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Faculty of Fine Arts  
Contemporary Art Program

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# **I DOUBT IT**

*or: the other answers*

Master's thesis

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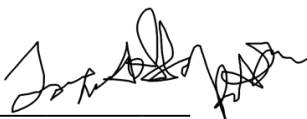
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## Summary

*This text explains what the text that explains doubt is about*

The text explains doubt. How it functions in people as a way to learn but also as a firewall which is intended to keep us from believing in bad information. It recounts some of the benefits this doubt can offer both in terms of being less gullible in regards to what is being relayed to us but also that doubting one's internal beliefs can have some positive consequences. It also puts forth the dangers of how too much doubt can affect a person's psyche and how doubt instilled by others may be thought of as a common manipulation tactic used to control you and people around you. The text offers a meta-doubting of the doubt instilled by others as a medicine against being taken advantage of. The text gives examples of how doubt can be actively used in a creative process as a way to better understand what one has produced and as a checksum to see if that was indeed what one initially thought it was or wanted it to be. Through discussing the objects made in conjunction with the text, both those made directly for it and those incorporated without prior intent, it is exemplified how doubt sometimes leads to new insights and other times affirms previously held beliefs, with the key difference that these beliefs now have been tested. Doubt is encouraged but also warned against. Despite the text's sometimes jovial tone, the "hangover art" aesthetics and rascally themes of some of the works, the seriousness and power of the doubt is maintained. The seriousness of doubt is affirmed by pedagogically likening it to a part of a cybernetic defence system. Using the cyber threat, as something many perceive as dangerous in an immaterial sense, to elucidate that same feeling regarding other elusive threats and offering doubt as a defence system. Doubt is shown as a tool to discover and weed out inconsistencies in one's own beliefs, this is exemplified by doubting what I believe art is, or rather what I have believed art to be, something inspired by my years at art school. To doubt we must first have something to doubt. In the example this first thought or idea is created by making a game of the act of defining rules. That is, making a game of defining the rules for a game where the rules will be doubted. Doubting the rules is here done by playing out a scenario where the rules are followed but with a result we won't like. The example game is played out by immediately and hyperbolically invoking Godwin's law as an attempt to show that some skepticism towards labels and what goes under them is beneficial for concepts like art. Also showing the value of doubt. Art is again taken for a spin in the doubt-mobile albeit in a less gamified setting by simply doubting whether

art exists as objects or actions. It is argued that it does not and that it is more of a thought, an emerging classification happening in the brain. This is later expanded on, or narrowed down to, likening it to an empty variable expecting external input in a computer code. Doubt is again here encouraged as a means to sanitize the input of that query. The text speaks about confusion and its uses to dislevel people in order to manipulate them. And despite the fact that doubt often is used as a weapon to cause such confusion I promote doubt as an antidote or rather an inoculation. A pre-emptive way of functioning which we ought to ingrain in ourselves. Doubting whether there is anything to be confused by and whether the fog of manipulation can't simply be dispersed by refusing to engage or by simple analysis of how one is reacting and to what. Repeatedly doubt used as a question is evoked as a means of protection, but also as a means to learn, gain knowledge, and test those newly gained beliefs. An alternative to art as it is today with artists making art and a public to experience others' art is told through a short monograph of a story about a mad professor. The alternative proposed is a more personal connection with the art made where art becomes a part of everyone's lived experience. A close object one makes for oneself to meditate upon rather than a spectacle to go to admire. The text then focuses on how the author deals with and uses doubt in his practice. The author accounts for some of his beliefs on when doubts might have their best effect. And when doubt might creep in unwanted. More specific examples are related in later chapters as he goes through some doubts work for work. This text goes through some of what doubt is capable of doing in regards to dealing with our imagination, while explaining how humans function with regards to beliefs. And how our searching for patterns and meaning leads to responses to our surroundings that are less than precise; but rather a least counter-intuitive narrative about our world. Doubt is yet again placed in the text as a proposed doorman for letting these humanly ridiculous narratives freely roam to dictate the paths of our lives. Robert Sapolsky's lecture on the biological underpinnings of religion is used as a jumping off point and extrapolated on in a thought experiment where artists have inherited the roles of shamans in today's society. Sharing some of the same functions and sometimes traits of their magical entertainer predecessors. The thought experiment is abruptly ended and doubted as being conspiratorial and lacking basis in science. Instead what is offered is a discussion of how doubt relates to wonder and belief. And doubt in relation to believing another person and ourselves. All examples of how doubt hinders us whether for better or for worse. Doubt, as

indecision, is shown to be one of the heavier burdens of life and that the relief of having made a decision can bring at least calmness to the most troubled of persons. Doubt then sets aim at art and a chapter is spent on doubting various facets of art, and the art world, and how it is being infused in capitalist society. Here the fight or flight response regarding my doubts about art is expanded upon. A una-bomber-esque approach to art is painted up as the text slides into a science-fiction like monologue about escape from the art worlds capitalisation only to be cut short by doubts of whether or not to stay and fight. Daniel Kahneman's theories about fast and slow thinking are invoked to see whether we might try to train ourselves to be more skeptical quicker in response to a capitalist world which begs us to make quick impulsive decisions to buy stuff. In the end the doubt also put a dampener on ideas about a total withdrawal from public art scenes and meat space art. Doubts function as a weapon to create confusion and how people react to it is covered. Aporia and its uses by politicians, businesses and artists in their use of speech is scolded as an evil manipulation tactic. Inferred is a wish, not necessarily for a lack of confusion but, for honesty about what this confusion is intended to cause as an end result. The text then turns back to the author's artistic practice in a more practical sense. A more personal account for when doubt sets in and how it affects the artistic process is related. How the author functions, reasons and what he thinks when making art is written about in candour. After which the text is joined by documentation images, in the vein of Christopher Wool's documentation photos and some influences of Anders Edström's photography practice. The works are spoken about in a down to earth way intending to explain some of the artist's thoughts and intentions while not completely killing the reader's imagination. The works' common theme could be said to be humour, while the author maintains that they are individual works and not related in a more narrow theme. Focus is aimed at doubting the works' art status and ascertain what they are. The other answer to what they might be if not art. As a final warning the text analogies art with computer programming. Tacky metaphors, that seem to come straight from the tech illiterate screen writer's script for the 1995 movie *Hackers*<sup>1</sup> paints a picture which shows the dangers of having poor cybersecurity, in other words being trusting of artists and people. An artist who hasn't yet taken advantage of confusion might read this and realize the potential in what their art can achieve, if they are inclined to subversively affect people. The author calls himself out on his digression of

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1 *Hackers*. Dir. Iain Softley. United artists & Sufitley. 1995.

using brands in his works in a dubious post-hoc justification that he might not even believe in himself. And by reasoning about some methods used throughout the writing and discussing the text in general the essay reaches its conclusion. A promotion of creativity<sup>2</sup> in collaboration with reductionism is encouraged for artists and people in general as a means to understand their surroundings and themselves. And an admittance of doubt regarding academia's and art's amalgamation in general and the academic value of this text itself, concerns about its value as something knowledge producing, is voiced. The text ends with what until then had been avoided: doubt of knowledge which had to come at some point in a text on doubt. But a glimmer of hope steals the ending saying while we might not know anything we might believe with good reason and intentions and that this, and the search for this belief, is as good as it gets. Very Good.

### **Prologue**

*with thanks and salutations*

The reason for writing about doubt is due to my continuous doubting of everything, and specifically art. Its being, its value, its functions, the people making it and my involvement. Rather than halting my art production this doubt has led me to see the value in doubting and find its uses. I have in a sense doubted my way out of disliking doubt. Where the doubts have come from seem to be a combination of being exposed to various phenomena and objects claimed to be art because it benefited their creators and their proclaimers rather than the label having been a necessity or an apt description. I have also noted a view of the art world as being a sports field with competitions and ranking. And, perhaps as a result of the world becoming more capitalistic and incorporated, I have noticed more Art Business People, ABPs for short; people who see art solely as a means to make a living. I have noticed more Art Propagandist People, APPs; people who see art solely as a means to spread their ideology. As a romantic I abhor this. Not that art cannot be a means to make a living or spread an ideology. But the "solely" part gives me the chills. Luckily these people are few in numbers, but their presence and influence still have me feeling queasy. So I've naturally started to doubt my own place in the scheme and as I do so doubt has become a topic of some of my art making. Art has often been the subject of my artworks. A tad cir-

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<sup>2</sup> A creativity not necessarily in ways of being reductionist in one's thinking but rather prior to it.

cular subject perhaps. But since it is one of the things one can experience in life that I have come to be the most interested in it seems natural that I should also make art about it. Apart from being the subject of my works doubt has also become a tool, for looking at my own works and those of others. I'd like to take a page out of John Cage's doubting sayings: "The first question I ask myself when something doesn't seem to be beautiful is why do I think it's not beautiful. And very shortly you discover that there is no reason."<sup>3</sup> The saying seem to imply that we, after having thought about it, ought to find it beautiful. I'd like to further that by asking: "Sure, I would very much like to know why I don't like it, but even if there are no reasons for me disliking it, why do I have to start liking it?" The fruits of the doubt, as I see it, is not an increased appreciation for what I don't like or an increased belief in what I don't believe but simply better understanding. Thanks to Catarina, Ingemar and Hanna Rutström; Liis Ring; Piret, Siret and Kalju-Johannes Kullerkupp; Gabriel Nils Edvinsson, Aksel Haagensen and Kevin Stillwell for all your help and moral pep.

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<sup>3</sup> John Cage. *John Cage: I Have Nothing to Say and I Am Saying It*. American Masters TV series. Eagle Rock Entertainment. 1990.



*Doubt* – there's something horrible with it.  
It brings no joy.  
Resolution gives relief.  
Doubt feeds the anxiousness of certainty thirsting minds.  
The perceived danger of not "knowing" for sure.  
At worst implies that there's no trust.  
Constant skepticism leads to people not engaging.  
Due to fear of their opinions being scrutinized.  
Due to feeling judged.  
Due to not feeling trusted as a person.  
When beliefs aren't taken for granted or at least left alone feelings are broken.  
Why would anyone wish to doubt?  
Why not believe what you are taught and told?  
It seems some people crave answers.  
Certain and correct.  
Or barring that, at least explanations they can live with.  
A cause for things being as they are  
A cause they can keep once they received it, unquestioned.  
People seem to want a narrative.  
Which, while not necessarily true, is, as far as possible, non-counter-intuitive.  
A good story is better than a true one.  
A true story is better than a good fake one.  
A story is better than no story.  
Complex truth is sometimes trumped by simple explanations regardless plot-holes.  
A simple truth is preferable to a complex one.  
Some people seem to crave flux and uncertainty.  
Some people use uncertainty to avoid accountability.  
I find those people amusing or scary, but always hard to believe.  
I believe things are always certain but not always known.

## Introduction

Doubt is a function which ensures that a person retains some security in a world where everything and everyone tries their best to get one up on them. It is not a pleasant emotion or state of mind to be doubtful. Doubt is a thorn in one's spine. Doubt is etymologically connected to fear.<sup>4</sup> At one point the concepts were directly interchangeable. Maybe due to their emotional similarity. Perhaps arousing fear by doubting that something is not as it appeared to be is the reason for its being. That is, perhaps the feeling of fear has been beneficial causing people who doubt to survive, with the ability to procreate to produce more doubters. Or they might have survived to procreate despite their fear. Nowadays doubt primarily has the meaning of questioning, like how the previous sentence questioned the ideas just before it. It has also, but to a lesser degree come to mean hesitate or waver in opinion. Not only the English word “doubt” with its roots in Latin “*dubitare*” has these connotations. German “*zweifel*” and Swedish version “*tvivel*” share the root of “being of two minds”. The questioning and being uncertain of the degree of truth of something are often seen as signs of distrust. In christianity being a doubting Thomas is rarely seen as a good thing. As character he is often depicted fingering a wound, looking foolish.

We speak of certainty as being beyond the shadow of a doubt. Uncertainty, being in limbo, being of two minds, distrusting, all have negative connotations for most people. They are unpleasant states in which to be. Perhaps not without reason. Fear and desire helps to drive humanity. Fear being the one that makes people act the quickest. We can delay our gratification. We seldom delay reacting to fear. Fear is partly automatic and partly learned.<sup>5</sup> If doubt is a sibling of fear we might deduce that doubt also is partly learned and partly instinctive. As such we could infer that we might influence people into being more doubtful. The end goal would not be to make them feel bad but rather to make them more *en garde* against the world around them. Our doubt and fear alarm systems are commonly very good at keeping us safe. In some parts of life they are lacking. Our doubt of immaterial things like words, emotions, jokes or art seem to need more training or at least comes at a later point than being doubtful of jumping from a tall building. These ethereal things

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4 Doubt. Online Etymology Dictionary. [etymonline.com/word/doubt#etymonline\\_v\\_13974](https://www.etymonline.com/word/doubt#etymonline_v_13974). Accessed Jul 8, 2020.

