

## Into the Woods with Heidegger Reflections about an Artistic-Academic Experiment

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**Abstract:** *This article is an academic reflection about a video project that I conducted in the summer of 2016. The video documents my collaboration with artist Thomas Wolsing. My ambition for this collaboration was to discover and experience interlacements between, on the one hand, art theory (epitomized by some sentences of Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art") and on the other hand, artistic and physical-constructional work that is building a land art piece. The article cites and reflects on dialogues and monologues presented in the video by discussing the mutual dependence between and incompatibilities of art theory and art making. The conceptual cornerstone of the discussion is the notion of embodiment as outlined by Edgar Wind and Fischer-Lichte augmented by Barad's related notion of agential intra-action. The article discusses the experienced integration of physical and discursive actions that, in the moment of performance, are elusive and refute any ethical assessment.*

**Keywords:** *Aesthetics, Art, Practice, Heidegger, Edgar Wind, Embodiment, Ethics.*

### 1. Video documentary and Academic Reflection

This article is an academic reflection about a video project that I conducted in the summer of 2016. The project was part of a bigger framework, entitled *Constructions and Emergence*, that created a framework for artists and scientists/scholars to meet and collaborate. Five collaborating teams were formed. The pieces resulting from these collaborations between artists and scientists were exhibited and presented at the LandShape Festival 2016, a land art festival funded by the region of North Jutland (KulturKanten). The LandShape Festival also exhibited other works of land art commissioned and selected by a curatorial team. I worked with the Danish artist Thomas Wolsing.

All the footage was made with a GoPro camera mounted on my head. The dialogues, monologues, and visuals are the result of improvised encounters between Thomas Wolsing and myself. In addition, I used on-the-fly selected sentences of Heidegger's seminal essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" to create an encounter between not only two persons including their physical actions, but also between an artwork in the construction phase and excerpts from art theory. These encounters played out in the forest. This article follows the edited video in which I

have retained the chronology of the occurrences. Far from the whole raw footage found its way into the final video: many dialogues and oral reflections were omitted, and some shortened in order to create a somewhat interesting dramaturgy and a coherent thematic development.

As already hinted at, the project has two different documentary outcomes: a video and a conventional text-based article (the latter being this text) each using very different media with their respective affordances. A written article accommodates extended discursive reflections, descriptions, and references, whereas the medium of the video provides for a narrative representation of a situation's complexity in regard to the depicted material conditions, the diegetic sounds of the forest, the human participants' actions, and the interpersonal occurrences and dialogues. The recording of the intonation of my uttered words in conjunction with a point-of-view shot of my movements and actions better transmits my shifting emotional states ranging from curiosity to despair and hopelessness in regards to my set objective. The text format, on the other hand, caters for the construction of conceptual-discursive frameworks within which the descriptions of the concrete occurrences and experiences are merely jumping pads for abstract theoretical explanations.<sup>1</sup> As the etymology of the term ex-planation suggests, this inevitably results in a necessary reduction of complexity and the construction of an intelligible and academically reflected theoretical world as a tool for comprehension.

But let me commence with the transcription of the beginning of the video. In the video, I am standing in the middle of the forest, where I have agreed to meet with the artist Thomas Wolsing for our first day of the project. He drove his red car near to the spot in the middle of the forest where he wanted to construct the planned piece of art. We had met several times before in order to discuss the framework and objectives of our collaboration. The transcript starts with a short explanation of the envisioned collaboration, its focus, and goals.

*Falk: Here is Thomas Wolsing and his red car and ... he is the artist and is taking a lot of plant pots out of his car. We have begun our collaboration a bit late, meaning that the founding concept of the artwork has been done by Thomas. I was not part of the concept development process. My collaboration will consist of helping Thomas build and install this piece of land art here in the middle of the wood. What is the piece's name, Thomas?*

*Thomas: It's: Erhernogen (Engl: Istheresomebody) Parenthesis: still-life. Nature morte.*

*Falk: Ok. I want to document my experiences of the process. I will talk during the process, also with Thomas, asking questions, expressing reflections and how it feels to practically help Thomas construct the art piece. As already said, I am a scholar doing research within art theory. I have read a fair bit of theoretical books, such as Martin Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art". I was thinking that I will read some of his paragraphs, some of his sentences, once in a while, in-between, when I feel it would fit, read them and reflect on them a bit in relation to what I am doing in the moment: concretely helping Thomas construct the piece. I have forgotten to say that I am hoping that my theoretical understanding will in one way or another be influenced by the practical part of*

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<sup>1</sup> "late 14c., from Latin explanationem (nominative explanatio) "an explanation, interpretation," noun of action from past participle stem of explanare "to make plain or clear, explain," literally "make level, flatten," from ex "out" (see *ex-*) + planus "flat" (from PIE root *\*pele-* (2) "flat; to spread")" (Harper 2001-2018). Within a visual, pictorial discourse of imagination, making plane necessitates the reduction from three dimensional to two-dimensional representations that transforms objects to more or less generic signs and transforms them from being obstacles to way points necessary for further moves and actions.

