International journal of art and aesthetics in management and organizational life

MEMORY AND ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE

guest editors: Pierre Guillet de Monthoux and Antonio Strati

Alberto Zanutto
Mikael Scherdin
Timon Beyes
Terry Brown & Kathy Mack
Niina Koivunen
Klaus Harju

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Ben Johnson
on The Liverpool Cityscape

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Claire Jankelson
on the aesthetics of listening

Aesthesis

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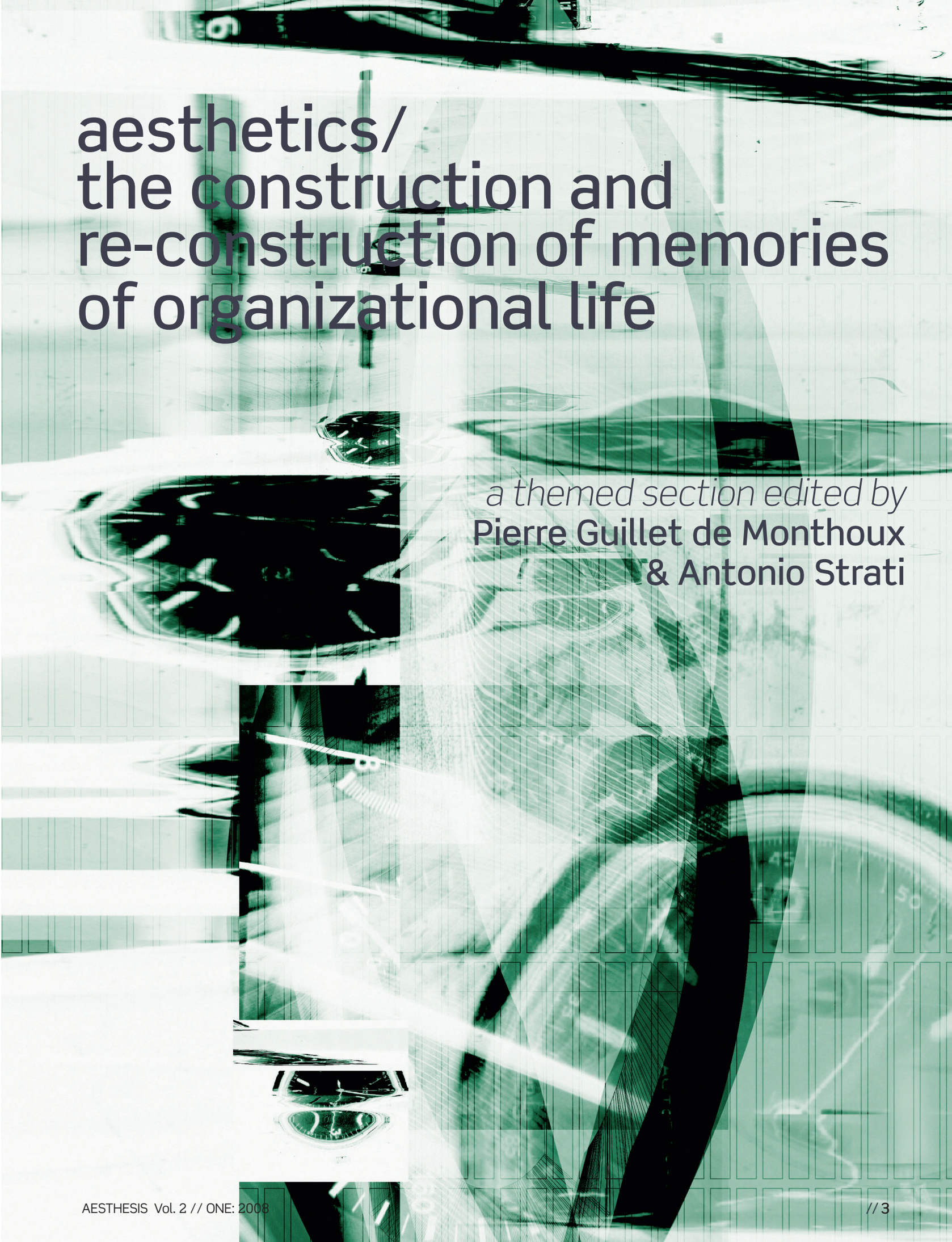
Pierre Guillet de Monthoux & Antonio Strati



Ponte dei Sospiri: Bridging Art and Aesthetics in Organizational Memories

Introduction by Pierre Guillet de Monthoux and Antonio Strati

Do you know when you see it, or do you see it only when you know it? Is it a matter of intention or is it something in the eye of the beholder? Is it a phenomenon or is it a perspective? How, then, do you express it, or how do you represent it? These are just some of the questions requiring an answer when 'aesthetics' enters the realm of social science. The themed *papers* section of this issue of *Aesthesis* is aesthetics and the construction and re-construction of memories of organizational life – such considerations seemed omnipresent to the researchers who gathered in the little village of Gattières,[1] southern France, for the Third EIASM Workshop on 'Art, Aesthetics and Organization' in July 2007. On this occasion, as in the past, the common 'call for papers' was intended to emphasise the dialectics that give strength to the ongoing configuration of an aesthetic discourse on organization. Art and aesthetics, in fact, are not understood in the same way by both of us.

// Pierre Guillet de Monthoux (2004) has a clear predilection for the arts as an arena and laboratory for aesthetic experiments. The arts have an important role as showcases of aesthetic practices threatened and marginalized by bureaucracy and corporate managerialism. Pierre is thus particularly keen to understand and enhance the aesthetics of the organization through artistic intervention.

// Antonio Strati (1999) emphasises aesthetics as a central but forgotten dimension of 'organizational life'. He focuses on *sensible* knowledge and aesthetic judgment in everyday organizational practices, and is particularly keen to highlight that the negotiation of organizational aesthetics gives form to the organization and also shapes power relations in organizational cultures.

These two diverse emphases regarding art and aesthetics in the study of organizations have also configured two different approaches – among others – in organizational aesthetics research: namely, the artistic approach (Guillet de Monthoux et.al., 2007) and the aesthetic approach (Strati, 2008). The artists, art critics, and organizational scholars who responded to our common call for papers for these three workshops – the first held in Siena in 2000, the second in Gattières in 2003, and the third again in Gattières, in 2007 – were in various ways catering to each convener's special interests. Their participation, however, did not give rise to a clear separation between the two research styles. On the contrary, participants and organizers shared the conviction that both performing art and aesthetic comprehension must be part of our understanding of the social processes of organizing action. This conviction was shared both by participating organizational and managerial scholars and such prominent guests from art world and industrial design such as Alberto Alessi, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Maria Finders and Daniel Birnbaum. Symbolic of this interaction is the Human Relations special issue on 'Organizing Aesthetics', featuring the script of a performance (Steyeart and Hjorth, 2002) inspired by the first workshop held in Siena. This was a novelty in an organization studies publication. But even though it appeared in such a prestigious journal, it did not engender much of a hybridization of art and aesthetics in organizational research and writing. The two approaches did not merge together. Rather, they continued to propose, each on the basis of its distinctive characteristics, a common ground for transgressive and novel forms of conducting and representing field research and the theoretical study of organization. In a word, what they had in common was simply a genuine and profound desire for ... aesthetics!