5 Theo Tsoulos. 7 Things You Need to Know About Fear. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/smashing-the-brainblocks/201511/7-things-you-need-know-about-fear> Published Nov 19, 2015. Accessed Jul 8, 2020.

might be harder to train our doubts against because they most often lack immediate consequence if believed. As a kid me and my friends were taught in school to be skeptical against media and specifically online media. We were told to check sources. We were told to be weary of strangers talking to us in the streets. Naturally the doubts we had about strangers in real life were stronger than the ones we felt about jokes on the internet. During the same school years we were lead through art galleries and told to take in what artists told us through their artworks as if they were historical documents canonizing the world that surrounded them like a perfect objective stenographer historian. Nowadays we are told that we must not use words because they have intrinsic power. I sometimes share these ideas when I see kids hearing their parents spout some horrid bigotry. But I think the difference between fear and doubt becomes apparent. That kid is already being taught fear. I believe kids and adults alike should be taught and encouraged to doubt rather than to fear. Fear closes down our view of the world where doubt puts the world on a microscope for study. This is my reason for writing about doubt. The old war on drugs slogan “Just say no to drugs” is more healthily substituted by “Just say know to drugs” because people will take drugs and it is better if they are good at it. Sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between doubt and fear. Once I started doubting art and the art world my instincts were those of fight or flight. Ought I just leave it behind or should I stay and try to fight for a place in its fringes? Should I adhere to definitions of art as they are or attempt to find an answer I could believe in without any cognitive dissonance. The answer seems obvious in hindsight. I must look at both how to make art and where in the art world I might exist with my personal ethics intact. I have also doubted this thesis and the marriage of art and academia. Not the side of art using academia as a subject for art making but I have doubted academia’s and art’s intentions by usurping art as an academic topic. At times it has occurred to be nothing more than a grant cash grab scheme. At times it has seemingly good intentions attempting to learn more about the world around us. At others it appears to adapt pseudo-scientific language to make simple statements seem deep and difficult, worthy of a lecturing tour where one can spout nonsense gobbledygook at the gaping faces of confused onlooking students. All being very serious and without any hint of humor, self-reflection, or doubt. To me the apparent danger is that this makes academia and science appear to be a waste of taxpayers’ money. Unlike my doubts about art I haven’t expunged my doubts about the intersection of art and academia. I have however come to the conclusion that

what damage my thesis might do with regards to the credibility of academia is minuscule. Not many people will be exposed to it. If they are and find it to be a waste of taxpayer money they might be right. If anyone finds meaning or value in this thesis I would be glad but I would still doubt its value to academia. And I would still encourage everyone to be skeptical towards the merger of art and academia. I have in order to be able to feel somewhat ethical avoided adapting a completely academic language. I have adhered to norms with regard to format but tried to keep the narrative more natural and prose-like than the stereotypical academical jargon. Upon asking a personal friend, with some insight in language and academia, on an opinion on academic writing the response was a rather blunt “Academic writing is created and guarded by the elite as a way to differentiate themselves from others to ensure their special status and maintain recognition of their superiority. Clear and succinct prose doesn’t have to be so obscure. They have created something that they can hide poorly organized and not fully developed ideas behind. This is why it’s useful. They can reinforce their status as special and smart even if they are neither and have just grown up in the elite. Since it can be learned, they can deny all this, even though that being the case does nothing to undermine my argument...” It was shortly after followed up with “Education is 99% a tool for maintenance of the status quo. Education as practiced anywhere is currently bad.”<sup>6</sup> After having said my yikes and looked around to see that I was not at a meeting in the docks I started wondering. Maybe academia doesn’t need protection from art but rather art needs protection from academia. Maybe “just say no” is really the way to go. After all sometimes fear is the proper response after the dust of doubt settles. If a complete rejection is not wanted then rather a cautious approach and spades of doubt might make the marriage worthwhile. An openness and very clear wording in what happens on whose terms and to what end. If grants are all that everyone is after then perhaps both art and academia needs a cleansing of the ranks. But hey. Maybe that’s just me, I’m a dreamer, and a bit of a romantic. That’s something I hope shines through in this text. Not just the scared conspiracy theorist but the sensitive sap who believes in some classic ideals and wish they ought to guide art and learning rather than a capitalist drive for funding and narcissistic drive for hierarchical status points. Knowledge, truth, beauty, equality, and a curiosity about the world that surrounds us and maybe mostly an understanding of

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6 Anonymous. Conversation with the author. Sep 13, 2019. Author’s chat archive. My personal friend still has academic pursuits after a masters in linguistics and prefer to remain anonymous.

who we are through the experiences we live through. A drive for communal joy through making and understanding rather than glee from cred and getting one up on one's brothers and sisters. I doubt my wishes regarding the art and academia will make any difference on them. They are probably seen as naive by people who see themselves as pragmatics and if not value competition and money are perfectly content in playing along to achieve both in what I can only assume is due to lack of other reasons to live. The competition is there for everyone who wants to join it. All art grant applications are essentially sports events where the way of writing a project plan plays a large enough role that there are courses in writing for grant applications. And it is about money if you want it to be. Art is like everything else in life in that regard. You can sell whatever you make or possess if you really want to. And if you're really sneaky you can often sell what others make or possess. I have nothing against people wishing to purchase or people accepting to sell. But when it's the driving force of any endeavor those classic ideals, of what really is important, scream out and I get a foul taste in my mouth and a sucking feeling in my gut. Also stemming from the same etymological source as doubt is the word "dubious"<sup>7</sup> which share doubt's sordid connotations. Dubious is used as a term in chess as a description of a move which is seemingly bad but hard to refute. It is not simply a blunder or even a mistake but a move which gives the opponent an advantage but only if they play accurately, that is find the right moves in the right order. Dubious is annotated by commentators as "?!". A blunder is "??". A brilliant move is "!!". The other annotation sharing the dubious move's symbols is the reverse order of them, "!?", which annotates an interesting move.<sup>8</sup> The dubious move while being incorrect might still lead to advantages if your opponent doesn't refute it. The same way as breeding doubt in someone might be enough to get away with murder in real life. Doubt is a privilege which is afforded to those who have the time to doubt. It is, if left unexplored, also a privilege of avoiding answering questions asked. Ignorance is bliss, but only for people without curiosity. For us curious it is however a privilege you cannot rid yourself

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7 Dubious. Online Etymology Dictionary. Etymonline.com/word/dubious#etymonline\_v\_15947. Accessed Jul 8, 2020.

8 Interestingly the annotation interesting move annotation "!?" was supposedly called out by chess player Andrew Soltis as being an annotation used by a commentator when they didn't want to work out if a move was good or bad. I could however only find a record of him saying this in chess life, march 2000, pp 12-13, except for referenced on Wikipedia which we all know is a dubious source of information. Regardless if this hearsay is accurate or not it leads me to think that art commentators calling something interesting without expanding on it might find use for the "!?" short hand.

easily of and a privilege not many would ask for knowing how it feels to doubt. This text is in defense of doubt but also a warning of its possible power when knowingly used as a weapon against someone. Most of all an encouragement to explore doubts when they appear and nurture a mind that makes them do so.

### **How to still the doubt**

#### *a game of defining art*

Here I propose a game. To set up rules regarding how to define art. These could be match, season, league, sport (work, exhibition, theme, medium) specific and either subjective or something agreed upon in large or small groups. Changes of rules are natural in games. Rules from previous seasons are amended and modified causing confusion for both fans, players and sometimes even referees. The reasons for change are sometimes well grounded in the fact that technologies evolve and the speed of a game makes old rules dated or even dangerous. Sometimes they are for the soul benefit of the sponsors wanting more airtime for advertising. It is natural that some won't like the new rules, not only because it puts them in a slightly more difficult spot but for the fact that they love the game and changes to it will in effect make it another game. Off-branchings are likely and the diversity has both positive and negative side effects.

What rules I set up for the example game:

1. Art is a label anyone can proclaim something to be.
2. What something is can be better understood by someone who isn't that thing's creator. This is a paraphrase of sentence 25 and 26 of Sol Lewitt's *Sentences on conceptual art*<sup>9</sup> but he specifies that "The artist may not necessarily understand his own art. His perception is neither better nor worse than that of others." And "An artist may perceive the art of others better than his own." respectively. I simply propose expanding that statement, as not doing so implies that we must be artists to understand others' art better than they do themselves. Artists are like other people, who are blissfully unaware that their actions hinge more on their lunch than their "critical reasoning", artists could not be expected to have special powers to understand art better than any other similarly non-rational being.

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<sup>9</sup> Sol Lewitt. *Sentences on Conceptual Art*. First published in 0-9 (New York), 1969, and *Art-Language* (England), May 1969. Cited on [http://ubu.com/papers/lewitt\\_sentences.html](http://ubu.com/papers/lewitt_sentences.html). Accessed Jul 8, 2020.

3. What is and isn't art is not a democratic decision. No committee could ever dictate another person's beliefs. So art is subjective.
4. Artists have no final say.
5. Curators have no final say.
6. Professors have no final say.
7. As a label it should help demarcate a thing from other things.
8. If there is a better definition for what something is other than calling it art then it is not art.
9. Something can be artistic in nature, focused on form, take consideration to aesthetics, and be mentioned as art in its presentation but still be something else if another label suits better.
10. If it has a practical function then it is not art. It might be better labeled design or marketing.
11. Art is something which lacks purpose beyond being art. If there is a purpose it has another label, and is therefore that thing, but possibly marketed with artistic design.
12. This is not a slight towards that thing, rather a clarification of what it and art is.

This set of rules had a lot of overlaps, repetition and superfluous explanations. The lack of simplicity makes it a bit of an ugly mess. Which in turn might lead to confusion. One might not even note that the rules that state that art is subjective seem to go against making further absolute claims to what art is. Our doubts regarding the rules start before thinking up examples. But if we see this set of rules as something one person makes for themselves we might be go along with it. We might simplify it to something like this:

- A. Art is a label used to demarcate a thing from other things.
- B. Anyone can use this label subjectively.
- C. Art is something which lacks purpose beyond being art.
- D. If something has another purpose than being art then it is not art.

This simplified set of the original rules regulates what art is but does not give any explanation for what art is for other than being art. Maybe this person making the list figured that it wasn't necessary for understanding art or they truly believe that art needs no reasons for being. In a group context this person might be questioned about art's further purposes.

Another set of rules could look something like.

1. Art is whatever an artist say is art.

2. Art is made by an artist.
3. Art is “the thing” proclaimed to be art.
4. Art is bad if it's never seen.
5. Art is good if it makes ripples in society.
6. Art is good if it illicitly an emotional response.
7. Art has a message.
8. Art has a moral.
9. Art is political.

Here were some rules which took the game to a point of judging quality as well rather than just defining something. Making judgments can help it feel more like a game. This can be drawn to the point of awarding points and keep scoring systems to plot out graphs of what is more or less art and better or worse art.

This latter positive inclusive set, which I wonder if not some people have as their way of looking at art, has some pitfalls which will become apparent when we use a hyperbolic example that not only conforms to the rules but also scores highly in regards to whether the art is good or bad. Here is a meandering monologue constructed to show the dangers of being too generous and open when making your own rules about what constitutes art.

“I'd be very wary of trusting artists on issues of moral. Let's not forget that the originally preferred occupation of some world leaders active in the second world war was just to be an artist. To me it seems like art and artists make claims that they are the ones with the right and ability to dictate moral dogma on society. But that seems to be a mantle which we only wish to give to artists who share our ideals. I suspect no-one wishes to grant Adolf Hitler the same privilege. But an artist he was. Did he ever quit? I thought that he quit being an artist but perhaps I'm naive in my understanding of Hitler's career. Perhaps he never gave up the dream. Perhaps he was the first relational aesthetic artist. Using people as his canvas. A social sculptor, if you will. If one were to claim his practice as an artistic one, and why not, now that the definition is as loose as we have made it, we'd have to consider his work as being among if not the most seminal in the history of art. Despite being uncompleted in many aspects it keeps being discussed and historicized, repeatedly providing offshoot entertainment, in the form of books, magazines and documentaries. The



documentation scope is enormous, focusing on the materials (ranging from weapons to the human remains and deceased individuals' belongings), forms of documentation (e.g. fairly early color film stock), reception in its time (interviews with soldiers, perhaps one should refer to them as participants or extras, and civilians, who we ought also think of as participants in the artwork). As usual, what you rarely hear about is the audience being discussed. Who we might call an audience is here perhaps mostly, as usual in the finer arts, "the rich" and other top tier class people (businessmen, politicians, religious leaders, etc.) rich enough to avoid the draft and the line of gunfire. Perhaps we should interpret it in a way that Hitler meant for us to see that the audience's participation would be symbolized by the Jewish community. By making them stereotyped as being business and banking savvy, therefore, the rich audience. And by making them one of the main focuses, or topics, of the work, turning it all into a meta audience participation act. Created simply by vilifying out an audience as an outsider evil rich group. Meanwhile the rich and powerful Europeans were the real audience. Whether one should see the entire war as one gigantic work or an enormous exhibition of smaller audience participation performances is hard to say. A question of authorship might be raised. Was this a solo exhibition or something of a group show? Were all of his henchmen and collaborators artists in their own rights or simply pawns in the complete social sculpture? Albert Speer was clearly responsible for a lot of the aesthetics. Was he a collaborator or an intern? If he had worked for Ai Weiwei I doubt I would have heard his name. Hugo Boss was in charge of some wardrobe, as was Coco Chanel in a sense; though they seem to have distanced themselves from this part of their work when looking back. I have at least never seen them brag about it. Leni Riefenstahl did get some artistic credit for the video and photography works she contributed, even after all the atrocities became known, and some people still seem to appreciate the craft of her productions. The list goes on. Music by numerous artists, staged parades, happenings, and flash-mobs (way before they were organized on the internet). All these things add up to make it look like Hitler did more than just putting on a solo show. He was the artist and curator for the event and leader of one of the biggest artist groups, with some of the most prolific artists and art communities, ever bespectacled. In terms of an artistic persona Hitler was second to very few. He had an enormous amount of the "fuck you *ne sais quoi*" often associated with artistry and male genius in general. As a personal cult Hitler has an abundance of the notoriety that is often appreciated in art world's bad boys. Or are we say-

ing he wasn't an artist? When did he stop being one? When he stopped painting? Because he wasn't morally in line with us? Or because he didn't claim to be one? The latest person who, to great success and admiration, were claimed to be an artist after her passing was the female street photographer Vivian Maier. No-one question her artistdom. As previously mentioned, Sol Lewitt said in his sentences that an artist may not be the one who best understands their own work<sup>10</sup>. It seems this could easily be expanded into claiming artist status for anyone whose actions, offspring or creations could be deemed as having artistic traits and merits regardless of their own view on the same. Does this inclusiveness benefit or harm anyone? Would Hitler being a good artist mean any difference in how people perceive his memory in general? I doubt that. It wouldn't justify a repetition of his actions. Something being art doesn't warrant its approval and being approved doesn't make a thing art. Does calling Hitler's actions, and their result, art mean that our experience of the world is enriched in some way? Perhaps in the sense that it would challenge our ability to reflect on everything as being art or having artistic merit. It might challenge our notions of whether there ought to be stricter definitions surrounding the term art. I wonder if the easiest response would be to claim that it is up to the individual to propose what is and isn't art but that we ought to judge that individual after their proposals. We could then claim art's complete freedom while also feeling comfortably safe in being morally superior while we judge more creative individuals for their lack of filter.

