we see in the picture. We do not even have to think much about it:

- The roof piece blocks a street and hinders us to get from A to B.
- Also, the roof piece is dangerous. It could fly off and damage property, or worse, hurt people.
- And, the church roof itself is now damaged; the building is no longer protected against rain, dust, light, wind, wildlife. The outside can now enter the inside.

This is one way to read the scene and cooperate with the happening. In my thesis I call this way *a distinct script*, which we follow, a script we all recognize, which we have rehearsed life-long and thus feel most comfortable with; secure so to say. This script is based on a Western idea or, let’s call it a very strong and sticky narration, of how to be human, of how to inhabit this world, of where and how to feel most comfortable and secure and of how to arrange life based on this need for comfort, cooperation and security.

Dialogical philosopher Martin Buber, who wrote the brilliant work *I and Thou*, developed in the 1920s two beautiful brackets for two opposite sides of experiencing and being in the world. Addressing the other is for Buber only possible in word-pairs: I-It and I-Thou.

While the relationship of I-It is of a monological nature, the I-Thou relationship is dialogical.

In the I-It mode, one and other are present-less. The I describes, dissects and classifies the other, instead of meeting the other. In this mode, I and It are separate, stay distant, isolated from one another. Guided by principles and causalities, I and It are only a sum of multiplicities without a real, present connection to one another.

In the mode of I-Thou, by contrast, it is the Thou the I turns towards, it is the Thou the I opens up to, it is the Thou the I encounters as a whole. I and Thou grow with one another, in search of a shared meaning: in this mode, neither I nor Thou dominate; the focus is on the in-between of both.

The more I listened to Buber's word pair I and Thou, the more I began to see what a lost opportunity it is to only look-at, anchor and operate the world.

Storm Niklas raged in Zurich the same year I started my doctoral studies. The wasteful removal and trashing as it has been done with this piece of storm sculpture felt like the perfect entry point for me as an artistic researcher to start my study on cooperation.

Now we go to another moment in time together. We are now in Helsinki, the time we go back to is the year 1966.

This work, the Sibelius Monument, is a very well-known Finnish public artwork, located in Töölö, Helsinki. It was built by Eila Hiltunen over the course of 6 years, between 1961-1967. It is an artwork made in honor of the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius. Eila Hiltunen won the competition to create the work and translated in her proposal the way she hears the music by Jean Sibelius into material.

We are standing in front of a sculpture composed of around six hundred 3 mm thick stainless steel tubes. All in all, the monument reaches a length of ten metres, the crown tubes have a height of nine metres, and the entire monument has an estimated total weight of between 24 and 28 tons.

This artistic practice we see here in a beautifully documented series of photographs, taken by her husband Otso Pietinen, can be also listened to in Eila Hiltunen's own words:

She writes in her notes after long day spent with the monument:

Quote *My eyes watch the fusion. I have written kilometres, tens of thousands of kilometres, kilometres of electric arc with the mouth of my welder. I am hermetically separated from the outside world behind a wall made of the crackle of my welder, of the murmuring of the evaporation of the cooling water and of my machines and instruments. I am like a stream of lava in search of a new bed whose wave moves on, covering entire large and extensive surfaces, becoming larger and more extensive.* **ENDQUOTE**

This pair – the sculptor and the sculpture - offered to me something tremendously valuable:

Eila Hiltunen and the Sibelius Monument offered me to excavate another way of understanding cooperation. The way cooperation is practiced or rather voiced in this example is so tremendously valuable, because it took place in past and thus equips me with an alternative vision of the now and the future. It allows to create another future in which we look at an event as the one taking place in Zurich with entirely different eyes. The way Eila Hiltunen expressed in words the years she has spent with the Sibelius Monument empowers us now to rewrite the path from the 1960s to the now. It allows us to weaken the strong and sticky narration we all know by heart and to strengthen another narration. A narration that is capable of developing another way of being with one another, of expressing the other, of perceiving the other, of making the other visible. From there we can then walk further in all directions and continue weaken the one, very harmful narration – so it turns out - and strengthen other ones, those that actually resonate with life.

This is for me a moment of a new encounter or new dialogue, a moment of extension that enables us to understand cooperation differently, to breathe in the dense material composition we as humans are in because of our strong, sticky and one-directional narration.

To revisit Eila Hiltunen's art practice means to knot and twine her artistic methods with my artistic methods. My focus alternates now between the far and near.

And this is my first of three propositions I make in my thesis toward a different understanding of cooperation between materials: the practice of knotting and twining, so I propose, requires thinking in a long line and through circular movements.

Now, I would like to take you to another moment in time still. The place is the same as we are right now, Otaniemi campus, but it is the year 2018.

To be precise: it is August 21, 2018 when a rework of a storm's sculpture, nearly unnoticed, comes into existence on the campus of Aalto University in Otaniemi, Finland.

This is my artistic component "Kreutzstrasse". I have built Kreutzstrasse in 2018 as a rework of the roof piece that had been ripped off the church in Zürich, Switzerland. It is a semipermanent public artwork (2018-2025) exhibited here on the campus of Aalto University. It is partly human-made and at the same time a work on its own. It is conceptually tied to the meteorologically made roof sculpture from Zürich. From its material

origin it is a storm work without a storm and a rework that inhabits this campus to cooperate with the gestures of the here and now. For instance, it weathers because of its location, because of its distinct embeddedness.

After knotting and twining various materials and gestures, now a new space has formed.

This is my second proposition I make toward a different understanding of cooperation between materials: this new space that has formed in which we can now move together with all other knotted and twined materials requires to be rehearsed. My thesis is such a space of rehearsal. Kreuzstrasse is a space of rehearsal. It is in this space that I cooperate with present and non-present counterparts. And it is this going back and forth between *what is* and *what could be* which enables me to imagine far more into a future, on a future's own terms. It is continuously envisioning by rehearsing the space that forms through the methods of twining and knotting.

In my third proposition I lastly microscope the sphere in-between "one" and "other". In my practice, the space that forms between myself, Storm Niklas, copper and the rework only comes into existence because I continuously rehearse it. It forms and so I begin to speak with my cooperating partners. In this open, experimental, unknown space we oscillate between gazes. Those gazes we memorise or imagine. In this unknown space, we do not look for orientation; we search instead for interruption, exposure and transformation. We weather.

I ask You,
honoured opponent appointed by the Doctoral Programme Committee of
the School of Arts, Design and Architecture, to present the critical
comments on the dissertation You find well-founded.