*building, wielding something, to feel the material and form, to feel, hm... maybe there will be associations, which I might not have had if I only had read his [Heidegger's] text*

My ambition was to discover personal interlacements between, on the one hand, art theory, epitomized by some Heidegger quotes and my in situ reading of them and, on the other hand, artistic creational and construction work and processes. My intent was to find very personal points of convergence or even common points of emergence of the artistic-creational act and art theory. From the very beginning, I imagined that this field of convergence must be located in or emerge from my performing body.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Dependencies and Distinctions

The application of art theory to concrete production work has proven to be a difficult endeavor in many art universities and universities with artistic programs. There is a historical division of labor between the art academies and the universities. The reflective part of art has clearly been allocated to the universities. Here, art is seen as a cultural expression of societies that has to be formulated and expressed with the help of academic-hermeneutic analyses bringing about knowledge-producing theories and contextualization. On the other hand, the concrete-creative methods of art production have been allocated to art schools of all kinds yielding artistic competences to be used in the materializing of inspiration and craftsmanship, be that a painting, music or sound, theatre, or other forms of artistic event. Artists produce works of art that, with Luhmann<sup>3</sup>, can show the world that there are other possibilities than the actual ones at a given moment. The autonomy of art (in Western societies since the 19<sup>th</sup> century) does not only secure a foundational purposelessness of art making in regard to societal needs and challenges, but it also shields the artist from demands of academic reason and causal-logical methods of production. Therefore, autonomous art, so it is claimed, can transcend existing discourses.

Switching back to academics, art theorists analyze and interpret art pieces uncovering not only their internal structures and *modi operandi*, but their possible significances as an attempt to make them relevant for society and its members. However, the relationship between art making and art theory is not linear and unidirectional. Academia is not only interpreting existing pieces of art, academia is also synthesizing and voicing artistic problems; this is another outcome of academic reflective endeavor.<sup>4</sup> Collenberg-Plotnikov, following the German philosopher and art historian Edgar Wind, seems to hint at art and art theory intrinsically forming a circular dependency. In Wind's book *Art and Anarchy*<sup>5</sup>, he laments that modern art is a secluded way of producing art and points to, for example, Renaissance art that also had educational purpose and

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2 In this context, my performing body refers to myself constructing the piece within the conceptual framework of my project. It is neither acting in the theatrical sense or a mere doing. The performing body is not operating flesh in Merleau-Ponty's understanding. The performing body is rather bringing about manifestations initiated by the conceptual framework, my proprioceptions and associations, and academic questions.

My academic take on the performing body is informed by performance studies and the notion of performativity (Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance, The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (London, New York: Routledge, 2008); Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory, Performance Theory* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003); Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs, Gender and Science: New Issues*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2003), 801–31) and aesthetics, especially somaesthetics (Richard Shusterman, 'Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57.3 (1999), 299–313).

3 Niklas Luhmann, 'The Medium of Art', *Thesis Eleven*, 18–19 (1987).

4 Collenberg-Plotnikov, Bernadette, 'Forschung Als Verkörperung', in *Wie Verändert Sich Kunst, Wenn Man Sie Als Forschung Versteht?*, ed. by Judith Siegmund (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2016).

5 Edgar Wind, *Art and Anarchy* (Evanston, USA: Northwestern University Press, 1985).

where patronage did not solely mean financial support, but also demands and discussions about artworks to be. If we were to believe Wind, this raised artistic quality and gave art a position in society.<sup>6,7</sup> Also, Shusterman states that art theoreticians partake in making art history through “the interventions of theorists, whose views have traditionally been central to the creative and critical context in which artists, critics, and art historians function.”<sup>8</sup>

Wind sees the cultural significance of art in the ability of embodiment (“Verkörperung”). Works of art can be seen as materialization – as artistic answers – to questions that cannot be solved by thought proper. Embodiment gives a necessary resistance to thought. Artistic questions are always means and products of thoughts. These questions might be asked by the artist himself or herself, but they are most poignantly (and often retrospectively) formulated by university academics. Art as cultural production is far from a solitary endeavor but, if it should serve any cultural and epistemological purpose, must be seen as a complex collaboration between a whole range of actors, where academic research definitely has a role to play. The same goes for any theoretical endeavor: theory too, being the production of structured thoughts, needs to be transformed and made observable as materialization of a kind. This might be in the form of artworks, any cultural artifacts, and the experiments of natural science.