What am I trying to do? Provoke? Surely expanding the field of art and the view of what might be regarded as art is not a provocative act? When I've said before that maybe audiences should be able to say that "this isn't art" I've gotten the response that the audience often do. In some countries more than others according to discussions with friends and more likely in some social classes more than others too. The provocation I'm trying to cause, if any, is in artists. Artists rarely claim that something isn't art. And if they do it's too rarely, not loudly enough, not openly enough for it to have any function or meaning. Perhaps it's fear of backlash or fear of their glasshouse collapsing but in a balanced system there ought to be closer to 25-30%<sup>11</sup> claims that something isn't art at all if only to keep propaganda, bad science, pseudo-philosophy, and "academia" so sloppily produced that I couldn't avoid putting quotation marks on the word even though it lacks a quote, from

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10 Lewitt. Sentences on Conceptual Art. Again in reference to sentence 25 and 26.

11 This is a number arbitrarily taken from my behind, there is no science or research behind it.

creeping into our beautiful, interesting, exciting and funny field of entertainment. Especially when all these things detract from the entertainment created by the works. Maybe this last sentence is purely personal and all of my writings are pointless but I feel when someone tries to give me candy while telling me stories to influence me to believe the stories I tend to view their actions and stories as dubious and abhorrent.

Perhaps this text is propaganda for more skepticism towards throwing around the term art in a too idle manner. Or rather it turned into it by adding this "why I'm writing about Hitler" paragraph. If I only wrote the Hitler bit people might not get it. It would be more of a sardonic dark joke. This and the previous paragraph is the killing of the joke. It's the bumpers in kids bowling. I wouldn't want any minds going into the gutter when thinking about me. I'd also rather preemptively out myself as dubious and abhorrent to people who feel like me when it comes to these kinds of propagandist works, the honesty and showing awareness of my ill intentions to influence is meant to take some of the edge off."

New rules are added to games once loopholes in the existing rules are discovered. Lest people take advantage and give themselves advantages. So how could we amend or modify the definition of art rules which ended in this horribly unfortunate outcome:

1. Art is whatever a nice (with me morally aligned) artist says is art.
2. Art is made by a nice (with me morally aligned) artist.
3. Art is bad if it's (with me morally misaligned) morally bad.
4. Art is good if it makes positive ripples in society.
5. Art has a nice (with me morally aligned) message.
6. Art has a nice (with me morally aligned) moral.
7. Art is (aligned with me) political.
8. What does not align with my values can not be art.

Perhaps the addendum of rule 8 might have sufficed but repetition works well to persuade. I wonder if this is what people actually think rather than the previous set of rules. And I believe it's a fair way to judge what is and isn't art. The caveats are noticeable though and as a definition for what art is you'll find agreement with the people morally aligned to you rather than people from diverse systems of thought. I wonder if people would miss me if I said that their definition didn't "talk to me". How we view, measure and judge art is group

building. And more important as such than whether it is a good view, measuring method or fair judgment. At least for people who wish to belong to groups more than being right.

After having set rules any doubt, about what art is and what constitutes an artwork, is more easily extinguishable by running whatever makes you doubt against the rules. For better or worse there is no objective standard and anything you say goes. Consensus might even hinder creativity and be disadvantageous. Perhaps “consensus about what art is” is part of your rule-set, in which case art doesn’t exist.

### **Methods of doubting**

#### *Avoiding old answers*

How should we doubt and be skeptical? I often think about this quote by Derren Brown: "Often when you react against something you inherit the structures with slightly changed variables."<sup>12</sup> It seems to me as the first thing needed is to doubt the structures we might inherit. Are they at all sound methods of looking at, measuring, judging, and describing anything? And if not what can be salvaged from it when we try to build up better methods? One main structural rule about art might be that “there are artworks”. I would doubt that and instead say that there are objects and that art takes place, or is, in people’s heads. Simple as that. Not in the works, not in the statements nor in the proclamations. Not in artists’ head exclusively. The art isn't made there. An idea might emerge there. Not even by the artists’ conscious will. That they perceive this idea to be art isn’t at all necessary either. Art takes place in the audience’s heads and insofar that an artist is an audience member (of their creation or someone else's) they may also experience, or believe something to be, art. Further attempts to pin it down to physical traits in the objects believed to be art seem to me futile. The varieties of art makes it pointless to hunt for a common denominator and if one was found the seemingly rebellious nature of people calling themselves “artist” would be to find loopholes to include things or events beyond that definition. What if we instead of thinking and teaching that “artists make art” we accept this idea of emergence of art in the mind? Rather than encouraging creation we could foster the proclivities in people to experience it wherever or whenever. Rather than experiencing it only when being pointed to it by art-workers. What if planting linguistic viruses would help people start to experi-

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12 Derren Brown. The path to less stress? Strategic pessimism | Derren Brown | Big Think. <https://youtu.be/wKfUK1Gd6YM> Uploaded Jan 21, 2020. Accessed Jul 02, 2020.

ence the wonderment of art without the need for a system to make, maintain and distribute objects proclaimed to be art?<sup>13</sup> We might, if necessary, advocate creation separately. Not only to make them experience art but to take a step to make them self-sufficient and self-reliant in life in general. Luckily people seem to be creative without incentive.

This abandonment of a basic rule of art leads me to more questions and doubt. I understand why someone would want to avoid doubting that there are some objects that are unquestionably objects of art. Some of the new questions and doubts I get immediately are: Need the structure be replaced? Did we throw it out too hastily? With what should it be replaced? I gave art a new place to exist in the last paragraph. Should I have? If art is now just an experience or a belief how should we spread that belief, if at all? If art is not in an object or event could we force people to agree with our experiences when we perceive it in one? Of course not, that would be draconian! Should we teach them our ways i.e. the better ways? Whatever they are? With the right amount of self-reflection, perhaps yes; but with complete conviction and hubris, naturally no. Should we let people fall into a black hole of aartistic<sup>14</sup> disbelief that nothing is art? It seems sad but at least it offers people their own volition. What about a simple encouragement, an offering, without expectations or promises? The dangers in teaching people to experience art in everything is that it's a good camouflage for corruptive messages, the type of priming advertising and propaganda seeks to spread. Perhaps an offering with a warning. How might this look? Here follows a fictive proposition of a utopian fantasy.

A mad philosopher stands in a smokey room surrounded by colleagues and like-minded. He speaks. "A pipe dream, with the hope to stunt the progression of consumerism and dependence on objects made by corporations for profit. Along with encouragement to make objects. We ought to use this linguistic programming to make people see that that which they created, which was unlike the other, perhaps being lacking in direct use or being weird in other ways or form or material, we shall tell them to see as "a not" an object to meditate upon to distract them from a menial boring trivial existence of everything having

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13 William S. Burroughs famously likened language to a virus. William S. Burroughs. *The Adding Machine*. 1986. P47. Cited in Casey Boyle & Jim Brown. *Calling All Reactive Agents: Cutting Up Burroughs*. [https://www.enculturation.net/calling\\_all\\_reactive\\_agents](https://www.enculturation.net/calling_all_reactive_agents) Accessed Jul 07, 2020.

14 aartist – Person who does not believe that anything is art.  
aartistic - Something (or someone) which is not artistic

to be justified and completely purposeful. When we all deep down know that we're pointlessly meandering through a life we will all leave empty handed. Where all seemingly important accomplishments will be completely washed away. We are wasting time trying to find meaning and value where there is none. Perhaps these "nots" with some DNA from their art predecessors will sit as humble solemn reminders of life's futility. Unlike art these "nots" are personal, kept to oneself, as beliefs should be. With the benefit of not being corruptible by commerce and propaganda. The makers are aware of their valuelessness and they exist simply as a token of clarity in the mists of narrational lies we happily pump out and walk through and suck in, for fear of succumbing to the horrors of dreary daily life. A reminder that our desires are not only biological but also taught. Our striving for progress and power has for long been a curse. A mix of socialized behavior and genetics, perhaps once useful for survival. But in a stable, safe and sound society a recipe for mental anguish caused by stress over material belongings, tribalism, and careerism. The cure is what I bring to you today, the "not". The room falls silent. "I have invested time and make money in people not being self-sufficient in their experience of the numinous," says one of the auditors. A murmur goes through the crowd and the mad philosopher is never again seen.

The issues such a form of system, where creation and experience is done by the same person, would solve are the consumerisation of art. It would stop art from becoming careers with hierarchies and focus on monetisation. It is a step that might be necessary. As the world's resources dwindle self-sufficiency ought to be encouraged on all fronts. Should society support artists to provide the public with entertainment or should society teach people to be more creative in their own right. Should we as artists start this movement on a larger scale than holding small workshops for a handful of people. I believe art can claim triumph when the cashier at your local convenience store while between rushes of customers gazes over to her personally made artwork which takes her out of her everyday life and makes her think about it, who she is, her relation to the world, and the workings of mankind. Rather than having her going to a gallery where someone has selected a person who has invited artists who have produced artworks with propagandistic messages about what she should think and feel bad about for the following three hours or provide works which have no specific message or intention and she is meant to find her own. There is no need to

stop this practice but why not encourage her to make something herself which she can find meaning in, wouldn't this be so much more rewarding for her? The saying "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he'll eat for a life time," or versions of it has a slight problem in today's world. This was sarcastically pointed out by Doug Stanhope in his variant of the saying "They say if you give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day. But, if you teach a man to fish... then he's got to get a fishing license but he doesn't have any money so he's got to get a job and he's got to get into the social security system and pay taxes. And now you're going to audit the poor cock sucker because he's not really good with math. You pull the IRS van up to your house he'll take all your shit... they'll take your black velvet Elvis and your batman toothbrush and your penis pump and that all goes up for auction with the burden of proof on you because you forgot to carry the one. Because you were just worried about eating a fucking fish."<sup>15</sup> Luckily the first variant of the saying still works with art, for now, there are no art licenses yet and while there aren't any we might encourage people to take advantage of that rare freedom. Because if they do not use it they might well lose it. We might also want to work for peoples' rights to repair their own devices and work against all attempts to make self-sufficiency illegal. Because while it may seem like a far fetched conspiracy theory that this might reach the art world it is already the case that modification of video games is illegal in Japan. And I for one cannot always see a distinct line between games and art. And in United States it is illegal to destroy some works of art even if you own them, specifically those outlined in the "Visual Artists Rights Act"<sup>16</sup>. I wouldn't put it past any government to, in an attempt to strengthen culture or similar guises, make us require a license to produce art. But then again I'm a dreamer, with frequent nightmares.

### **Me, my doubt, my works and I**

#### *A primer to the "doubting the "artworks"" chapter*

I doubt whether or not a thing which is presented to me is art. I doubt it because whether or not it is art is entirely based on whether or not I believe that it is art. If I knew that something was art there would be no room or need for belief. Luckily, perhaps, we could never

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<sup>15</sup> Doug Stanhope. *Deadbeat Hero*. Shout! Factory. 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Isaac Kaplan. If you buy and artwork, can you legally eat it? . <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-buy-artwork-legally-eat-it> . Published Dec 11, 2017. Accessed Jun 8, 2020.

truly be sure. We can't be sure of our own intentions, much less someone else's. We can't be sure of the reasons for our own actions, much less someone else's. We can believe. Our beliefs can be well or poorly justified. Art beliefs are often based on hearsay, word of mouth, continuity of history or similarity in form or theme or geographical location. The definitions are loose to the point that the definitions are nothing more than "what is claimed to be art is art". The belief that something is art is then personal but our search for belonging sometimes drives us to accept other people's beliefs rather than our own beliefs and experiences. I'm happy that I doubt it because it gives me reason to question what it is if it isn't art? What is this object's true purpose? This helps me ascertain the true intentions of the person who claimed that this thing is art. I do this because I hate being tricked. I doubt whether what I myself make is art. For the same reasons, I don't like misleading people. Also to see what it is that I'm doing, so I don't mislead myself. Because I am sometimes the culprit making nefarious claims about my works too, either trying to influence people subconsciously or simply by being unaware of how I perceive my own works. I often give myself the pass to go ahead with the making of the works and the claims about them being art anyway. I give myself a pass to be a propagandist where I look down on others for doing the same. To be allowed to label something as art and to view it as such requires nothing. I feel comfortable calling something art when I clearly can't see any other direct use for it. Often the direct use would be to entertain or bewilder an audience, seeing myself as part of that audience. Make them question the work or rather themselves. Artworks are, perhaps to a higher degree than everything else, a skewed mirror in which we see an image of our responses to that phenomenon. A way to better get to know ourselves. Our responses to the artworks tell us more about ourselves than about the works themselves. We can of course also see that mirror and look at in which way it distorts the image thrown at it. Unfortunately or maybe fortunately the mirror is an ever-changing sea of quicksilver always creating new forms for us to look into and one person can never stand in the same places as the person next to them to see what they see or saw. I'll later tell you how I saw my works as they first appeared to me after having emerged as ideas from places I don't know. Whatever amalgamated concoction my brain made up I can only surely say I never consciously planned to think up what I later thought out. At first I don't doubt the works. Because at first I don't even label them. They are thoughts. Sometimes



written down or directly incorporated.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes passing by and forgotten. Sometimes remembered. When written down the works are as finished as they ever could be. Even when told as anecdotes and sometimes just as thoughts they are *done* enough. Thankfully. I would hate to have everything I ever thought be known or seen by other judgmental entities. And it seems best for the creative process not to have doubts too soon. For some this might mean not having any clear ideas or concepts to begin with while some can go through the entire creative production without doubting. I'm usually not that lucky. Doubt may sneak in early and kill ideas before they reach the paper. Usual doubts about being "good" or "bad". If I don't have any doubts while making or after finished with my works I force it. I still avoid writing down or materializing what I consider my worst ideas. But lately I've been able to convince myself to make some bad, boring or uninteresting ideas material too. I might not be the target audience for my ideas so why should I rob the people who might appreciate them of any pleasure. If I'm lucky in the end the work stands finished. I then get the word art in my head. Like a symptom. A cough. I then begin to doubt. Is it really? Is my mind only trying to simplify and compartmentalize my existence? And if so, what would that art compartment really mean in terms of simplification? It is an easy answer. A simple response. But not really a simplification. More like an obfuscation. Like putting it in *miscellaneous*. Art is miscellaneous? Is it a sign that my mind doesn't care about putting these things in the correct compartments, that it just needs to throw it anywhere for now to deal with the more important things like food? It needs something more defined than "ugh, i don't know". Based on our upbringing and indoctrination I suppose art can function as a miscellaneous compartment. But really it's often the miscellaneous part of life that is most interesting. These are the things worth analyzing and studying more. Here we can find that jolt of excitement of having found something out. Perhaps someone might be completely sure of what art is and readily categorize things as that without second thought. I am not that person. I think doubt is a horrible thing. But in some way the removal of doubt sometimes makes a person a horrible person. A person without doubt might become gullible, easily led to believe anything, that any old thing is an artwork. A person without doubt might make works for the sole reason of being a "for the system

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<sup>17</sup> I prefer the word "incorporated" to "embodied". Mostly due to how the word "embodied" is an art world meme both in the sense of its proliferation but also in the sense of a feeling like a joke. Repeat a word too many times and it becomes meaningless, like in the boy who cried wolf.

functional artist". A person without doubt propagates their ideas without hesitation and with the conviction and charisma of someone who knows that they are right; despite having no reasoning or arguments behind their ideas. A person without any doubts is often insufferable to be around.