This issue of *Aesthesis* reminds us of this desire for aesthetics in our knowledge of organizations. When Alberto Zanutto writes that the task of research is to 'valorize aesthetics', he articulates an almost programmatic aspiration -- aesthetics as an escape from a one-dimensional idea of reality. Zanutto's long experience as a researcher on a variety of projects seems to have shown how aesthetics can be 'smuggled' into traditional organizational inquiries. What memories can one represent, firstly to the researcher him/herself, secondly to colleagues involved in the same research, and thirdly to organizational students and scholars, and to the

organizational actors themselves? Zanutto's article can be read as an ongoing fragmented aesthetic memoir. It also stands as a quest for a deeper understanding of aesthetics in organizational field research, which polemicizes functionalism's basic assumptions in order to open the way for aesthetic experience itself. How can traditional, rather 'square' research, be turned into a multidimensional inquiry -- thus providing an aesthetic research team with techniques for an aesthetic research process that will constructively confuse the binary boredom of an aesthetic reading of organization dynamics! Like most freedom fighters, however, Zanutto somewhat over-simplifies matters. It is difficult to argue that reality is life whilst rationalism is death; for both are part of our desire for freedom. However, his contribution is a viable first step towards transforming the representation of the outcomes of social science research into forms of aesthetic organizational memory.

Mikael Scherdin's argument stands in sharp contrast to Zanutto's strong belief that aesthetic organizational research and the researcher's personal aesthetic comprehension of organizational phenomena should be grounded in negotiation with colleagues. Scherdin's contribution evokes a tension between an almost romantic belief in subjectivity for subjectivity's sake on the one hand, and on the other a view of aesthetics as a social phenomenon that constantly puts the idea of a given subject in constant danger. We ourselves recognize this tension in our own editorial divergences: Pierre Guillet de Monthoux´s interests in art are viewed with some scepticism by Antonio Strati on account that art might well obstruct our analysis of aesthetics out there in the field. However, this issue's references to art critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud´s understanding of contemporary art as performing a 'relational aesthetics' (Bourriaud, 1998), and Guillet de Monthoux's predilection for Joseph Bueys´ definition of art as 'social sculpture', indicate that we are immersed in the intricacies of a controversy. Scherdin´s rather radical position begs the question of whether organizational aesthetics can be adequately represented by adopting such an individualistic style in field research. Comparisons with Zanutto's article may thus help us grasp the delicate nuances of organizational research in practice, in ways that induce diverse states of aesthetic feeling in the researcher. Here we get a feel for how to 'legitimate' certain forms of aesthetic understanding through a process of negotiation in the context of a plurality of individual aesthetic understandings. This contrasts with the aesthetic 'self-legitimation' assumed by Scherdin's 'autoethnographic' re/construction of the aesthetics of his individual organizational memories. Moreover, both articles echo broader methodological controversies in social studies, and one can see emerging a process by which the study of the aesthetic is negotiating its own legitimacy in the context of mainstream methodologies. In a sense, this brings us back to the central issue in aesthetic organizational research, that of the epistemological controversy (Taylor and Hansen, 2005) – but with a touch of novelty introduced by the specific characteristics of these two research experiences.

These methodological reflections can be understood in a new light through Timon Beyes' detailed account of Jacques Rancière's aesthetic philosophy. When organizing the 2007 Gattières workshop, we recommended this French philosopher to the participants. His booklet *Le Partage du sensible* (2000), as well other works such as *Malaise dans l'esthétique* (2004), raises issues that are not strictly bound to the art world but encompass the way in which our world offers itself to be shared and divided up in our daily perception of it. This philosophical aesthetics has recently gained fame in art schools and amongst young artists. French theory, however, has a very special way of elucidating how aesthetics is a fundamental approach to social philosophizing, and it signalled for us exactly what the title of this introduction indicates: bridging art to aesthetics (and back).

Beyes' article provides a 'crash course' in this aesthetic philosophy. Rancière sees the formation of new arenas, the emergence of new collectives, and the voicing of new desires, and this new activity is fundamentally aesthetic. It is up to aesthetic intuition to give form to, to organize if you prefer, otherwise silenced and suppressed phenomena. Rancière's aesthetic perspective opens up what might be called a *political* analysis, and it is, as Beyes makes clear, 'critical' in the sense of relying on the self-organizing force of aesthetic intuition. The researcher is not a judge nor an expert once s/he has opted for an aesthetic approach. S/he develops a sensitivity to aesthetic forces that are profoundly liberating because they creatively generate their own trajectories, rather than simply voicing dialectic criticism or staging violent revolts.

While illustrating Rancière's aesthetics, Beyes alludes to possible implications for the study of organizing processes. Beyes also claims that Rancière's organizational aesthetics has emerged as a philosophical alternative to the implicit authoritarianism of aesthetically engaged sociologies, like that of Pierre Bourdieu. Hence his article raises an issue similar to that encountered in the tension between Zanutto's and Scherdin's articles: the tension between an aesthetics implicitly imposing something that 'ought to be' and an aesthetics that only reveals the organizational control of the sensible in order to defy and escape it – as in Strati's aesthetics (1999) or Gagliardi's empathic-logical approach (2006). The question of who is most prone to open up organizational life – a sociological researcher or an

aesthetic philosopher – still remains. Terry Brown and Kathy Mack provide a concrete example that might appeal to Rancière. They show that aesthetic research forces us to assume a new stance as social scientists. As they reflect on common organizational memories, Brown and Mack are compelled to give form to everyday artifacts in order to invoke the aesthetic dimension of collective memory. Zanutto insists that aesthetic research consists of encounters within a team of researchers, while Scherdin develops arguments to defend the sphere of subjective action for individual interpretations of an experience. For both of them the outcome of the aesthetic research process is unclear, although one surmises that it would be some kind of organizational awareness of aesthetic processes in Zanutto's case and some sort of art-like product (cut off from its context) in Scherdin's. Brown and Mack, however, illustrate how they used multimedia techniques to make a product that was then fed back into the field in order to bring forth an aesthetic dimension common to both researchers and researched: research thus consists in crafting a piece of art necessary to bring forth forgotten aesthetic memories in organization.