This might seem to be a rather simplified functional relationship between academia and art and, most certainly, there are many more aspects, both personal stimuli and societal conditions, that eventually lead to the making of works of art. However, in my reading, Wind seems to suggest that academic analysis is not only a post-factual, interpretive endeavor, but that academic reflection also plays a prospective role in the production of art. Definitely, art does not (and should not) illustrate art and/or aesthetic theories, however, it is reasonable to claim that there is a dialogue, a mutual inspirational process going on and that art and human sciences presuppose each other (at least in the present societal constellation).

This is even more relevant today, where art academies aspire to be research institutions conducting artistic research. This development (re-)ignites the discussion about the differences and communalities of academic and artistic research and about how we operationalize and bring into play our respective competences (see, for example, Badura; Borgdorff; Savin-Baden & Wimpenny).<sup>9</sup> The simple fact that artistic research demands an artistic problem formulation or a hypothesis of a kind or, even more rudimentary, a specified and articulated field of interest, whose importance must be validated through a contextualization of the artistic process and product, shows that theoretical (reflective) dimensions are an intrinsic part of art making. Expressed the other way around but equally true, art making and art reception are intrinsically reflective enterprises that allow us to engage in an interplay of perceptions and significances, precisely because art, on a basic level, serves the materialization of the imaginary that circles around the fruitful dependency between rationality (the sensible) and irrationality (the not-

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6 Wind, 1985, p. 62

7 Luhmann has a similar take on art seen from the perspective of sociology. He asserts that artworks are elements of the social system of art in line with other system participants such as the audience, the critics, institutions, funding bodies, etc. Artists' seclusion and autonomy is an ambition supported – and also perforated – by all the other system participants. According to Luhmann, modern art during the 20<sup>th</sup> century has begun to incorporate the very question of its social positions, purposes, modes of communication, and significances into art making (Niklas Luhmann, ‘The Medium of Art’, *Thesis Eleven*, 18–19 (1987)., thus creating reflective anchors (in terms of society). In my view, this is (partly) a result of the merger of art academies and universities in the Anglo-American societies and forms the basis for recent discussion about artistic research (see further down in the article).

8 Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000) p. 45

9 Badura, Jens, ‘Erkenntnis (Sinnliche)’, in *Künstlerische Forschung - Ein Handbuch*, ed. by Jens Bdaura, Selma Dubach, Anke Haarmann, Dieter Mersch, Anton Rey, Christoph Schenker, and others (Zürich: diaphanes, 2015); Borgdorff, Henk, ‘The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research’, in *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, ed. by M. Biggs and H. Karlsson (London, New York: Routledge, 2010); Savin-Baden, Maggi, and Katherine Wimpenny, *A Practical Guide to Arts-Related Research* (Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense Publishers, 2014)

structured).<sup>10</sup>

But does that mean that artistic research will take over the role and competences of academic research, because the artistic researcher will incorporate these dimensions into art making proper? What, then, remains for the academic scholar? This is, of course, a vanity question. Collenberg-Plotnikov's differentiation is an attempt to characterize societal-functional differences. Of course, this generalized model cannot account for the many concrete incidences, where both artists and academics try to enlarge their field by incorporating the other side. During the past decades, one could observe a kind of beating around the bush by academic and artistic researchers in an attempt to find new distinctions. Artistic researchers have tried to define what artistic research is in comparison to academic research by experimenting with and testing different combinations of and weighings of the resulting work of art and different means of explicit reflection (e.g., documentation report, thesis, discussion, presentation) as research outcome. This is most evident in the different national requirements for artistic PhD programs (see for instance, Biggs & Karlson<sup>11</sup>).

On the other hand, even though academic results are most often disseminated through scholarly journals and books, academics were never prohibited from also engaging in artistic practice. That does not mean that there is still an old finger-wagging man admonishing us to keep the reflective-analytical distance to the artwork. But for many musicologists, for example, it is quite natural to play an instrument and/or to compose music. Some theatre researchers do engage in theatre productions as dramaturge, director, etc. And can universities forbid art historians from painting or curating? Therefore, on a personal level, both artists and university scholars engage in multiple ways with their fields of interest and expertise without respecting professional boundaries. Explicitly or not, experiences made in the 'other' disciplinary field will have an influence on both an artist's and a scholar's work and thinking. And it is precisely the complexity of personal involvement with the common field (of art as cultural and communicative creations) that allows for a necessary manifold of both artistic and academic outputs.