### **Doubt as a leash**

#### *for the craziness*

I have sometimes thought or felt "It seems like people want more. They want life to be more. They want something super-natural. The feeling that life can't just be what they experience daily. They seem to want extraordinariness. They want an explanation that is not "nah, this is it, this is your life, this is all there is". They seem to want excitement in an ever duller, risk free, world. They want to know what will happen, but they want it to be extravagant. They want a deeper or higher meaning. This was the job for the shaman. Explanation, hope, entertainment, predictions, stories, connections, reasons. And the shamans provided. They saw what would happen because they were commonly schizotypal,<sup>18</sup> and if they weren't the drugs made them. Seeing connections between weather and crops made them seem psychic. Seeing the connections between people in the town gave them power over them. Seeing gods and spirits in the haze of psychedelics, or during mental breakdowns, gave them stories. And they told these stories, and the people were enthralled by both the content and also the magic ways in which they were told. The shamans were charming fuckers, quite literally. Their predictions made them seem to be connected with the supernatural and thus have immense power and influence. Attractive traits, to would-be partners. And they picked up on and easily sent hints of interest so they had no problems to reproduce. Their traits were passed on. As groups grew, religions formed, the shamans became instrumental in organizing society and the organized religions were formed, not always by them but around them. The seers became controllers. The monks became scientists. Seeing connections between physical objects and actions, looking for explanations, for an understanding of god's creation, and then simply godless understanding. Again the scientists now become artists and artists become shamans in a never ending dance in search for understanding. It is a nice story. The leaps made in it might be too ambitious

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18 Robert Sapolsky. Dr. Robert Sapolsky's Lecture on the underpinnings of religiosity. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WwAQqWUkpI> Uploaded Dec 30, 2011. Accessed Jul 8, 2020.

and the body of truth won't necessarily join the story on the other side of the gorge. But as we will find that truth is not always necessary when it comes to forming beliefs."

Doubt drags me back from completely believing in these tales I tell myself to explain my emotions. Who are these "they" and "the people" I think of? Writing down the half-crazed ruminations is a good method to help the mind to have a clearer image of what to doubt. Are they my own paranoid delusions created to deal with the doubts I have regarding the art world? This doubt, which hopefully takes the form of a question lest it remains an illusive feeling of illness, will look for an answer. The first beliefs for how the world functions around me are eloquently explained by Andy Thompson as what he calls the *least counter-intuitive world*<sup>19</sup>. People perceive agency and believe that there is conscious purpose behind what is happening. And if no agent is seen we are prone to make one up. Doubting these beliefs not only helps curbing the unfounded poorly thought through conspiracy theories we might have, but also to find nuggets of truth and wisdom in the dung. It seems to me that questions are like viruses. They are dealt with by taking a pill called answer, whether this pill is a functioning medicine or a placebo makes little difference in a moment of illness, both will often work temporarily. Studies have shown that, for some symptoms, the placebos even work when the test subject has been told that they take a placebo.<sup>20</sup> The answer brings relief. Like viruses questions are spread from person to person, infecting large populations, making them look for quick fixes. I believe that having a well tested and proven drug makes more sense than giving the people placebos or waving pretty colored crystals over their feet. And as much as my self-medicating, through quick conspiratorial answers, works for giving me solace in regard to my inadequacies, it is still important to have a hard look at what answers you give yourself, they may well be bullshit. It is also worth analyzing that bullshit to find inspiration or truths mixed in with the fecal matter. It is during this analysis that doubt comes in. The crazy ideas about artists filling the roles of shamans are my own, they are completely unresearched, only inferred by similarities between the two in some of the statements made in Robert Sapolsky's lecture. They may account for how some artists function and they may explain how a certain

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19 Andy Thompson. Why We Believe in Gods – Andy Thompson – American Atheists 09. <https://youtu.be/1iMmvu9eMrg> uploaded Apr 24, 2009. Accessed Jun 20, 2020.

20 Mallika Marshall. A placebo can work even when you know it's a placebo. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/placebo-can-work-even-know-placebo-201607079926> Published July 07, 2016. Accessed Jul 08, 2020.

degree of craziness can be beneficial to artists. The ideas are however far too general to speak for how all artists work and how they function in society. I should hope.

When it comes to a more personal self-doubt the utmost sad (and perhaps simultaneously hilarious) thing that could happen is the victorious defeat that is that your doubts about your work and yourself as an artist are being validated. To have them ringing true and agreed with, by all and everyone, your deepest darkest self-loathing wasn't just unfounded self-deprecation but actually a fair judgment of your work and yourself. A pyrrhic victory in that at least your self-assessment was correct all along. Perhaps this is why we doubt the things we do and are. For a fear of not only being failures but of being wrong about being a success. A hedging of bets of sorts. Perhaps a softening of the blow in the "I told you so". A phrase which we could repeat as a mantra to ourselves once our fears had been proven true. We may be shit but at least we're not stupid, because we suspected that we were shit.

Wondering is the less negative sibling to doubt. It comes before it. It's the first lust for knowledge or information. Whereas doubt comes after having been given an explanation or thesis of some kind which seem insufficient or disagreeable. Wondering is the lust for knowledge. Doubt is the search for truth. In a sense doubt often contains wondering but a furthering of it. A continuation of wondering despite having found something. Doubt can exist without wondering but then it's more of a dead end, a wish to not know, this would be something that could be described as disbelief. If there is no wondering but instead a prior knowledge conflicting with the explanation given then there would be less of a state of doubt and more one of a disagreement. Or a spotting of a mistake. Doubt without wondering or disbelief isn't necessarily a poor standpoint. Some explanations are not necessary to take in to account. Either for one's own well-being or because they lie outside of one's scope of interest. They may sometimes be based on one's own preconceptions, regarding where the explanation came from. I can confess that I often make this mistake myself, sometimes happily. I rarely take anything very seriously on any topic from a person who has shown themselves to be xenophobic. While they may very well be factually correct on issues completely separated from their personal beliefs regarding people unlike them I still have a hard time listening. This seems natural. We compartmentalize people and stereotype them. People who are xenophobic are idiots. Simple for our heads to comprehend and live by. Probably to our overall benefit. The same goes for their perspective on me and my

non-xenophobic ilk. They probably doubt (without wondering) anything I say on most topics. This is maybe a hyperbolic example. We probably take something any stranger says with more grains of salt than the words of our close friends. At the same time we are, sadly, more likely to be skeptical to something a person with SAD<sup>21</sup> says than what we hear from a beautiful person.<sup>22</sup>

The self-doubt seems to be a double-edged sword. One edge strikes against confirmation bias and stale notions based on old moldy data and interpretations, socialized behavior and teachings received when our minds were vulnerable and soft. The other keeps us from the comforting feeling of certainty that what we are doing is right and proper. As artists that might be doubting whether our products are good, our ideas are interesting, our audience entertained or that whatever more or less sinister intentions you have as an artist are being fulfilled, finalized or completed. Perhaps it helps to think of it as wondering rather than doubting in this field, if only to fool ourselves. I do however believe that notions come before us like lightning as soon as we start to wonder. After which it's doubt all the way. If someone can wonder for long without getting at least some idea to doubt, a working hypothesis about what they think about, then I'm both jealous and skeptical of their honesty about having no ideas about what they're doing.

Perhaps a clarification has to be made. When I mention self-doubt I refer to doubting a thought, opinion or belief held by oneself. I do not refer to self-doubt with regards to self-esteem. A slight difference. Where the latter may come as a result of the first, but I don't believe that causation is necessary. For instance a person may be totally confident in the belief that they are in fact a piece of human garbage. Vice versa a person with the best self-esteem would likely occasionally question their ideas and beliefs. A person who continuously doubt their beliefs and ideas might eventually develop the other kind of self-esteem issue. It might even be that doubt and a constant re-evaluation of one's perceived reality is harmful. The opposite could be said about being confident in one's beliefs and ideations having an effect leading to an inflated, not to say bloated, self-esteem, this could of course be equally harmful despite the positive fetishization of confidence and its adver-

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21 Severe Appearance Deficit as defined by George Carlin. George Carlin. *George Carlin: Doin' it Again*. Brenda Carlin et al. 1990. Excerpt: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4EXISTVyJ4o> Uploaded Nov 14, 2015 Accessed Jul 08, 2020.

22 Dawn Dorsey. <http://news.rice.edu/2006/09/21/rice-study-suggests-people-are-more-trusting-of-attractive-strangers/> Published Sep 21, 2006. Accessed Jul 8, 2020.

tised correlation to success.<sup>23</sup> I will however speak of the self-doubt of ideas and beliefs with little further concern for self-esteem issues.

Self-doubt, in this sense of doubting one's ideas, can be seen as a form of curiosity of one's foibles when it comes to one's confirmation biases and preconceived notions. Also a curiosity which isn't satisfied by answers but about what is beyond the answers, sometimes a curiosity about the questions themselves, but more often a wish to know *the other answers*. That doubt can be horrible is clearly displayed when we look at the question of whether life should go on at all or not. When I was a youth I heard from my shrink that some people who commit suicide display signs of relief and calmness, almost happiness, once the decision to go through with suicide had been taken.<sup>24</sup> Naturally this calmness cannot all be attributed to a lack of uncertainty but also a relief that the suffering of life would soon be over. But the knowledge that life will be over, and at our discretion, can also be a Linus-blanket to us all when life is shit, and that without having to go through with ending it. The fact that relief sets in as early as when a decision has been made makes me attribute this calmness to lack of stressing over indecision, i.e. doubt, to at least some relevant degree. It shows to me that the burden of the question “whether or not” being repeated, the weight of the doubt, is a heavy one. To be sure the same gravity is probably not there when one asks oneself whether the right decision is to have the falafel plate or wrap. But at least for me a sense of relief comes even when those small decisions are finally made. While I see indecision as a form of doubt I don't see all of doubt as indecision.

The suspense doubt brings has always felt stronger than the suspense of not being given a notion at all. In fact, as with suspense, I wonder if doubt could be notion-less. Then I believe the doubt would be more of a general wonder. A question looking for a first answer or explanation. Perhaps suspense would be a general unease about something of which we are not yet aware. I wonder if doubt always comes with suspense. I believe I've experienced at least doubt without suspense at some point in response to something in

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23 Richard Petty. Confidence: What Does It Do? | Richard Petty | TEDxOhioStateUniversity. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKu-32iyHs0> Uploaded Mar 16, 2015. Accessed Jul 08, 2020.

24 Worth noting is that suicide isn't always precede by any signs at all. But my shrink's statement is echoed by this site which lists sudden calmness as a potential sign for people with known depression: Cleveland Clinic medical professional. Recognizing Suicidal Behavior. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/11352-recognizing-suicidal-behavior> Last reviewed Mar 15, 2017. Accessed Jul 08, 2020.

which I had no real stake or interest but still felt an error in explanation had been made. But suspense seems to always have some element of doubt present. No, suspense can be there even when there is nothing we know to doubt, as with wonderment. Or is it? No, the suspense requires expectations, a notion, which is in limbo, then there is doubt. Would it be fair to say that the emotion of doubt is suspense? Fear is a type of suspense after all. I'll claim that for there to be doubt there must first be a notion. This notion can be something as clear as an answer or explanation. But it can also be as loose as an idea, a feeling, a belief, an option, an awareness of the inkling of a possibility that perhaps, maybe, something *could be*. Doubting oneself and doubting others are similar. As are doubting reality or phenomena. Perhaps the greatest doubt I have is about commonly accepted descriptions of reality. I've realized that my experiences of reality is dubious as a true description of reality. As are others' descriptions of reality. Their descriptions are therefore also healthy to doubt.

### **I missed it?**

#### *Conspiracies and blaming others*

I get a feeling of nostalgia now when I think about art. But I doubt if I ever experienced it. It's the same nostalgia people have for film photography although they personally never experienced it in its heyday. The same nostalgia people have for how the internet was in its infancy. The same nostalgia I have about the sixties. A decade I missed by more than twenty years. A rose tinted idealized mirage, only heard of in pleasant tales. We can still take picture on celluloid. We can browse old websites on old computers. Perhaps even visit the sixties through music and incense. But it will never be the same. I don't even miss any particular era of artistic expression. The feeling is the same though. Like I missed it but also have fond memories. Art is still here. What I think it might be that I feel I missed is some form of innocence. A world, and an art world, less focused on economical and material gains. But it is just a feeling. I doubt there ever was such a world. This feeling might just be me growing older and losing hope.

"How many of you in here like 20€ in your pocket? Raise your hands!" I've heard that this is a common manipulation tactic in sales pitches to get the prospective buyer to make an positive agreement as soon as possible. Another is scarcity marketing. The purported rarity of the thing on offer is let known and stressed to influence the audience to focus on the necessity of a quick agreement. Is this something we can see in the gallery too?