Niina Koivunen analyses this process by exploring the making of an artistic artefact: a recording of contemporary classical music. Her contribution implicitly supports Brown and Mack's account. They simply had to make a product to bring forth an aesthetic process; for Koivunen it was the other way round. There was a process -- the listening to contemporary music by aficionados with set values and with a set context of classical connoisseurs -- into which products (the recordings made by the skilled producers observed by Koivunen) were constantly fed. Rather than a process triggered by a product, the product was created by the process, and in ways that, according to Koivunen, seemed almost automatic and system-conditioned. Koivunen accordingly helps us understand the difference between what we usually call an artwork and what we consider a tool to bring forth the aesthetics of 'non-art' organizational life.

Klaus Harju's article tackles the ontological status of this dimension itself. It propounds the extreme idea that the aesthetic of organization is nostalgia for a never-existing past. This does not involve a beautiful utopia to come; nor an ideal of some sort of perfection to be reached. It is a 'saudade' for the always bygone retrospects, which is not the same as simple nostalgia for an origin. If this is what aesthetics is about, then we are again confronted by the fact that art and research are separated only by a very fine line. For how can we seriously claim that there is a difference between fact and fiction if Harju's point is taken seriously? Mind you, this kind of fiction is not an ideal, a universal dream, or a claim to transcendent reality. It is a poetical fiction tainted by singularity, which can only be reshaped in a Nietzschean process of eternal return.

In editing this themed section of *Aesthesis*, however, we have not been able to maintain that artistic and aesthetic approaches are distinct and counterposed phenomena in organizational research. On the contrary, we have found ourselves affirming – with Rancière – that a crucial issue in both the aesthetic and artistic approaches to the study of organizational life is the changeover to a post-aesthetic discourse on organization. This involves a sensitivity, an awareness, and a taste that shapes organizational aesthetic research on the re/construction of organizational memories, as the capacity for aesthetic pathos in the understanding of organizational life. The novelist Philippe Delerm (2005: 114) – to continue with the French slant of this introduction – has relevantly and masterfully evoked:

.... tous les témoignages de lecteurs concordaient: on lui était reconnaissant d'avoir su inscrire dans le temps et l'espace des sensations détachées du temps, dans lesquelles chacun se reconnaissait pour avoir éprouvé non les mêmes, mais leur équivalent dans un lieu différent, avec une intensité perdue.

..... all the readers' testimonies agreed: they acknowledged her mastery in inscribing in time and space sensations detached from the time when each reader recognised that they had felt not those sensations themselves, but their equivalents in another place, bereft of intensity.

NOTE

1// We surely do not need to introduce Siena, but we want to say a few words about Gattières: The 4000 inhabitants of this little village, situated some 20 minutes drive from Nice-Cote-d'Azur airport, enjoy not only art & aesthetics conferences: in the village there are three good value-for-money restaurants and as many nice bars for your pastis. You can, as conference goers, check in at the nice small Hotel Beau Site and then visit Le Jardin run by the European Center for Art and Management. This is an ultra-select art space open only one day each year for us mortals. Last year Benjamin Saurer put on a show for the conference -- starring a big Zebra painting and a pony in Zebra suit (see over). The rest of the year this art-space is devoted to the aesthetic education of those extraterrestrials frequently flying over the neighborhood in their tiny saucers. But there is also an annual opera festival performing late July:
opus-opera@wanadoo.fr

Deleuze et....

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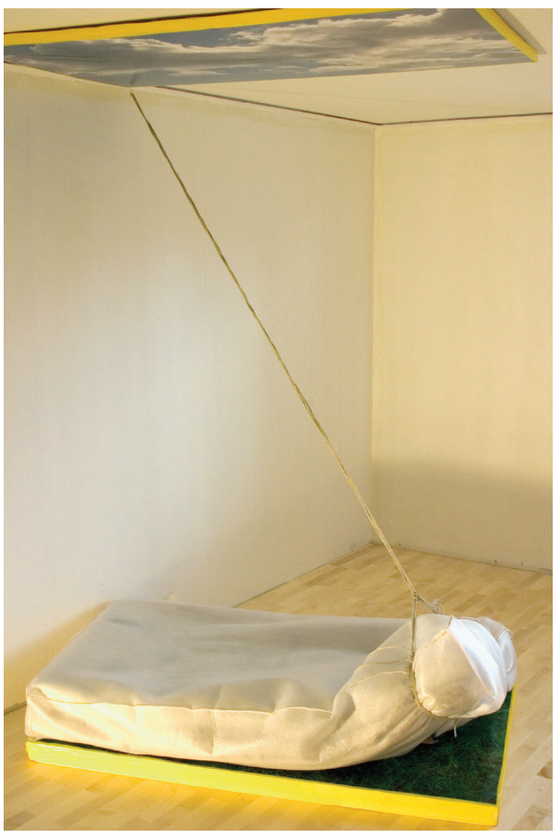
Framed:
new method and subjective grounds

Mikael Scherdin



Membrane, 2007

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY.

Autoethnography is a research method, which is a promising means of subjective-based enquiry, or even an auto-(learning)-method. It could ultimately become a method suited to developing our abilities to work with subjective, embodied experiences, particularly in the area of entrepreneurship as well as in the arts. Autoethnography emerges from the researcher's ability to become 'one' with the studied object, becoming a part of the studied object, and therefore able to gain a unique range of understanding, which is precisely what an artist and an entrepreneur attempt to do.

Autoethnography is often credited to Hayano (1979), who studied poker players by playing poker himself, by living in that particular subcultural context. Some variants of autoethnography are now common and are used in a number of different social scientific fields. Some of these have their roots in mainstream ethnographic methods (Geertz, 1976; Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995; Roth, 2005) and more recent developments have chartered the border between autoethnography and poetry, jazz, visual imagery, and performance (Ellis, 2004). Autoethnographic studies in combination with a study of images (Scott-Hoy, 2001; Saava and Nuutinen, 2003), film (Barone, 2003), teaching and artistry (Slattery, 2001), and autobiographical performance (Alexander, 2000) have improved the method's range and facility. However, Ellis (2004: 215) points out that many arts-based researchers using this method simply combine their art with a story. The 'art' part of the project, which creates images and moods, combines with writing, which is better at directing emotion. However, in many cases, published words are used more to explain the art, rather than enhance the emotional mood.

The development of the autoethnographic method has taken place on the borders between traditional research and the subjective processes of the researcher's experience. There are few publications on this subject, and arguably the method is still somewhat underdeveloped given its possible scope. Moreover, Anderson (2006) suggests that the earlier and sole focus on developing 'the evocative' -- modes of expressing experience (Ellis, 1997, 2004) -- should be combined with a developing means of analysis, turning autoethnography into a more powerful research method. This is particularly highlighted by Scherdin (2007) in the study of an art project using combined evocative and traditional analytic approaches.