In the last passages, I have tried to set the stage for my elaboration. On this stage, I find the notion "Verkörperung" (embodiment) intriguing and it shall henceforth be the focal point of this article. Indeed, it is not a new concept and can be found in many texts on art and especially artistic research, simply because art is about the creation of an artifact, a material or otherwise tangible and concrete manifestation (painting, sculptures, installations, music or theatre performances, events/happenings – just to mention a few). However, the fact that academic research, be it in natural or human sciences, also is in need of this "Verkörperung" is a disregarded phenomenon, especially within the humanities. The natural sciences have their various forms of experiments that embody and materialize their academic research questions and give the necessary resistance and indeterminacy necessary for theory formation. The natural scientist Rheinberger calls this "nicht-fokale Aufmerksamkeit".<sup>12</sup>

Evidently, art theory is dependent on works of art (as many human sciences are empirically dependent on cultural artifacts of various kinds). This relation is normally seen as unidirectional, where the artwork is the pre-given subject matter for academic analyses. Human sciences 'post-artifactually' unravel the significances and inner workings of art and present them as discursive knowledge, as generalized propositions. However, I, in line with Wind, Collenberg-Plotnikov and

10 Collenberg-Plotnikov, 2016, p. 79

11 Biggs, Michael, and Henrik Karlson, 'Evaluating Quality in Artistic Research', in *Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, ed. by Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlson (London, New York: Routledge, 2011)

12 Rheinberger, Hans-Jörg, *Iterations* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 2005) p. 72



Shusterman (to name some), claim that works of art also serve as the embodiment of questions produced (but not exclusively) in art theory. In this regard, theories always produce questions (and not propositions), simply because all abstract and generalized propositions necessarily are hypotheses that have to be verified by the particularity of life. In art theory, artworks are most often used as referenced examples that seem to incorporate and thus make plausible the hypotheses of the theory in question. In this sense, all theories are creating the works of art they are referring to. In order to be embodiments, theories have to conjure up artworks as perceptual objects or “Gebilde” in Gadamer’s sense<sup>13</sup>, a form of “ideality” (or the ideality of artistic form) based on a conceptual structure that allows for hermeneutic participation. Only if a theory succeeds in creating its referenced artworks as perceptual imaginations, that is, as physiological occurrences, then the embodiment of theory has succeeded. Expressed a bit differently, I claim that any theory cries out for incarnation and wishes to be merged with the materiality of the world.<sup>14</sup>

For example, Heidegger’s essay on the origin of the work of art refers several times to the Greek temple and also to Van Gogh’s painting of worn-out shoes. Heidegger almost conjures up the decisive world-establishing significance of the temple by letting us recollect images of temples that incorporate perceptions of, for example, the rocky ground it is (and we are) standing on and indirectly the heat of the sun and so forth. He is almost arousing our capability to physically feel the shoes as a particular thing and their inherent thingness as a specific tool. A work of art works (performs) by creating our world that lets us reflectively experience the situated constituents of our world. Also, Heidegger’s far more abstract passages on art show and let us experience the combat between world and earth, wherein the earth reads and feels as palpable materiality that is always in the process of concealment, of negating any obvious significances and therefore remains sensuously material. Of course, for Heidegger, the earth is first of all a metaphor, namely a metaphor for the agency of hiding, of remaining unknown and dark. Nevertheless, his description of Van Gogh’s shoes connotes the concealing – and therefore fertile – earth. And in his description of the Greek temple, “the rocky ground”<sup>15</sup> becomes the ever-concealing earth, whereas the temple opened up a world for the Greek society and citizen, as long as the Gods were present in the temple.

But I am jumping ahead of myself and the video. In my performative experiment, I wanted to try to embody bits and pieces of (one specific) theory of art through the physical work of construction of an artwork; not by bringing art theory and emerging artwork into a hermeneutical alignment, but rather by searching for instances of embodiment where thought and physical construction are two sides of the same coin. What these instances of embodiment could look like, I had at this point in the video no idea whatsoever. The experimental setting was very simple; I participated actively in the construction of the artwork while reflecting on the artwork-to-be by citing and interpreting Heidegger’s essay. I wanted to embody Heidegger’s thoughts by bringing them into the concrete situation of physical construction work.