Obviously yes. Scarcity in the form of uniqueness and rarity is a staple measure of value and greatness in the art-world. Not least seen in the auction houses where the (almost) guaranteed rarity of a deceased artist directly increases the market value of their product. Along with scarcity, the time limited offer is of course exactly what an auction is all about. By making the purchase of an object a competition the bidders are not only trying to obtain something but they are trying to *win*. This winning becomes something transcending the purchase and symbolizes winning in the bidders life. Or is that just me? Rarity is seen in the pricing of photography where limited print runs make the prints more valuable through their supposed scarcity. Uniqueness is something often pushed as a value in connection to the inflation of certain artists' persona or image, whether anyone could make something does not matter when what matters is that this specific work is made by our metaphorical Midas. Not necessarily that what the artist made was unique, but rather their association with the product made it great. While I believe that this should not necessarily matter I probably still fall for it from time to time. The originality of an idea carries little value for me. And who got that original idea carries even less meaning. Why should the fact that someone happened to get an idea be lauded or praised any more than a branch falling on a person's head would prompt us to praise or blame the branch for its aim? Both are equally deliberately caused. The tactic to get another person to say 'yes' also obviously has its place in the art world. Artists continuously make art which is based on the content having unquestionably good moral intentions. Art is not a meritocracy. In having heard comparisons of how internet is now and how it was when it started I got the feeling that art is no different. Art was about creativity, beauty, having fun, and making harmless mischief. At least in my nostalgic fake memories. And now it's a capitalist hellhole where people desperately struggle to get likes and attention to make a name for themselves and through that some chance of redemption and meager profits. Likewise the internet was a wild west of small forums where people shared ideas and created content for no other reason than amusing themselves and their newly formed group of cyberfriends. Now turned into a social media dump where corporations profit by throwing ads into the glowing spotlight of the attention people clamor for. I'm going to make a website. A website of my own. I'm going to make art. And put it on my website. I will link my friends' websites on mine. There will be no like button. There will be no comment feed. Only a phone number and an e-mail address. I might not reply. I might start a forum for art interested people. It will be



anonymous. People could post their works of art. People could discuss art. Everyone would be equal. I would apply for grants and beg for money to keep it running. There would be no ads. There would be no product reviews. It would be my studio. I would keep it open. But I would keep it hidden. I would keep it safe. A place to make friends without faces. Not a place to organize faces of strangers in web-binders. A place off of the mall-street of the corporate social media gauntlet. That is where art belongs, outside of the surveillance capitalist control grid. But then doubt sets in. Is it possible to achieve happiness by escaping your pursuing monsters? The option would be to stay and fight the politi-corporos but then you are again inevitably part of the spectacle. Again in the spotlight with a company logo projected on your chest. The same company logo you fight against. The same political faction you disagree with will use you. Be quiet, stay hidden, destroy their shit and build your own.

Daniel Kahneman, a psychologist, won the Nobel prize in economy, not only because there isn't one in psychology, but because his findings were of use to economists, businessmen and capitalists. His findings are also of interest for anyone who is interested in how people function. His findings should be of interest to artists for the same reasons that they were of interest to the business world. He presented a theory of fast and slow thinking. The fast thinking is the intuitive response which happens automatically. The doubt in which I'm interested usually comes in slower, after the first quick thinking has shown to provide incredulous or surprising results. I listened to one of his lectures online and believed most of what he said except for when he claimed that the slow thinking was a consciously decided affair. I would agree that we might be more aware of our thinking when it goes slowly, I do not agree that it is therefore in our hands. He mentioned in the talk that when learning complicated things people first learn slowly but when people get good at applying the skills they have learned they become intuitive. Why would the financial world be interested in these findings? They make advertising. Knowing how people react, and to what, is instrumental in tricking them into buying shit they do not need and vote for people they don't benefit from having in office. "There is a real demand for over-confidence," he says in regards to why people listen to quick reacting, quick talking, pundits as soon as anything slightly confusing has reached the attention of the public.<sup>25</sup> This

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25 Daniel Kahneman. Daniel Kahneman: "Thinking, Fast and Slow" | talks at Google. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjVQJdIrDJ0> Uploaded Nov 10, 2011. Accessed Jul 06, 2020.

connects to Andy Thompson's lecture on why we believe in gods. There is a real demand for quick answers. And we want someone to listen to. My suggestion, after having wallowed in doubt about what to do in response, is to try to ingrain doubt so well that it becomes a quick thinking firewall against the constant stream of information aimed at our senses. I have no idea if this is at all possible or how it would look or feel to achieve. Thinking about it, I feel like "hesitance" is not at all a sign of weakness, but might rather be seen as a virtuous trait. I believe the subject should be talked about more, more often and earlier in the educational system. It seems like important information to know that people know how you function better than you do. And while it doesn't surprise me, it still scares me that the ones who are most on the ball when it comes to the control of people are advertisers, politicians and corporations. Luckily I start doubting my fear as being irrational when I again recognize the signs of conspiracy theory language in my thinking. The fear doesn't subside completely but the doubt functions as a dampener. I'd like to call it hesitating.

## **Confusion**

### *Control*

People are, according to Adam Curtis' documentary *HyperNormalisation*,<sup>26</sup> purposely led to be confused. They are targeted by the individuals and groups who want to control them, politicians, marketers, corporations, media, etc. In short those with more money and thus power than them. The main purpose? Confused people buy what they are sold more easily, be it ideas or products. And con-artists, pickpockets, charlatans, and other people who have little reason for having their true intentions known, have through the ages diverted attention from *their goal* to *whatever else* that attracts attention and causes confusion, which makes people oblivious to their intentions. The end goal with selling people ideas and products is often to have the sheeple either work for them in various ways or simply stay busy while they take advantage in other ways. Some people claim to like randomness and disorder. Perhaps they are differently conditioned or perhaps their brains still prefer order while they enjoy the unaccountability that comes from not understanding why they do what they do. Another, darker, possibility is that they are part of the people who have an urge to control others through causing confusing weird conditions. In situations they know

<sup>26</sup> Adam Curtis. *HyperNormalisation*. BBC. Oct 16, 2016. reuploaded on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fny99f8amM> uploaded Nov 2, 2016. Accessed Jul 8, 2020.

are not real they remain in control. As with gas-lighting, the victim is the one who believes there is substance in what is being presented as truth. The perpetrator is the nihilist who doesn't care or the orchestrator who knows what is and isn't a lie. Perhaps the people who believe that life isn't weird enough and shun understanding and knowledge are manipulative and benefit because they have nothing real to show, the equivalent of a singer whose looks sell the music rather than the music selling itself. Perhaps a good way to spin Hunter S. Thompson's words would be "when you want to control the going, make things weird".<sup>27</sup> On an individual level, making things weird as a way to control one's own world is more likely than the paranoid conspiracy theory idea that people enjoy being manipulative and controlling others. The people who claim to enjoy disorder and weirdness probably want to control *their world* rather than other people. The sad side effect is that they still make their surroundings an easy target for scheming sociopaths with a self-centered agenda. Is this what the art world is? A whirlpool of artists trying to make sense of the world, to control it by making it confusing? In my thesaurus 'scheming' suggests 'artful' as a synonym. Artful has: disingenuous, distorted, misrepresented, perverted, twisted, insincere and, surprisingly, ingenuous as suggested synonyms. Ingenuous has in turn artless as a suggestion. Whatever helps keeping the public uncertain helps keeping them powerless and in the dark. Straight talk and clarity is now necessary to avoid a confused and scared population. No ifs or buts or maybes. Perhaps the art world attracts manipulative sociopaths partly since the weirdness is already there. Of course uncertainty, lack of clarity and lack of explanation is common in many places. This does not detract from the possibility of the prevalent confusion being a light bulb for manipulative scumbags. Art speak wall-texts rarely speak plainly. Companies that are run nefariously write purposely confusingly about their business. This is not a coincidence. "Whatever complicates the world more I do, ... It's always good to do things nice and complicated so that nobody can figure it out"<sup>28</sup> are the words of Donald Trump. He may or may not be smart or clever in a traditional sense, but he is a master manipulator. You start doing well that which you like do-

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27 The original quote goes "When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro" Hunter S. Thompson. Fear and loathing in Las Vegas. Nov 1971. Rolling Stone vol. 95-96. Cited by Glynn Wilson. in When the Going Gets Weird, the Weird Turn Pro. <https://www.newamericanjournal.net/2019/03/when-the-going-gets-weird-the-weird-turn-pro/> Published Mar 28, 2019. Accessed Aug 4, 2020.

28 Mark Singer. Trump Solo. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/05/19/trump-solo> Published May 12, 1997. Accessed Jun 8, 2020.

ing. And Donald seem to like to manipulate people. I can only think he would do fairly well in an art setting. I find this practice disgusting and morally abhorrent. Unfunny even. Although at times it seems like I am, as an artist, partly “in on the joke” of being weird for confusion’s sake.

'Aporia' is the purposeful spreading of doubt, by pretending to doubt, before handing a simple explanation to the people you just confused as a means to more easily convince them of what you're saying. This could be as easy as asking multiple questions before giving an answer. The questions don't need to be related to the answer, or rather the answer doesn't need to answer the specific questions posed. The manipulation of the state of mind of the audience is the goal. Another way is to speak in confusing language, gobbledygook, obscure words. Often with imprecise or multiple definitions. Political speak. Business speak. Art speak. Doubt is used as a weapon against the audience. Art speak aggravates me. Perhaps not always purposefully meant to influence peoples' world view at large, though it might. If the person affected doesn't combat the confusion or doubt they were infected with when they experienced the art it might affect their normal life. Influence a person to be stupid in a bubble and they'll remain stupid when they exit that bubble. This confusion could be harmlessly making people buy a piece of candy. Which might in turn stabilize them enough to again make sense of the world. Or it could be as harmful as the audience remaining influenceable to believe any lies told to them by people wishing them harm. The people wishing to influence them could be the artists, as any artist might well be a narcissistic psychopath. But it might also be any random con-artist outside the gallery doors taking advantage of a freshly stunned and bewildered gallery goer. The sociopath might find the gallery the perfect place for a date due to its confusing properties. Could the doubting of “what the artworks mean” be a good misdirection of doubt when courting? This seems to be a dark prospect if true. I dare not think of what future we would be in for if the purposefully confusing worlds of art and politics and business mix. Sounds like a perfect storm. But that seems like a far-fetched idea doesn't it?

### **Doubt in practice**

#### *unSound methods?*

When I go through my creative processes I go through various doubts. These doubts come up naturally at various points. In the beginning there is the idea. Coming from seemingly

nowhere. Or easily traced to whatever thing I was doing at the time. Sometimes it's simple and pure, easily doable and it more or less makes itself there and then. Doubts can still arise when it is made. But let's go chronologically. The first doubt can come almost in tandem with the idea, lagging just a millisecond behind. "Is this a good idea?" or rather more often worded "that's a dumb idea, you fucking hack". I push through that; and doubt the doubt. "Maybe not, think about it or write it down or don't write it down and if I remember it then I have to think about it." Why not let my mind deal with that dumb idea; it wasn't me who thought of it in the first place. After the idea has been doubted and thought about I write it down and consider the work as finished and done as any other artwork. Of course it usually doesn't stop there. I doubt whether to make it physical or not. Here my laziness often wins the argument and if not, my wallet usually puts a stop to the rest of the straggling ideas for monumental works. Left are the works which are cheap, quick and dirty. Generally I prefer these kinds of works, when looking at other artists, too, they seem less pretentious, less like art is a serious thing which we have to take so seriously. They speak to my inner punk. The cheap materials, speed of production and disregard for pristine finish all make my blood simmer, add a slight bit of dry subversive humor and it brings it to a full boil. And already with the question of making it physical comes the question of whether or not to share it. The notion that art is something we share is not an immediate given for me. Like many other thoughts and ideas some are best kept private. I'm for an art making which is kept to oneself. A self-sufficient art audience and through that unemployment is something I think working artists should strive for. Making things physical with the intent to exhibit opens up a whole slew of issues to take into account regarding things which aren't related to art but to a market, and with that marketing and advertising. How to avoid this is perhaps what I think about the most. Not making works or leaving things in a language or sketch format is not mutually exclusive with not sharing. But they might lead to avoiding a market at least temporarily. Most works are experienced that way anyway. Second hand retelling of what the work is, or was about. Images of how the work looked. So why not cut out the middle man and explain your works and show sketches and documentation instead of making things? For the joy of handicrafts and prop comedy; that's why. So some things are made. Doubts arise when making them. Materials and methods usually flow naturally from or are part of the original idea. A MacGyver-approach to making and coming up with solutions leads to less doubt since there is less room for it. Doubts

regarding how the works are experienced are more prevalent. Starting with: how do I actually experience them myself? Are they funny? Prop comedy rarely is. “Has this been made before?” is a primary question forming a notion which leads to the doubt. Do I care? Usually not. Originality is something I don't really find that laudable anyway. The fact that an idea was formed in someone else's head before mine warrants as much or little admiration as it not being formed at all. Neither for me, nor any previous person, nor future person, having an idea has never been nor will ever be a conscious decision. What matters, if anything, is the experience of the person experiencing it. Be it me experiencing my own work or someone else experiencing a dog shit on the street as an artwork. Maybe that is what I'm doing; putting stuff together.

### **Doubting the "artworks"**

*What are the other answers?*

So what have I made? Are they artworks? I guess I could follow my own advice and play the game of setting up rules. I will surely break them and doubt various other things too but for the benefit of our reader these rules serve as an inspiration to do something similar:

- A. Art has no purpose other than being art.
- B. Art is intrinsically meaningless.
- C. Art is the opposite of serious.
- D. Good art is fun.
- E. Art is a mirror in which the audience can see how they react to the artwork.
- F. Art requires no explanation.
- G. If you don't get it I can't explain it to you.
- H. Art is not meant to be camouflage for propaganda.
- I. Art is not a message delivery system.
- J. Art is a mirror in which the audience experiences itself.
- K. The subject and message in artworks are not to be trusted. Because people are notoriously liars.



*Fig. A*



*Fig. B*

The works I will talk about in this chapter are separate entities. Easily distinguishable based on visual similarity or method of production. They are illustrated with images from the time of production. After which comes a text discussing the works. Which figures the text concerns is noted at the end of each chunk of text. The works are finished in the sense that the productions of the objects are finished. But the images are not always representative of how they would be exhibited. In the case of auditory information I have added the text of the audio when it is of a voice. The videos related to the stills, Fig. F-J, are available through links provided in the Extra material section after the Documentation list; as is the video relating to the work shown in the documentation photo in Fig. M.