Research in the field of entrepreneurship has its roots and nexus in subjective creation processes (Scherdin and Zander, 2006), but has not been framed and studied with methods wholly commensurate with these particular processes. Yet throughout history it is undeniable that practitioner based researchers and artists have found the means to create powerful objects, presenting insights and reflections on society, using the 'subjective' skills that emerge from their embodied experience. Still, even in the field of art, there are few major studies of research procedures and methods, other than the autobiographical and descriptive (Tharp, 2003; Dewey, 1934; Berger, 1980).

A SUBJECTIVE CREATION PROCESS: WHAT CAN IT TELL US?

The study of entrepreneurship often tries to squeeze the dynamic 'entrepreneurial' element into boxes, which is then explained and categorised by standardised forms of rational inquiry and cognitive processes. Artists in the recently developed areas of practitioner-based research are also similarly squeezed into abstract boxes of theoretical concepts. Both these situations invoke an urgent need for new methods. The field of entrepreneurship and the new field of practitioner-based art research lack the following: (a) a relevant and directed methodology to study actual phenomenon; (b) auto-learning methods to work within subjective processes; and consequently; (c) a new and forceful vocabulary (of metaphors) to be able, in a constructive way, to communicate, discern and understand phenomena connected to subjective creation processes. This paper attempts to make a start in using the autoethnographic method along with experimental writing and photographs in an attempt to communicate fragments of a subjective creation process. It has a certain 'grass-roots' view -- from the creator -- in an experimental and explorative attempt to look for another understanding, to follow a subjective creation process over a short period of time, seeing quite what we discover.

THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STORY

Stockholm 15th February, 2007

It's about to happen again. I am being steered by something. I can't do anything about it, other than to try and let it come into existence as painlessly as possible. I know I cannot resist. The easiest way is to follow the clustery flow of ideas and help them along, otherwise they will just become reluctant and irritable.

Have you ever had twenty irritable ideas in your head?

No, but perhaps you can imagine how it feels. They sit and sulk together and in a communal protest about not being able to get out.

Utterly annoying.

I think I am there now.

They are still in a good mood though; they have not yet turned sour, nor do they stare in exactly the same direction, in urgent need of attention wherever I point my nose. But they are starting to form in some imperceptible way, they have united, and sit there expectantly. They twitter a bit and create a new way of looking. They have kind of washed something away, and suddenly I notice other things.

I walk the same way every day. I see the same things every day. Walk for an hour and half.

Precisely the same route.

A ritual.

You can be deceived into thinking that you would see the same things, but no. Now, during the winter, I recall, I haven't even bothered to have my glasses on; it's just as well that it's a blur. I don't know what to look at anyway. Better not to, so I avoid straggly impressions from every different direction creating a conductorless orchestra. But recently, I have suddenly wanted to wear my glasses, even the desire to do so has been imperceptible. To be frank, it is quite impractical, I perspire, they get steamed up, and sometimes they create more problems than they solve.

Perhaps the twittering ideas have subconsciously persuaded my hand to put the glasses on my nose. Now there they sit, and new facts are emerging with every stroll... Things that were interesting before, like the squashed cans in the street that were a pleasure to collect, are now worn out.

No longer interesting.

Perhaps it was something mechanical, or simply a panicking over collecting them as if I had to prove to myself that I still can, certainly, find arty objects. Instead, I find other things that inspire me in new ways, impressions that strengthen an inner process, directed in a way that is still foggy and unattainable.

Perhaps I am in a directional-process?

I hate the word 'formation', or even worse 'to formulate oneself', used ad nauseam by an art school teacher I remember. How he wore it out that Staffan, the teacher; but perhaps there was something in his way of talking, that something formulates itself.

A bit scary, to formulate oneself; sounds a bit like laying some cards on

the table, in the right order, pausing appropriately and phrasing so as to manipulate and get one's message through unobserved, sneaking, so that the crowd didn't grasp how it happened, until long afterwards. And there it is, a long time later. Maybe nothing can be done about it.

The content of 'directional' appeals to me more, it just indicates a course, a pace, a tempo, a marker, a point of orientation, but 'to formulate oneself' feels more like an object or a persuasiveness against one's own will.

Lots of different concepts have been fluttering around lately.

The desire to do something has appeared from under a carpet of boredom and tedium. For years it was firm and flat, but recently the borders are starting to loosen. What luck that it was not glued firmly, I reflect. Perhaps that's the case with people with strong prejudices; they become glued down forever.

Something wants to be done.

I have also got that nagging, glorious feeling that something is brewing. Something is about to be done. Someone is planning something; maybe not my conscious self, but I am convinced that several conferences and consultations are going on. Perhaps they are even having a kick-off.

There they are speculating about strategies, tactics and targets; how shall we reach our goal? They work together and ponder, sensible and wise. Perhaps it's the hidden meanings, the irritated and raised voices when they discuss, which reach me. It's just as well. I don't want to know all the ingenious ideas, whims, and fantastic creations that are gushing forth.

There has never been a lack of them. At least not inside my head. In my head there has always been a lack of suitable means to remove them. I'm excited about getting rid of them, one after another, all equally stupid. There is no limit to how infantile -- to them, ingenious -- they are. I have always been in need of a sensible kind of screening, or perhaps I should say a more refined type of screening, to sift out all the rubbish that keeps erupting in my head at the most obscure times. They think they are ingenious and how can one know that they are not? When someone knocks on the door and beams, newly polished, glittering with fantastic concepts and a persuasive performance, it always gets me.

They stand at the door and shine one after another.

What do you do?

Take out the shotgun and shoot them as quickly as they appear? I can see myself, every time there's a knock at the door, loading my shotgun to kill yet another party crasher that I know will bother me again today.

To make this day a day of meaningless dreaming without any useful returns. I wonder if anyone has made any regression on the economic returns of dreaming?

No I can't really do that. Instead, I usually direct them towards the cellar, to an indefinite period of custody in the attic, or in some promising cases make them simply wait a while in the hall. Many of them have to turn away directly in the doorway, actually most of them.

I estimate swiftly.

At the moment lots of them are ringing the doorbell. They have been away for a while; in fact, for such a long time that I almost thought they had forgotten the address. For the past few years, however, it has been quite obvious that just a few of them made it to my hall, and not a single one of them has made it to any storage facilities. They have just not been there.

Perhaps my head has been resting.

Perhaps I have been re-booted. Someone has pressed the reset button. The disc drive has clattered into action again, with the necessary software updates of the past few years.

It is swirling with new confidence. Or perhaps self-confidence.