I started airbrushing objects, with the intent to make *trompe l'oeil* metal toilet rolls by painting standard empty rolls. The choice of toilet rolls never had any connection to toilet paper being a coveted commodity as it became for a short period of time in the beginning of 2020. The connection I had to toilet paper and hygiene materials in general is that it is a common denominator for people of all social classes. At least in most parts of the world. Some cultures may use bidets to a higher degree. But the idea is that everybody poops and everyone decides whether or not something is art. And by deciding or believing that it is art thereby in a way makes the art. I'm not sure that these pieces are art myself, while producing them I felt like it was more of a handicraft. But the meaninglessness and uselessness of the final pieces makes me doubt that it is handicraft or design. I've had ideas about making these cheaply produced objects and selling them as "bad art for friends you don't like". Assuming that decorum forces them to keep them and bring them out for display when the gifters come for dinner. Or simply as a gag gift between friends. An idea

not yet materialized, but for now living on in my mind and in the title for the piece in Fig B. Fig. A-B.



*Fig. C*

At the time of airbrushing toilet rolls I went to a lecture on kintsugi<sup>29</sup>. As the toilet rolls might have let on, I am enamored with the concept of repurposing, mending and fixing rather than throwing out and buying new. While fixing is where kintsugi has its roots, it has more recently been used as a quick way display some westernized philosophical virtues of wabi-sabi. A hard-to-describe concept, often simplified to meaning beauty in imperfection. I find this kitschifying of the philosophy, and the practices it inspires, to be equally disturbing and funny. I decided to make a work using poor taste to make it ridiculous. I had during the previous year bought four chocolate bars and received a plastic cup with one of the chocolate brand's design elements printed on it. I find it to be beautifully poor taste from the start. I carved out a crevice on the outside and inside of the cup with an electric multi tool and filled in the small crevice with gold acrylic paint. The final object is unusable as a cup due to the acrylics not being food safe. I feel that this is a physical joke, which makes me doubt whether or not it is art since comedy feels like more of a handicraft

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29 Petra Holmberg. *Den operfekta Skönheten* [The Imperfect Beauty]. Jan 29, 2020. *Världskulturmuseet* [World culture museum], Gothenburg. Lecture. Author's Audio Recording. Kintsugi is the mending of cracked pottery and ceramics with lacquer and gold powder. Recently gold paint and glue is used to achieve a similar aesthetic effect.



than an art form due to its fixed goal to make people laugh. But I doubt that comedy is purely a handicraft. The doubt that comedy might be art follows from the fact that I've spent some time looking at comedy and hearing comedians talk about their practice. Some comedians, among them some undisclosed personal favorites, have seemingly had as a goal to "walk the room" which means to make the whole or a majority of the audience leave. The goal has then been to fulfill, but it is a more unclear goal. Perhaps personal amusement, amusement among peers, spiting the venue owner of the comedy club or maybe even not having any meaning. Regardless I believe this element of comedy having more than one fixed outcome makes comedy more of an art form than a craft. It is at the very least a blurring of the lines between craft and art. I can see the faux kintsugi chocolate advertisement cup being on the art gradient of that comedy blur. Whether the cup is funny or not to others. Or if it even walks a room is from here up to the audience. Fig. C.



*Fig. D*



*Fig. E*

The airbrushing lead into ideas of combining objects before painting them. This lead to the works "Hair of the dog" and "Hold my beard" consisting of painted beer cans with my body hair glued to them. Unlike the cup I preferred the cans painted because I didn't want any brand associations in this work. Perhaps because the hair makes them feel more close to home than adding gold paint, or perhaps because they feel more distasteful with a dark base color. These works are essentially visualized puns and my doubts were the same as with the kintsugi cup. As aesthetic objects they are more alluring than the cup, almost pleasant, yet aversive at the same time. Puns are notorious for often being bad. I heard on

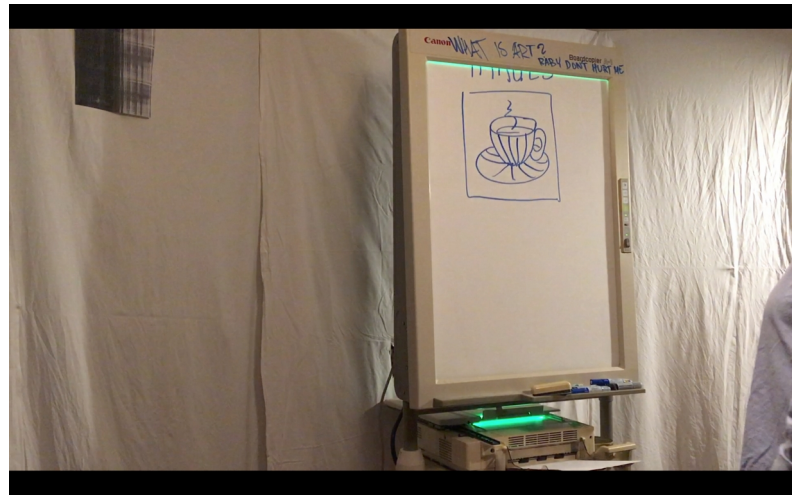
the British television show *Quite Interesting*<sup>30</sup> that this was purposeful to join people in the laughter against the joke rather than risk dividing people into those who understand and those who don't, or those who enjoy it and those who don't. While I made these works I found myself content that they were art. Afraid that I was being tricked by their aesthetics I placed them in the house to see how I reacted to them. They constantly attracted my attention, they stood out even in all the mess. They were different. They made me feel and think and I saw myself in how I reacted to them. I figured "Well I guess they're art," but then the creeping feeling of doubt started again. Is it fun? Is it comedy? I didn't think they were. Not beyond that first jolt of happy excitement of having had the thought of them. But I started to wonder if even then, during their conception, was that happiness speaking to their humorous properties or was I just happy that I had had an idea. This seems to be an issue even when making art that isn't joke-based, too. Do I think it's good or interesting or do I just like the feeling of making it or having made it myself? It's a good doubt to have. I see it, most clearly, when I don't have any response to something I haven't made, but think that I'd probably enjoy having made it myself. It's even more noticeable when what is being presented has nothing to do with art or any other field of entertainment which I have as an interest. As when someone speaks passionately about farming and how they grew parsnips the size of a baby's head. I can see how I would have enjoyed that if I had any interest in doing that. But, as it is, I don't know if a baby head sized parsnip is even possible. And I wouldn't get excited if I saw one or heard someone talk about it. The positive thing is that even if something doesn't evoke anything it is still there to reflect the people experiencing it onto themselves. At least now I know about myself that I don't care about farming parsnips. And that is as little a crime as not laughing at a joke I don't find funny. As little a crime as not engaging with an artwork as a gallery goer. Fig. D-E.

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30 Richard Wiseman. Cited in *Quite Interesting*. Season H (8), Episode 14. Original air date Dec 24, 2010. BBC. Excerpt <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBZgZ4e36IU>. Uploaded Dec 10, 2011. Accessed Aug 4, 2020.



*Fig. F*



*Fig. G*

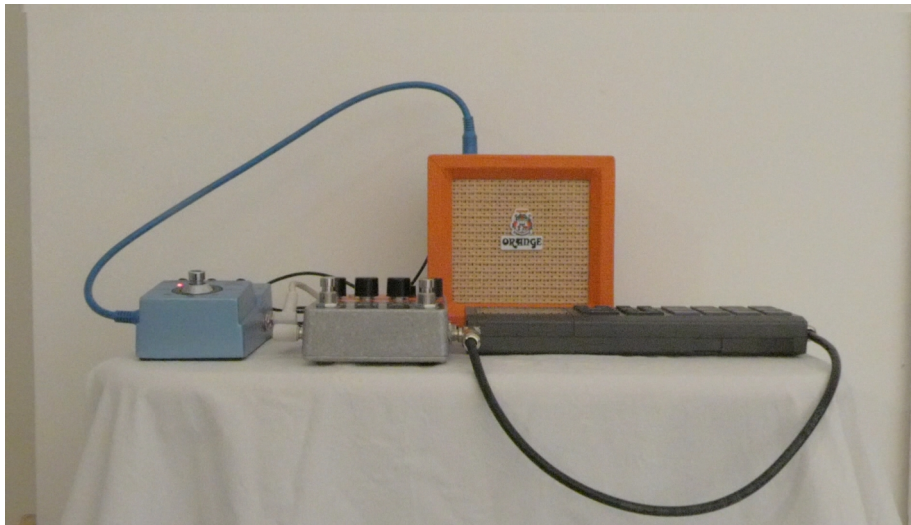


*Fig. H*

Maybe someone would argue that art audiences have a responsibility to engage and try to figure art out. To this I say: “make me.” Someone might say that as an artist myself I have to engage and think about art. Again I say: “make me.” One does not have to analyze art to be able to make it. As much as one does not have to analyze comedy to tell a joke. This kind of thinking has led me to doubt my most fundamental beliefs, those I’ve never before questioned. Do I even like art? I notice that the answer doesn’t come as directly and obviously as I had thought it would. No, I don’t really like art in general. I like very few artworks. I like very few artists. I often like the artists I know personally better as people than as artists (I believe this speaks to their and my credit). I still like their art better than strangers’ art; for obvious reasons. There seem to be a notion among people who meet me that they assume I like art when I tell them I study at art school. To be completely honest with myself I have to say that I right out dislike most of the art I experience. I would be highly suspicious of people who say they like art in general or *all* art. I would be happy if these people never become part of any police profession, because it seems like this type of tribalism is harmful. It forces people to accept poor behavior by people within the tribe and it leads to a homogeneous culture. Something which I believe stifles creativity. Do people I interact with like art? They do but seldom in the same way. I suspect people are the same when it comes to sports. I don’t like sports. I like specific sports teams, in specific sports, in specific leagues. I like playing some sports. I like playing in a very different way than I like observing sports. I like making art. I like it much more than watching or hearing it. Much more than having made it. In a very different way than experiencing others’ art. I have also realized that I find art interesting, much more than I actually like it. But at the same time I rarely find it interesting if I do not like it. I prefer talking about art in general more than actually experiencing it on site. I also am very interested in what other people think about art and, along with my doubts about what art is, this interest led to the first work which is directly on the topic of doubt. Once all your own resources are depleted it’s best to call on the combined wisdom of the public. Which is what I do in the work “What is art? baby don’t hurt me”. The work is simply the question asked to the audience which is then invited to either write or draw an image on the archaic office equipment that is the “Canon Boardcopier”, a whiteboard and printer combination where what is printed on the board is scanned and printed on an attached laser printer. The archaic printer is a spectacle and functions like a siren call to the audience. After the drawing or text on the board is



printed the copier part of the machine is put to use to copy the print leaving one for the audience member and one print for hanging on the wall. The toner advertises lasting for up to 3000 copies. Up to 30 copies can be made in one sweep. After the audience member gets their copy and one is hung in the wall behind the machine it leaves 29 for making books featuring the exhibition's findings. If the toner was emptied that would add up to roughly 95 pages. I doubt these findings will still my doubts. The work might lift the question of doubt for the audience members. And if nothing else, it might work in the same way as a feedback and complaints phone line works for companies, in that it lets the public complain, which is enough to make them feel better. Fig F-H.

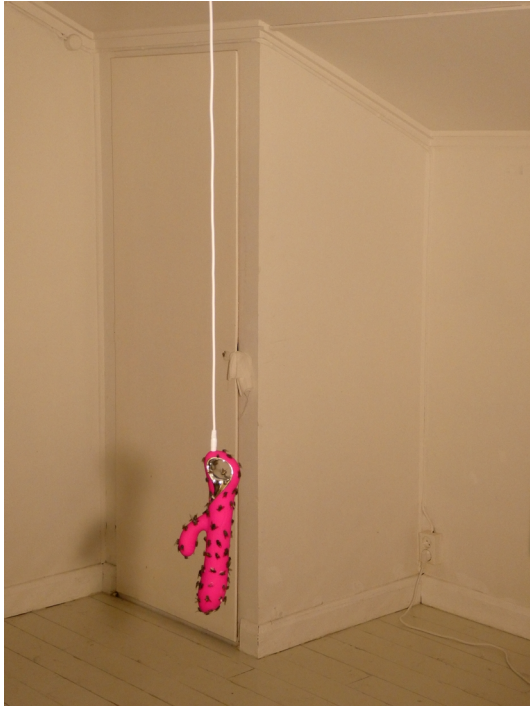


*Fig. I*



*Fig. J*

Some of the other works I've made are less subjected to my doubts. For some reason my sound artworks fly under the radar. This makes me wonder if I don't even care about them. When I hear other artists' sound artworks I often have doubts whether they are art or not. Perhaps the fact that I consider myself less skilled or experienced makes it obvious to me that the works are meaningless. Other artists' sound artworks seem to have more pretensions. When it comes to my own works I might not doubt them simply because I have no thoughts to doubt. I call these types of sound producing works "IADs". Short for Improvised Audio Devices. Not because they are dangerous in any sense but because I improvise them and they are a mess of cables that might make them look dangerous. The works often consist of guitar effect pedals, microphones and speakers which make simple repetitive sounds. In the work shown in Fig. I, a small drum machine is programmed to make a clap every sixteenth step at the slowest (40) beats per minute. I see this as the simplest form of music. Before voice boxes were formed animals must have clapped their hands, right? There are some shrimps that produce snapping sounds, or rather when closing their claws at extreme speed air bubbles are formed and when these collapse they make a sound. Who is to say that this is not music. The work isn't based on this unresearched hypothesis regarding music, but rather this reading of the work is. Luckily the fact that the work isn't built to communicate a hypothesis speaks to its art status. The works are meaningless as information. I find them fun. There is no message. The fact that it is now, in my mind, a representation of the first instance of minimalist music is not a necessary story to relate to the audience. The other iteration of an IAD presented here, in Fig J, is made up of two contact microphones attached to two cameras. One set to continuously focus on faces and the other set to take pictures at fixed intervals, three images at ten second intervals with a shutter speed of around 128th of a second. No images are saved, the audience influence half of the sounds made in the work. It has nothing specific to say but offers that reflective surface in which the audience can experience themselves. What they will experience is naturally different depending on from which angle they approach the work. Both mentally and physically. Fig. I-J.