To have something brewing is a bit like being high. High on what's about to come. High on the hopes and expectations; the thought of ideas having a kick-off is now steering me forward in a fixed direction again. I can be in the driver's seat with a new outlook trying to master the craft. I have newly polished glasses. New insights are within reach, or at the very least there is an expectation. That is what is most beautiful. The expectation. Not the assurance, because by then it has already shrivelled up in the swamp of formulation. It's about to arrive, the expectation, the prospect.

Feel pretty satisfied anyway. I take a walk to clear my head.

Not just 'I'm taking a walk' --

I'm taking a walk too.

New York City, 29th March 2007

7th Avenue West 42nd Street

At the crossing of 6th Avenue and West 32nd Street there is a diner, a classic one, a typical place to have breakfast, get a coffee-to-go or maybe stay a while for a little lunch. A place that just happens to be there, like thousands of others in Manhattan, that serves a whole horde of people that pass by every day. The town of doers. The town of the busy. The town where everyone seems to have clear targets, and where, if they don't, they seem pretty busy anyhow. I take a break, sit by the window while busy people pass by. A grilled cheese bagel with a slightly oversized coffee, staying a while and looking busy.

I am here to reconnect, to see if there are any new possibilities. At the same time I have another purpose, just to be. Most of the time I don't do anything much, I just take long walks, very long walks in Manhattan in every possible direction.

I loathe predetermined destinations, pre-selected and typical museum tours and other tourist traps and attractions. I have always, as long as I can remember, strolled around on my own, independently, whether it was in my childhood village or on my many travels over the past few years.

If a stranger tailed me, it might look aimless and meaningless, perhaps even somewhat indolent. To do such a thing in the city of doers goes rather against conventions, yet creates a wonderful contrast to the movements of others.

Being outside the stream.

The stream of people which I, in some way, observe. What are they doing? Can these thoughts and movement of people lead me anywhere? Do I see a pattern of some kind? No, not directly. But it does create a feeling, it's hard to explain.

I take my last sip of coffee, leave my chair and become part of the crowd.

I walk, uptown, on Broadway.

I pass Times Square, this blinking, beeping and hyper-communication square. It is hysterical. I notice out of the corner of my eye that they have ripped away something that looks like a place where there used to be a row of pay-phones, now gone. Strange, I think. Almost getting run over by a bunch of Japanese tourists pouring out of a bus, I forget about it, and continue uptown.

New York City, 30th March, 2007

12th Avenue West 24th Street

I am waiting, a bit too early in the morning, at Washington Square. Some police are driving through the park in their patrol car, shouting through speakers. There's a man lying on a bench and they are yelling at him; it's already morning and he has to move on.

I see Benjamin further down the street, hurrying from the dry-cleaners; nowadays he's Curator for Artists Space. He is carrying his white jeans, which I've seen him wearing before at openings. I walk down the street to meet him. We have decided to meet at his apartment -- a small but elegant apartment, with quite a weird red sofa, impossible to sit on. I choose to do the interview at a table in the living room. He is stressed. Later on today is the opening of a new show at Artists Space. Usually he is very focused, but has ups and downs and one needs to get hold of him at the right time to have a good conversation. Today isn't quite right, as he is a bit uptight about his opening.

I do the interview for my book project and my initial questions start a stream, no not a stream, a torrent, of words. He claims that there has never been so much money involved in the art system as there is right now, but at the same time, just a slim portion of it is for the experimental sector.

What was earlier quite fragmented has become a commercial industry with adapted art products. Pre-formatted. Suitable for the sofa, or even in the format of a starter product, then a bit more expensive, and on top of that a mega-sized art piece often already labelled as private collection.

How cynical. His torrent of words is immense and his criticism tough about what he calls an utterly commercial system where modern museums, nowadays, have a symbiotic relationship with dollar hungry galleries, which are housed in bigger and bigger money-consuming premises. If you want to be an artist you just have to play the game.

But the rewards can be enormous. According to Benjamin, an initial price of $3,000 - 4,000 for an object at a debut exhibition is not unusual. Everyone lives off each other. Everyone tries, at the same time, to minimize the risks by scratching each other's backs. He babbles and babbles but doesn't recognize that he behaves similarly, even if he is the curator for Artists Space that is, at least, an alternative to the never ending and escalating hunt for the green ($). But still.

Still I feel the similarity, I recognize it. That hunt is perhaps a bit less cynical but even so, they keep on hunting for the new, although perhaps in a slightly different way, in an attempt to look for other things (outside the mainstream).

At least he represents an alternative. He has the assistance of three curators, who work like nomads around the world, keeping a constant eye on what's going on. A little bit like the way I have worked for many years, in search of the new, he says. After the interview, I present my new project to him and while he doesn't directly dismiss the idea, he is still critical as to how I could handle the art process at the same time as the research process.

- Isn't that a little bit schizophrenic?

- Well in a sense, I answer. But, in my case I will not mix the analytical part with the evocative.

I am not entirely certain that he understands. We talk a great deal about how it would be accomplished, and he wonders whether it will have a connection to introspection and psychology, and if that is the case, who would control or debrief the process, as is done in psychotherapy.

- Well in my case I am one and the same person.

I am still a bit uncertain that he understands, but I cannot claim that I do either as I haven't started the process yet. What I feel though, is that I am on the right track, otherwise he would have dismissed the idea directly or just frankly been as uninterested as only Benjamin can be when he couldn't care less. That I have met with a slight resistance shows that there might be something of genuine future interest. It's the first indication that I am on the right track after all.