*Fig. K*



*Fig. L*

This is a work that could be seen as an offshoot of the "haircans". This too is an excuse for a title. A title which is in itself a proposition for the collective noun for fascina, the much less common word for dildi. Fascina is the plural of fascinum. To my surprise, I found no collective noun for neither dildi nor fascina online. The proposal for the collective noun is in the title: "A buzzing of fascina". Fascinum is Latin and the lack of general knowledge of this word makes the work somewhat educational. Does this mean that the work is a message delivery system and therefore not an artwork? I could say that the title isn't the artwork. If I necessarily wanted it to be an artwork. This separation of work and title does seem like a cop-out. Fascinum also has the meaning of evil spell or witchcraft. Something which the work might resemble being. As one might suspect the word fascinum has a strong connection with the word fascinate which shares the connotations of witchcraft, charms, spells and enchantment. Fascinate's meaning of delight and of something which attracts and holds the attention makes it fitting to attach its wordly sibling to this work. As I do find it fascinating, regardless of the work being tied together etymologically or not. Naturally not every dildo vibrates or buzzes. Neither do dead flies. A swarm of flies is called either a swarm, a cloud, a hatch or a business of flies. Flies were not as much chosen as available to be gathered. And so they were even before I knew what to do with them. At some point during the spring I was offered a to my knowledge unused and unwanted dildo.

The reason for re-gifting this contraption to me was that I might be able to make art with it. I put two and two together, even though the twos were dildos and flies it seemed to add up. It seemed to me an absurd but still perfect marriage of objects. I didn't doubt the fun part of it. It certainly looked like an artwork. I doubted using dead animals in my work and whether I could find any meaning in it myself. The animals had died of natural causes. I have mourned them and thanked them more than any other dead flies I have seen or known before. This might not give me the right to glue them onto a sex toy, but I still did. Their dryness and fragility seemed to me to go against the pink plastic machine vibrator. If I had used plastic fly lookalikes they would have shared too much of the same DNA. I may not feel good about it but I don't feel bad about using them either; they are, after all, just flies. So how do I experience this thing appearing before me? I looked at it finished and saw the absurdity of death combined with a tool for release of pleasure. *Le petit mort* flew through my head. "Perhaps this is someone's kink. If they didn't know it before maybe I've opened a very strange door for someone seeing this. Glad to be of help of a sort." I had, in my doubts of using flies, thought of gluing tire studs, which I had laboriously removed from car tires, as a substitute. While these seemed to offer an equal amount of surfaces for an audience to gaze into they lacked the fragility and the title. I'm sure there are some puns or jokes to be made using "stud" or "spike" in the title but that will be for a later work if any. The word *art* is thought to come from "PIE \*ar(ə)-ti- ... suffixed form of root \*ar- "to fit together.""<sup>31</sup> Cutting two things from two different contexts and pasting it together to make another thing can fairly well describe what I do. These burroughesque methods of art productions suit me. But I doubt whether art could be explained by the action made while doing it now? At which point does the joining of things become less of a joining of things and more an application of ideas? Is there a difference? Could the placing of an object unaltered in the gallery context be enough for it to be called a joining? In the end what makes me question this as a good explanation of what art is is the fact that joining of things are continuously happening without anyone believing that it is art. The art label is arbitrarily put on some joining of things. But not others. So I return to art being a belief. While joining is seemingly not instrumental to making art it is an instrument one can use to make it. Fig. K-L.

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31 Art. Online Etymology Dictionary. <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=art> . Accessed Aug 4, 2020.





*Fig. M*

One of the last works which I was working on was partly an interactive installation and partly a video work. Until I doubted it. The installation part consisted of two tripods, one with a strong camera lamp and one with a smartphone holder, a small speaker connected to an mp3-player which asks questions and a “step and repeat” back drop. A “step and repeat” is a screen with various company logos. They are usually used in sports contexts, where athletes and team leaders stand in front of them when talking to the media. In the installation there would be a TV-monitor next to the step and repeat, which would show a video of such an interview but in an art context where an artist is being interviewed regarding how an art show opening has been going, his answers would be played back on headphones connected to the screen. The work equates the practice of an artist with that of an athlete. And draws connecting lines between the two interests. The audience can then make up their own answers to the questions being asked through the speaker or just take a selfie in front of the step and repeat.

The work has taken several lines of text to describe and I believe this is where my doubts are the strongest. Does the work need to be this complex? Do I have to invite the audience with a selfie trap? Is the video not enough? The re-tell-ability of an artwork is important. The easier to retell to a friend the wider spread the idea of the work might get. Then, perhaps, the selfie trap is necessary. Doubt again. I’m thinking: “Maybe the speak and repeat with the light, speaker and camera holder is enough. Skip the TV. It detracts attention. People will know what to do. The TV is only a means to show my face in the gallery.” It’s the more elegant solution. It might feel cheaper. It might appear lazy. But the

fact is that I don't see complexity or labor as positives in themselves. The comparison of sports and art, placing them in the same place, equating them as both being entertainment, with the purpose to sell products and appease the people, is in my eyes funny. So with the modification: the last work which I've been working on is an interactive installation. This installation will be displayed without a prerecorded video of myself doing the interview. I have transcripts and images from such a video to exemplify how such an interview might look in the gallery with a gallery-goer. For the purpose of any online exhibition the video might take the place of the interactivity intended with the physical work. The fact is that I view most of my works as modular. Changes will be made depending on venue and material available. I see it as integral to being an artist to be flexible and creative not only when thinking of or making the work but in regards to what and how to exhibit. This modular approach offers that flexibility. Fig. M.

Here follows a transcription of the interview featured in the video. I have to make the disclaimer that this work is fictional. Any similarity with persons living or dead is purely coincidental. Transcript from mid-opening interview with artist:

*Reporter*

"Here with us is the artist in question live from the opening floor. How did you perceive the first half of the opening of your show?"

*Artist*

"Oh man, well, I came in gave my best like. You can only hope it's enough like. One thing we've been working on, that we know is appreciated, is to just put a lot of time and effort into the works. Like, when a work isn't really all there yet it will likely still fly and be like appreciated if it looks like there's been a lot of effort. People really respond to that. I mean Diogenese had a point in rolling his barrel up and down the market place, right. And this time we had a couple of works that felt so, so conceptually so we gave it a hundred and ten percent. Sometimes the works bounce in and sometimes you have to grind the millstone, like a lot. So like we go big so we wont have to go home. Make big works to impress, fine finish, high production value, make it look expensive and difficult and people will be impressed."

*Reporter*

“Right the works are huge and we can see the attention to detail. Some of the works still actually have blood on them, really impressive stuff, but it’s not all material? There’s a lot of text on the walls how important is that for you?”

*Artist*

“Right, like, this show we’ve not only tried to show the physical labour but also the mental work. And like a huge part of that has been to really expose the anguish and suffering behind it. Like, we realize the audience still has this fascination with suffering artist imagery so we push on that, bring it to the forefront with text and images from the creation process.”

*Reporter*

“What do you have to say to the naysayers that say that you’re faking it and that you are a fraud?”

*Artist*

“I mean no comment. People will think what they will think. The rumours of staged behind the scenes photos and stories and the allegations that we are using art speak generators to make our wall text are completely unsubstantiated. Like none of it has been proven true at all. The way I see it is let those without sin cast the first stone. My suffering is real. The camera was there to prove it, right. Ok, maybe a tear was added in one photo but I did cry before that and the camera man we hired missed it.”

*Reporter*

“Now it’s soon time for the second half of the mingle, some say its the most important part of the show when the right people are a bit drunk and coked up, how do you prepare for the socializing?”

*Artist*

“Oh man, we brought in a really good coach just for that, you should see her she sold kale to Donald Trump, like, he hasn’t eaten anything but adderall and red meat for the past fifty years and she sold him kale. So she does the media, art elite, potential buyer training top hierarchy stuff. I had to start from scratch basic hygiene, cut down on drinking, smiling classes, no red wine, two glasses of white and some mint gum and I’m one smarmy fucker.”

***Reporter***

“We’ve been hearing more and more about other artists trying to influence the audience with what, we the media, has started calling ‘scientific doping’. What do you think about the art world adapting strategies from the marketing and advertising world?”

***Artist***

“Man, hey, let’s be frank anything goes when it comes these things. I don’t do anything questionable myself of course, but I’ve been asked if I wanted to. Like I don’t really get how it works but someone told me that people think better of you when they are served a hot beverage compared to when you give them a cold one like they think you’re a warm person or something. I mean of course, raising the temperature of the gallery and serving alcohol are standards everyone does it, like, we’re not gonna stop doing that, there’d be no-one here. But the minutia of it, like the beats per minute in the music, the goody bags with stickers and planting small sums of cash to make people in a better mood isn’t my style and apparently only marginally increase peoples opinion. Maybe offering free drugs to people in the stipend jury is more direct and works better, not saying I do that of course.”

***Reporter***

“You’re personal friends with the cultural minister, how does your own ventures like this show benefit from you being employed in a publicly funded art establishment?”

***Artist***

“Our friendship is based on a mutual love for the arts, I have never asked for any favours and I have never been offered any. I’m a bit offended by the question to be honest I don’t understand what would prompt you to ask it. I think it’s very unprofessional and wouldn’t have expected that from a reporter of your stature.”

***Reporter***

“The reason I ask is because there have been talk of money being siphoned from that establishment to your private ventures, I only want to give you a chance to respond to clear your name. So you’re saying that there is no truth to those claims what so ever?”

***Artist***

“Man, no comment, you’re lucky I need the media to be seen otherwise I’d never come back to talk to you swine after being jumped like this. Really you’re a prick. Like really. A

prick There better be another reporter here after the second half. I'm warning you I'll probably be drunk enough to bash your skull in you little rat."

**Reporter**

"OK, thank you, and uhh, good luck with the next half."

**Artist**

"Thanks."

**Reporter**

"We'll try to tie this up with the artist after the next part of the show. Now to commercials."



*Fig. N*



*Fig. O*



*Fig. P*

To show the possibilities of the "rules game" proposed earlier in the text let's simplify the rules and step into a fictitious person's shoes. We will see how having a bare-bones set of guidelines might help in exposing ourselves. Figure N is not art. It has no frame, surely the lack of seriousness and effort, the blatant disregard for presentation means that it is not art. The ostentatious lean of the paper against the wall amplifies the slacker message stenciled on the paper. "Man, imagine if some famous artist would've made this, woah, it'd be pretty good then!" What is artistic about this text? Nothing. Text is a tool for communicating. But what does this message communicate? It's maker's own inadequacy. Something which is already obvious at a first glance of the paper. Making it tautological drivel. Figure O is not art either. It is simply too design-y in its aesthetics. It fits better over a couch in a home than in any gallery. Figure P is art. The layering of three stencils and making a painting. An image of disdain shining through the face of an angry cat is clearly a work of art. It is easily recognizable as a cat. A symbol of cunning self-reliance. Glaring glowing eyes seem to look at the viewer saying "what are you doing?" or "you did this..." in response to the world surrounding both the viewer and the cat. One can not help but feel guilty. Surely

the rules, 1. Art has to show effort 2. Be serious 3. Treat itself and art in general with respect 4. Be difficult 5. Speak through symbolism, allegories and allusions, can all be thought of as sound rules? Someone could have been brought up to believe all of them and live through their entire life content and happy without changing them. They could easily enjoy what they believed constituted art. And I don't think they would be wrong. But I doubt those rules would work for me, and I don't plan on following them. Jimi Hendrix said it fairly simply and concisely in his song *if 6 was 9* "I got my own world to live through and I ain't gonna copy you."<sup>32</sup> An ironic thing to quote.

Much like my doubt of such stringent rules also I doubt that my interpretations regarding all the works are the only interpretations one can make. And thusly I doubt they are the correct ones. In fact I am certain that my doubts about that are correct. The audiences perceiving the works, or the documentation of them, have their own worlds to live through too. Far be it from me to expect them to copy my interpretations of my works.

### **Attack surfaces**

#### *op-sec in the gallery*

Writing about the works made me think about whether the reflective surfaces artworks offer to their receivers should be thought of as an attack surface. I assume this is how marketing people think of advertisement. The advertising images of happy people enjoying themselves while, by chance surrounded by various highly visible products, is meant to illicit the victim to put themselves in the shoes of the actors in the ad. Surrounded by loving friends, having good clean fun. These attack surfaces are aimed straight towards the people in front of various screens and on the streets. We are meant to see ourselves in ads. We can, actually, see ourselves through our reaction to art. Doubt should be thought of as the firewall and anti-virus program of a soft easily impressionable sponge brain. Learning how people try to manipulate you is part of this anti-virus. It's important to keep your anti-virus up to date. New vulnerabilities are discovered constantly, as could be read about in regards to quick and slow thinking. One vulnerability is the way people experience art with an open mind. The fact that the variable called art is completely unpatched, and accepting anything, leaves us vulnerable. You could inject any message and if we expect art or see it

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32 James Marshall (Jimi) Hendrix. *If 6 was 9*. Axis: Bold As Love. Track Records. London. 1967.

labeled as such in the input it would pass it through for the program to run it. Some of the updates to the anti-virus, being taught that threats exist and how they work, have given us a false sense of security. We believe that, because our system has been patched as to not run all files sent to us, we are safe. But the security issue remains because our systems are connected to the art network. All that is needed is a few persons with poor op-sec. Opening attachments. Not running updates. Not questioning escalated privileges. And we'd be in for a pandemic. What we need is anti-viral education. A regularly updated skepticism firewall. And to begin with an avoidance of visiting malicious sites. I would like to leave what a malicious site is up to the reader; but as an example I will offer: dealing with companies and their advertisers. I would view them as sites infecting you with malware, clogging up your processes and spamming you with, believe it or not, ads. The goal, of the parties attempting to take advantage of art's weaknesses, are as I see it not to steal information, as is common with computer hacking, but rather to disperse information and in some sense modify the state of mind of the receiving system. Naturally, the goal of getting money is also part of the reason why people would want to label input as art. Some of my works heavily feature brands and companies. How could I possibly justify having them there? If I previously said never to associate with such filth. The main reason is because I care very much and would like to see if someone will call me out on it. In the analogy of computer security one might see the brands as planted flags. A test to see where there are weaknesses for me to later point and say that I don't believe that I should have been able to do that.

## **Conclusion**

### *Outro/farewell*

Throughout this text I've been taking a rather reductive stance. This is in part to provoke. As I believe people respond more to provocation than when reading a text which they readily agree with. I also believe that the stronger a person's response, the more firmly are the ideas embedded in their heads. Whether people agree with them or not. I have no wish for people to agree with me. Only that they are aware and bare in mind what this text is about. But is a reductionist approach really the best towards art? Even as a reductionist I think I have to say no. If I follow the reductionist path to its conclusion. Where art is simply a form of entertainment, where nothing really matters except to individuals as subjective experiences and emotional responses. Which is what most things we humans engage

in end up being. I think having a richer albeit erroneous view on what art is can be of benefit to the person experiencing it. Sometimes it's better to take the blue pill, stay in the matrix, and enjoy the proverbial steak. I do however think that for some, like for me, knowing that no real animals were slaughtered makes this not only easier but at all possible. Peeking behind the curtain to see that there isn't much there makes it easier to enjoy the show. I also think that taking a reductionist stance still only gives you the answers which our limited minds are able to muster up. The scope of unknown answers to the same questions are still vast. The apparent danger with a reductionist approach is that answers seem to dry up the well of questions. A person who has reduced something to its core may be incapable of seeing further questions to be answered. When the road has been followed the reductionist might see only a dead end. While the creative might start trekking through the wilderness. One can however be creative and a doubter. I've doubted a lot of things during the writing of this, I have recurrently doubted the text itself. The purpose of it, its format, and its academic value. I've doubted art's place in academia or rather academia's place in art. To still my doubts regarding the purpose of the text I have periodically turned to a pragmatic "I need to write something to pass" and on the flip side of that I have periodically seen the pleasure of writing out my thoughts as purpose enough in itself. I have never thought that the text will have any meaning or value as knowledge. I have no proofs for many of my theories, they are in essence beliefs, and sometimes conspiracy theories. They are inherently good to doubt. Even what I believe I understand, in regards to how I think I know how I think, and function, is questionable. The text has more value as prose. Like how the sentence before the previous one is entertainment, as well as trying to show that I doubt my beliefs of how I function. And as such I've doubted writing it. For not wanting to add more semi-entertaining fluff to the world. The format of an academic text, a thesis, an essay, seems to be ridiculous in an art context. Art historic texts could possibly be of some academic interest. But I have no interest in writing a text about art history. The problem doesn't lie in the fact that art as an academic subject couldn't be truthful and provide valuable information. Though I will always distrust artists as sources of information. The main problem is that it is expected from persons who are interested in making art rather than being academicians. The fact that these persons can be mixed with non-artist academicians. Who from an outsider's point of view are willing to work with art as a subject. Makes it difficult to believe either. Another personal gripe I have is when academicians use artistic



means in their academic endeavors. Something that is likely to happen if they are given the opportunity. If something is portrayed as art or presented in an artistic manner I become a skeptic in regards to its academic value as well as the presentation's artistic intentions. Artists have no burden of proof. Art obfuscates as much as it illustrates. Art made to serve as a Trojan horse for academic ideas doesn't paint the art nor the ideas in a good light. Perhaps this is why I wrote about doubt. I doubted whether I ought to write something claiming to be academic, in relation to art making, so that was the only thing I could write about with a clear conscience. Something which cast itself in a bad light and throws rocks in its own glass house. While I doubt the academic value of this written text, I still believe there is some form of value in there somewhere. Writing about this doubt has lead me to finding uses for it. It has lead me to believe that I ought to encourage doubting. It has lead to more learning. It has for good or ill lead to being less impressionable. It has lead to some poorly thought through beliefs being erased. And some ideas being reaffirmed with more reasons to believe them. I believe doubt can do this for others too. While I didn't want to resort to the hyperbolic doubt that "we can't know anything" I believe I have to. It has always made me more doubting of the little non-hyperbolic things as well. Perhaps this Cartesian doubt is not only a mental *cul-de-sac* where we can give up on investigation, but also an encouragement that everything is in fact up for exploration. If not for absolute knowledge then for what little justifiable belief we may gather. For the benefits these decent explanations may lead us to. And simply for the experience of quelling doubt. While I might not know in the future if I did, and I couldn't even have been sure I would, and if my memory and eyes deceived me, I'll always have to doubt whether or not I ended this very sentence. But I did.

### **A supervisor note for Christoffer Rutström essay, Gabriel Nils Edvinsson.**

I believe that Christoffer has found a utensil in his artistic toolbox which he calls doubt. In the essay, he clearly illustrates how he uses doubt to create questions and how we can do the same. I think of artistic processes and that often this notion of doubt or what Christoffer calls doubt, can be called criticism/critic. Many use criticism in the same way he uses doubt, in several ways. It reminds us of language, and how we as living beings on this earth communicate with each other and that the failure in understanding each other is that we have different understandings of words. Depending on what we have seen, what we have heard and touched etc. Christoffer's text gives us the reader a way to understand his beliefs of what the word doubt means for him as an artist and expands it for the reader. Christoffer's text and works speak about cynicism in the art world, humor, pretentiousness in the arts, anti-academia, aesthetics. And maybe most importantly, the text explores ideas about what art is, what is art, and why is it art? In the text, Christoffer puts forward the idea that art is a virus that operates in our brains. It is interesting to consider this notion that we as artists are infected with this virus. A virus that constantly feeds our heads with the messages that some idea or happening is art for some reason. We are left with ourselves and our virus, and we doubt if something is art. The notion that something is art when the artist says it's art is widespread. Rutström asks another question that is not as common amongst our culture; It is not art when the artist says it's not. Even though it is hard to agree with the text at times, some of the work Rutström presents as none art can easily be turned into art, if contextualized as such?

The works mentioned in the text are accompanied by a set of rules for what art is. This becomes a set of meta-game rules for the reader to have in mind as we go along with Christoffer's reasoning why something is an art or why it is not. Humor is of most importance in Rutström's work, maybe it is the most important, even though the set of rules do not have a hierarchy. Maybe it is because of the rule; *Good art is fun*. This says something about what drives Rutström's art-making. At times the text is funny. It could be perceived as a work of art itself if fun was the only criterion for art. All works of art or crafts mentioned in the text are funny. Some more than others: the work that gets the biggest laugh is the work 'What is art? Baby don't hurt me.' The title riffs on the famous disco hit song

'What is love,' by Haddaway. The dryness of Rutström's video compared to the sparkling disco song he borrows the title from is funny, but it is not the only thing that is funny. It is also the question of what art is with the followed 'don't hurt me,' as in 'Please answer what art is, but please think about what you write so I (the artist) don't get hurt. As if there could be an answer to the proposed question that could hurt? What would that be? Followed up with a neat drawing of a coffee cup and the aphorism – ART IS IMAGES. The stated aphorism seems random but also true. And then for some reason, the image drawn by the woman in the video is scanned by obsolete technology, and the image is spitted out from a printer and nailed to the wall. There is something funny about how the actor politely submits to this task of drawing, waiting, and hanging the image. Worth mentioning as well is the set of three images, fig N, fig O, and fig P which embodies its own set of rules that asks of us viewers to agree or to disagree if the image of the cat is art. The other pictures are not art, proposes the artist. Showed together in the same context makes it funny but also interesting because the three of them seem to need each other to make up this game. Is the image of the cat art without its two neighbors?

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### **Music:**

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### **Online Videos:**

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### Documentation list

- Fig A. “Everybody poops, Everyone can make art”. 2020. Toilet roll and acrylic paint.
- Fig B. “Art to buy for friends you don’t like”. 2020. Toilet roll and acrylic paint.
- Fig C. “Gold of the gaps”. 2020. Plastic cup and acrylic paint.
- Fig D. “Hair of the dog”. 2020. Empty beer can, acrylic paint and human hair.
- Fig E. “Hold my beard”. 2020. Empty beer can, acrylic paint and human hair.
- Fig F. Still from documentation of the work “What is art? Baby don’t hurt me”. 2020. Canon A1 Boardcopier, Whiteboard marker, A4 paper. Actor: Catarina Rutström, Cinematographer: Ingemar Rutström.
- Fig G. Still from documentation of the work “What is art? Baby don’t hurt me”. 2020. Canon A1 Boardcopier, Whiteboard marker, A4 paper . Actor: Catarina Rutström, Cinematographer: Ingemar Rutström.
- Fig H. Still from documentation of the work “What is art? Baby don’t hurt me”. 2020. Canon A1 Boardcopier, Whiteboard marker, A4 paper. Actor: Catarina Rutström, Cinematographer: Ingemar Rutström.
- Fig. I. Still from video documentation of “Clap(with reverberation)/simple\_music”. 2020. Boss DR-220, Electro-Harmonix Attack Decay, Zoom MS-70 CDR, Orange Micro Crush, a 9-volt adapter with a daisy-chain power-splitter and four quarter-inch mono-jack cables.
- Fig J. Still from video documentation of “Hunting focus, Snapping shutter”. 2020. Nikon D800, Nikon D700, two contact microphones, Zoom MS-70 CDR, Danelectro surf & turf, Danelectro fish & chips, Boss DD-3, a 9-volt adapter with a daisy-chain power-splitter, five quarter-inch mono-jack cables and an Orange Micro Crush.
- Fig K. “A buzzing of fascina”. 2020. Dildo, power chord, wood glue and dead flies.
- Fig. L. “A buzzing of fascina”. 2020. Dildo, power chord, wood glue and dead flies.
- Fig. M. “Side-step critique and repeat”. 2020. Large sheet of heavy duty paper, Paper napkins, acrylic paint, masking tape, two tripods, a camera light, smartphone holder, mp3-player, quarter-inch mono-jack cable, quarter-inch mono-jack to 3.5mm stereo-jack converter and a guitar amp.
- Fig. N. Photo of a paper with the stenciled text reading:“Man, imagine if some famous artist would’ve made this, woah, it’d be pretty good then!”. 2020.
- Fig. O. Photo of a framed paper featuring the stencil of a silhouette of a woman. 2020.
- Fig. P . “Ats”. 2020. acrylic paint on A4 paper.

## **Extra material**

### *Author's video material*

#### **Author's documentation videos:**

Clap(with reverberation)/simple\_music (2020) - <https://vimeo.com/446200923>

Hunting Focus, Snapping Shutter (2020) - <https://vimeo.com/446208283>

What is art? Baby don't hurt me (2020) - <https://vimeo.com/446199921>

#### **Author's video artwork:**

Side-step critique and repeat (2020) - <https://vimeo.com/446198865>



## CV

### *Contact information*

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### *Education*

2018-20....: MFA studies in the Contemporary Art programme at EKA, Tallinn, Estonia.

2015-2018: BFA studies in Photography at Valand Academy, Gothenburg, Sweden.

2013-2015: Studied photography at YRGO, Gothenburg, Sweden.

2008-2010: Studied documentary photography at Hola folkhögskola, Prästmon, Sweden.

### *Exhibitions*

2019: Organised a 3-day open call cassette recording studio and library, “Kassetiputka” (“The cassette kiosk”) together with Liis Ring at UIT Linnafestival (UIT City Festival), Tartu, Estonia.

2019: Performed, held a workshop and exhibited works during a one day “GAR(B)AAŽ” festival, Tallinn, Estonia.

2019: Acted in and made music for Liina Siib’s “Augusta or Politics of Paradise”

2018: Participated in a group show called “exhibition/non-exhibition/exhibition” with six works, gallery monitor.

2018: Showed eight works at “Next to the Ocean”, graduation show of BFA, MFA and PhD students of Valand Academy, Röda Sten Konsthall, Gothenburg. Held artist talks about my works. Held a workshop together with three classmates on the theme of “cameraless photography”.

2018: Curated and participated in the show “kom!” (“come!”) with Johan Melander and Liis Ring in gallery Rotor 2, Gothenburg. Held artist talk regarding the show.

2017: Solo exhibition “Prospective”, gallery Rotor 2. Held artist talk regarding the show.

2017: Exhibited “teaser: title subject to change” in the group exhibition “Humour in dark times”, gallery Rotor 2.

2017: Performed the work “The shaving” at artist collective KollektivGladboll’s spring exhibition, gallery Rotor 2.

2017: Contributed to BFA 2 spring exhibition with the works “500ms” and “photograph sloppily retouched to remove details”, gallery Monitor, Gothenburg.

2017: Showed the work “tinderkungen” at the group exhibition “safe space 2”, gallery Rotor 2.

2016: Twice performed the 4 hour piece “Teaching Steffen Kloster Poulsen: Wonderwall” at the show “Durational and marathon art”, gallery A-venue, Gothenburg.

2016: Curated and participated, with the works “Kallifatet”, “Offerkoftan” and “Tiger of sweden”, in the group exhibition “safe space”, gallery Monitor.

2016: Showed the work “determinism” as part of an exhibition in gallery Monitor in connection to Gothenburg photo book festival.

2014: Contributed with an interactive installation called “What does the image represent?” to an exam show at Gothenburg City Library.

2010: Showed parts of a work done photographing commuters in Gothenburg in a group exhibition at Härnösands länsmuseum.

#### *Work*

2020-2021: Internship at Ljudverket, a sound art museum for Gabriel Nils Edvinsson.

2019: Two month internship at gallery fg2 for Klara Källström and Thobias Fäldt.

2015: Assistant to Anders Edström, including filming of “The work and Days (of Tayoko Shiojii in the Shiotani Basin)” in Japan and Stockholm, Winner of Encounters award at Berlin International Film Festival 2020. And preparing his book “Hanezawa Garden” for release (published by Mack).

2013: Interned as a local newspaper photographer for Mölndals Posten.

2012: Interned at Qpix.

2005: Worked at Super Cool, a company that manufactured cooling units.

2001: Summer job at Volvo Lastvagnar

#### *Other practice*

2019: Co-organised and held the course “Contemporary Art in Estonia” at Eesti Kunsti Akademia.

2018: Academy Valand fine art summer course on the theme: “What’s hidden in history” I will be working on the role of the jester in past and present society.

Teacher: André Alves

2018: Wrote essay on art without free will.

2017: Academy Valand fine art summer course on the theme: “Humour in dark times” worked on the theme of the artist as a parallel to the stalker from the book “roadside picnic”; my “zone” was for the summer the store Lidl.

Teacher: Leslie Johnsson

2016: Academy Valand photography summer course: photographic project work, translated a Baudelaire poem into images, printed on receipt printer.

Teachers: Klara Källström & Tobias Fäldt

2004-2005: Assistant hockey coach for Bäckens HC J16