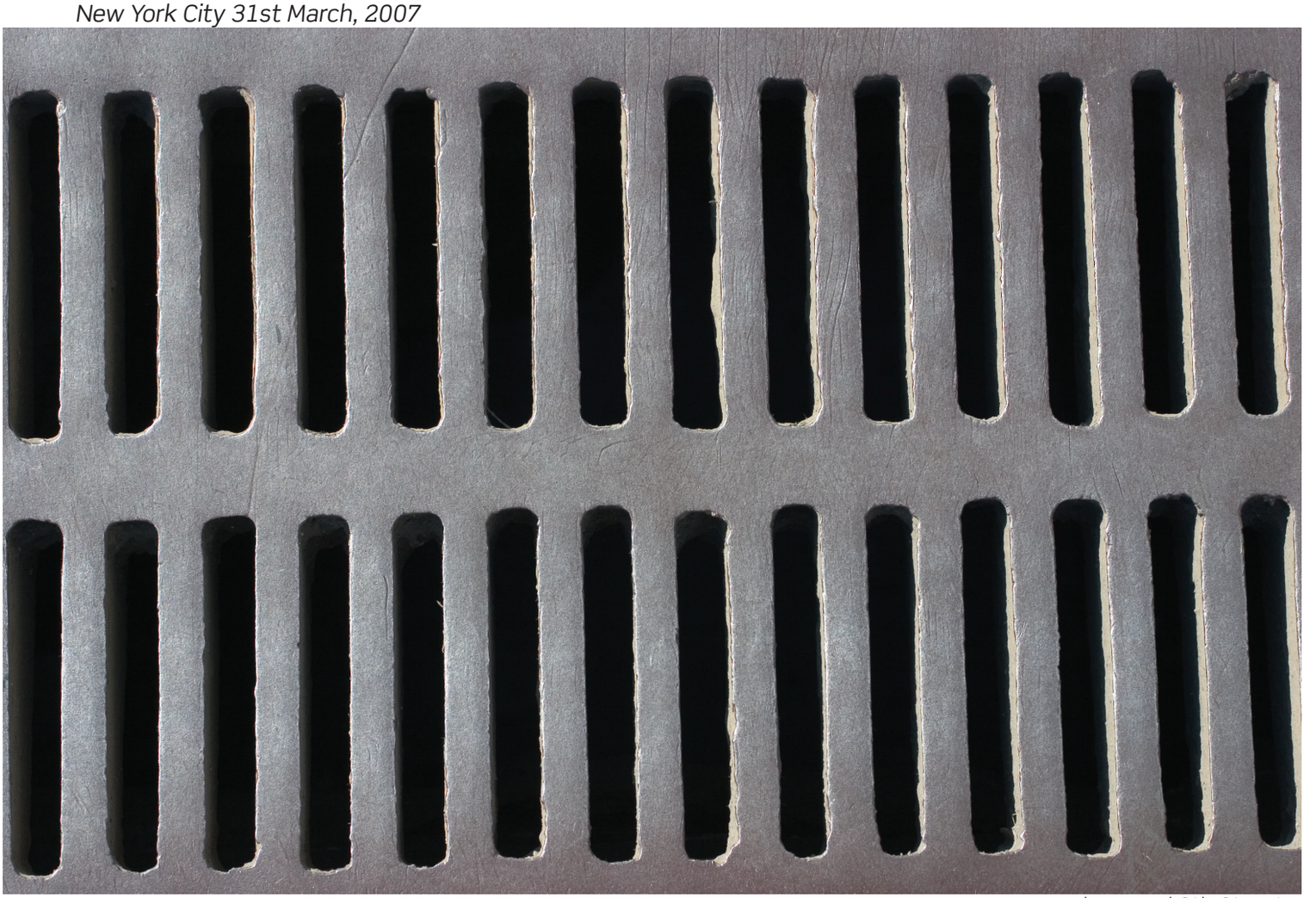
Acceptance, no. Getting back into the circus again, I can see in his face that it is hard but not impossible. I still have a reasonable track record. This, I think to myself, will be a tough one, but on the other hand I clearly understand that it's a completely impossible task for him to form an opinion about something I cannot yet show. I wonder more and more if he is not so down to earth, as he has shown earlier, that he makes judgements on what he sees and not what he hears.

Perhaps, when he sees similar things in a similar direction he might start wondering about a pattern, but I cannot quite see how he thinks. Unfortunately, he is in a hurry today and I do not get that much time with him. Intuitively, I am on the right track, but what he lacks most of all is fresh objects. We continue to talk a bit about research processes and financing, but leave most of the conversation open for the next time.

How many times has this guy heard fantastic presentations of wonderful ideas? (I think) I guess he is a bit tired of dreamlike ideas and fantastic castles in the air, which only produce meagre results.

I should be quite satisfied with this; one can't get deeper into further discussions, having nothing more concrete to show. I visit his opening quite briefly, in the classic NoHo/SoHo area, but understand little about it, to be frank. It's an exhibition of documentation of earlier exhibitions from independent art spaces around the world. I reflect that the result from the Nordic art scene is quite slim, if anything, even though I haven't had a chance to go through all the material filling three entire rooms. The exhibition is okay, at least it's liberatingly un-saleable in its own genre.

New York City 31st March, 2007



Broadway and 8th Street

The next day I go back to NoHo/SoHo and take pictures here and there, with no clear intentions, but still I am thinking, with interest and an unknown purpose. While strolling around I pass Dietch Projects, a nearby gallery, which I was in contact with a few years ago -- a contact we got from my old friend Patrizio at Gucci, my dear Italian friend. I was in contact with them several times but for some reason nothing ever came of it. Lucky escape, I think. Our art group split apart right after that, and most of the energy was already leaking out like a slow puncture because of internal conflicts.

They have a show which, at a first glance, makes me think of Gerhard Richter or something similar; painting with plastic in extremely glaring colours. Nice, slick, saleable, and as an extra starter product, the debris of the process, the dried plastic leftover products from working in this technique, which I think needs to be fast. The artist is selling the pallet as well!

Smart. Very smart, to sell the debris of the production itself. Of course they are also attractive, but isn't it a bit over the top? Here we have a starter product, and then a bunch of saleable paintings in various sizes, and then a huge panorama painting, ten meters long, quite un-saleable I guess. There aren't even any price-tags.

Everything is for sale. Paintings, the brushes, or in her case some kind of over-sized pallet-knives, pallets and also rather un-saleable mega-sized productions. But is this any different from artists selling their drawings and sketches to finance bigger oil paintings, I reflect? Not exactly new, but isn't there a bit too much product thinking in this, doesn't it shine through rather? But perhaps ordinary people with fewer insights into the arts don't see this. On the other hand, I remind myself, from the artist's perspective it is perfectly okay; most of us are just trying to make a living. In that respect it feels like the artist is giving me a mocking smile.

It is quite refreshing to stroll around endlessly in Manhattan, it is liberating for one's thoughts, and they become focused. I am actually beginning to feel like producing something again, and even start to believe that this new research process of mine could lead to something.

And why do I think that?

Perhaps it's for the simple reason that people are indifferent, bewildered and, even better, they seem to lack direct associations with anything similar. That is a really good sign, and my hypothetical process might just hit the spot. Perhaps a bit apprehensive about realizing it though. But not really any genuine worry, when I give it a second thought. There has never been a shortage of ideas when they are needed for producing something, rather it's their direction that has been lacking over the past few years. Or even worse, no really good art ideas have turned up over the past year and a half, but suddenly, now, they have started to form. They form themselves so neatly, that it starts to resemble some form that urgently desires to be realized in practice. It strikes me; I'm starting to feel content again.

Ideas are flowing in a similar direction and clustering, they are combining with other thoughts, profound reflections and other previous ideas, images and impressions are caught again, but with a distinct meaning. An example. I have, now and then, in the past few years, every time I've waited for the bus, seen a thick mattress, thrown away, lying in a ditch. Sure, you think, many artists have used worn out, threadbare mattresses and cushions in various installations, collages and what not.

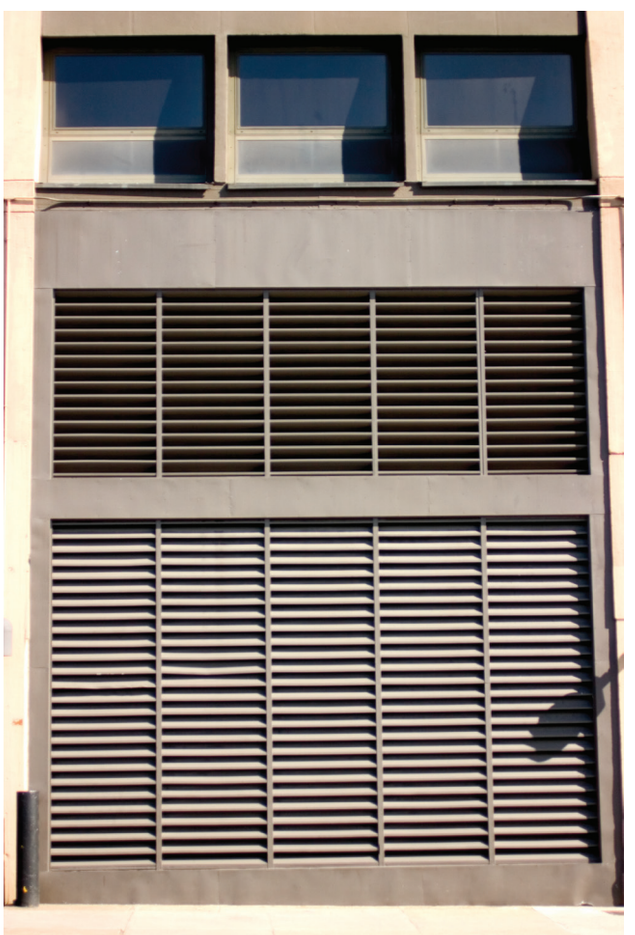
And you are right. But this mattress, this mattress that I've caught sight of for years, that kept irritating me in my thoughts every time I got on the bus, suddenly gets another meaning when I walk into an exhibition in Chelsea. An artist has, quite simply, made a Plexiglas box, big enough for a mattress, and folded it into the box. Nothing fancy, just that. Just a shabby mattress in a Plexiglas box.

Then it hits me, my mattress at the bus stop, it has a deeper meaning. I get an instant clear image of an installation with photos and the mattress, quite different from the one I have just seen. My mattress will have a woven context around it, with photos taken a few years ago but never processed. Photos, stored somewhere on a hard disc, waiting for a moment. I write it down in my idea book, and have to wait for my return to Stockholm to see if everything's still there, and that my memory responds to my newly borne expectations.

9th Avenue West 33rd Street

It is the last day in Manhattan before my return; I start it with a 'lumberjack omelette' at a classic diner, quite close to Penn Station, a genuine milieu, like in a movie, with chrome, red-and-silver glittering bucket seats shouting the 1950s, a long narrow room with a slightly bulging ceiling and inwardly slanting walls. A little bit like the interior of a bus. After the lumberjack breakfast one can walk an entire day, and I start working from there. I start my photo walking/strolling session without a goal, actively sucking new images into my mind in the industrial area behind Penn Station and down towards Chelsea.

Doors, graffiti, the backs of advertising signs, industrial settings and the ventilation shafts on skyscrapers. They are like passages to other worlds, ready for a two-way communication. But only a few things pass. I can never remember being interested in road siphons leading down into shafts and not in ventilation equipment either.



11th Avenue
West 28th Street

But now they make an impression.

They grab me.

Quarrelling.

Shouting at me.

If I spend half a day documenting this, I really hope there was some importance (hidden) in the message. I don't know. I can just conclude that something has glued itself to me.

After looking in more than twenty galleries, I feel pretty satisfied. Some really shimmering pieces are stored in my head and a few galleries in Chelsea really have brightened up my stroll. A lot, though, has been really uninteresting, and even indifferent, rather shallow. Tonight will be an early night before I cross the Atlantic again tomorrow. I scribble down all sorts of ideas, passing thoughts, and make sketches and notes, so as not to lose the day's work. I mail a bit, and make the odd phone call. Plan for tomorrow, buy a few things, and check out timetables at Penn Station for Newark.

I finish off the day by making three marathon video recordings of the building opposite, from the 20th floor. While doing that, some odd windows in a building close by grab my attention.

7th Avenue West 33rd Street

Even the windows have something to tell.

What it is I don't know.

In an American way, I divine an apartment behind those veiled windows. Even those are a kind of passage. Closed, indeed, but interesting. It feels good to be going home again, and I notice that I have suffered neither from anxiety nor any depressive thoughts, which has often been the case on journeys over the past few years. My last trip to Tokyo was a disaster, with a state of anxiety prior to the trip and depressive thoughts and homesickness while there. Not really being able to benefit from them, just uneasiness driving me up the wall. On the contrary, this trip has done me good, with just a few but pleasant meetings and a lot of time for reflection and thought.

Seems as though it was needed.

I am early, too early, at Penn Station. I have some time to wait. It is a really good pastime. It is a well-established practice from childhood, when I loved to disappear in timelessness. Away from everything. Flat out. Not at home. Not away. Nowhere. A perfect opportunity to think.

I haven't even finished the sentence when a pile of ideas start arriving and I almost don't have time to get them into my notebook, finish writing down an idea, and put the book in my bag, before I have to pick it up again for another idea -- a bit manic. Many pages get scribbled, small texts and reflections. This trip, unlike others over the past few years, has produced a crop of new ideas. If just a tenth of those are good enough to be produced, it will suffice for a reasonably tight and good exhibition. Even if the production of a few of these ideas takes years, it is a fantastic start to something new that I thought was completely gone a year and a half ago.

I am even getting interested in music again, also something that has been gone for years.

I think I will buy an iPod when I get back.

Desert rain.

It doesn't happen that often.

Stockholm 4th November, 2007.
Membrane (see over). Photo 100 cm x 160 cm of grass mounted on Styrofoam board. Photo 100 cm x 160 cm of clouds, mounted on Styrofoam board. Mattress (objet trouvé). White cover, sewed from industrial plastic. Yellow plastic tape. Twinned brown cotton strings, with knots for adding texture. Attached sculptured strings, for lifting the mattress, as when I first lifted it and discovered the grass underneath, years ago. At that moment, I discovered the membrane effect but all the bits and pieces needed for finishing the object came years later. The whole became clear to me.

DISCUSSION

Even though subjective creation processes are absolutely central to human cognition and experience, and a key to our understanding of, for example, the artist and the entrepreneur, even so, these processes are neglected and even trapped in odd academic traditions and methodological frameworks.

This paper, therefore, has urged for a consideration of three fundamental issues; first, arguments for the importance and position of a subjective view; second, the establishment of a new subjective framework for the development of new methods; and third, as a consequence, a beginning to our understanding on how ideas become visible entities. With a view from within the subjective, autoethnography could serve as a first and more powerful enabler of the revealing and even enhancing subjective creation processes. Finally, I would like to present some points that were not possible to develop in depth in this paper, but are certainly important for further investigation within the autoethnographic method over a greater period of time: (a) opposite vocabulary, (b) flânerie as data collection, and (c) genuine surprise.

(a) > We can identify in the autoethnographic text above a cluster of expressions, such as the following: arrives, I am steered by someone, something wants to be done, someone plans something, they (the ideas) think they are ingenious, they form themselves, they use me, they get stuck with a meaning, they make an impression. Compared to logical re-cognition processes, this vocabulary indicates that subjective creation processes can have opposite connotations, which can be useful for developing new metaphors enabling better understanding and communication. The text also shows a kind of arriving, brooding, for its own revelation, for its own sake, not able to be steered by the creator.

(b) > Images from the case study show an abandoned phone booth, siphons, and ventilation shafts, taken at seemingly random walks in Manhattan, comprising a flânerie, all indirectly (subconsciously) steering towards the finalization of an object (Membrane), a few months later. A final object, consisting of images taken years back (cloud image), connections of earlier memories (mattress), all seemingly have been waiting for years for their own 'finalization'. The piece we finally see assembled is directed by a dense expression, similar to 'thick description' (Geertz, 1976), a final point in a process, involving inner and outer experiences through interaction with the surroundings. An interaction, one could see in the light of Simmel (1903), with cities affecting me as an individual, using the camera as a tool for a flâneur (Sontag, 1977), while performing a walk, getting lost (Lucas, 2004), as a kind of aesthetic practice (Careri, 2002). However, I would like to draw our attention towards two issues observed in the autoethnographic text. When (subjective creators) are using the method, there is evidently a need for (i) a clearer and better distinction between data collection and its methods, and (ii) a further distinction between subjective and subconscious ways of collecting data, and doing so in an experimental way.

(c) > We also have a subjective creation process involving some kind of genuine surprise -- a genuine surprise conceals the final object during the whole creation process, until it chooses to reveal itself. The subjective creator cannot push those particular processes too far, just rely upon them, and wait for their results.

To conclude, we see that (a) a more developed vocabulary, both exploratory and precise, could be of use for writing about those processes; (b) we need to use careful distinctions within subjective data collection and its methods; and (c) we need to gain a more intimate insight into the way that subjective creation processes keep a 'hidden agenda' inside themselves, until the moment of their own revelation.

Using autoethnography to pass on such an understanding with a distinct and vivid scent of 'having been there', is time-consuming, and perhaps more difficult than just to take a stroll, and get lost. This article calls for the attention of another language and new methods emerging from subjective grounds, which, however, have an objective potential for seeing another 'seeing'. //

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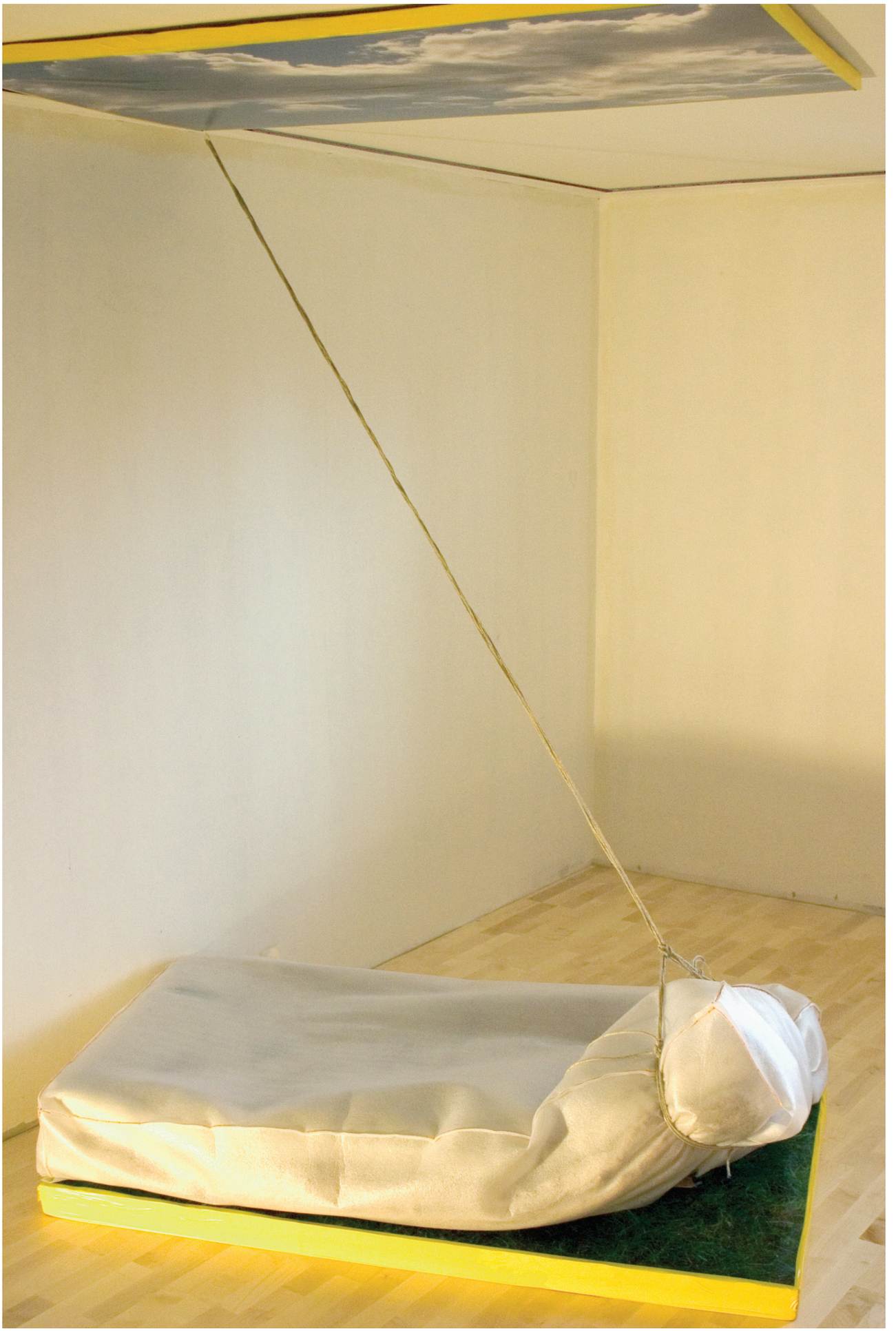

Mikael Scherdin, *Membrane* (mixed media), 2007


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