A whimsical aspect of my aim is that Wind detested Heidegger. He accused him of “[seeking] to replace critical analysis with contemplative declarations.”<sup>16</sup> In his polemical essay “Jean-Paul Sartre: A French Heidegger,” he heavily attacks Heidegger (and Sartre) by writing that “[t]he

13 Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Die Aktualität Des Schönen* (Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 1977) p. 44

14 Wind asserts that the experiments of natural science embody their theories through the act of measurement. The apparatus of measurement becomes the materialization of thought and theoretical assumptions that, paradoxically, predetermine our notion of reality.

15 Heidegger, Martin, *Basic Writings* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993) p. 166

16 Wind, 2001, p. vi

dismissal of lucidity, of rationality, of any harmonious sense of existence as ‘unauthentic’ is one of the most vicious pieces of sophistry that M. Sartre has taken over from Heidegger.”<sup>17</sup> Wind sees in Heidegger’s adoration of darkness (concealment) the philosophical argument for his active support of National Socialism.

For Wind, embodiment of art is realized through *aisthesis*, the sensuous experiences and appreciation of the artwork. “There is only one test of the artistic significance of an interpretation: it must sharpen our appreciation of the objects and thus enhance our aesthetic pleasure.”<sup>18</sup> He sees embodiment as a process of rationality, of hermeneutics on the basis of symbols and forms. Art ultimately is embodiment of thoughts that rigorous interpretation can pleurably decipher by bringing into rational clarity the significances of formal composition and historic contextualization. Evidently, he is talking as an art historian at a time when artistic research was not a topic. The science of art found embodiment in existing works of art.

### 3. Questions, artistic embodiments and body actions

Back to the video: a summer forest with an abundance of moss, fern, and mainly coniferous trees. The first day of our encounter in the forest was a warm and pleasant day. Everything was green.

*Falk: Ok, Thomas, what should I do?*

*Thomas: We have to put these pots in this area over there. We should put each beside a fern.*

Thomas and I carried some plant pots from his car to the selected site, approximately sixty meters from the narrow stony path. The forest was not a very dense one, rather light and spacy. Thomas had chosen a spot with a lot of ferns. While carrying the pots into the forest, Thomas explained:

*Thomas: It is like that, that, my idea for this project was that [this forest], a beautiful area with summer cottages [pause] obviously, this is an industrial, planted forest, but we call it nature [...] It is a recreational area, where tourists like to come [...]. And furthermore, I am very fascinated by these ferns here, and moss. Moss and ferns were the first plants on the earth – from the origin of life. When you look at a fern like this one, as long as it is planted in the earth, is it termed nature, but when it is in a pot, is it called culture, part of civilisation. That is why I thought what we will do is dig up the ferns, plant them in the pots, widen the hole in the ground and put the pots into them.*

*Falk: Ok.*

*Thomas: When we do this at many spots, it can provoke the public’s curiosity - yes – that is to say, something is happening here, something different. Let us continue with this idea.*

*Falk: And we do not know whether the pot is coming out of the earth or whether, precisely, it is put into the earth.*

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Wind, 1985, p.62

*Thomas: So, nature is human-made, at the border of nature and civilisation. I think that is interesting and I was thinking of working with this in the project.*



**Figure 1:** Still from the video article: Into the Woods with Heidegger – A video article

Thomas Wolsing has been working for a while with the special culture and atmosphere of provincial areas, namely parts of the country where there does not seem to be any economic and cultural progress. These are the areas where the young people move away towards the metropolises and industrial centers and where only the elder and uneducated people remain. In these areas, many houses are abandoned and slowly deteriorating, time seems to stand still. His idea for this project, is to erect a summer cottage of decay in the middle of the forest; a cottage that is in the process of being swallowed up by the forest, the forest soil, and its plants. The dialogue between him and me shows not only his thematic focus, namely the distinction and relationship between nature and culture or civilization, but that he is looking for concrete materializations of these thoughts that are able to entail the complexity not of thoughts, but rather the complexity and indeterminacy of his experiences that his thoughts arise from and that his thoughts want to capture. In order to have a playground for his (and others') thinking, he wanted to create a particular situation that could nurture his questions about the distinction and relation between nature and culture. This situation should embody his thoughts by being an artistic answer in the form of a concrete work that yet is distinctively undetermined and polysemic. Thomas has encountered the planted pot idea; a pot that grows out of the forest floor and that contains the most ancient plants to be found in this forest – moss and fern.

Until now, Thomas' idea was only a concept and not yet a full artistic answer: because we had not externalized and materialized the idea, we had not planted the ferns into the pot and the pot into the forest floor.

*Thomas: Let us try to – it is tempting to dig one up.*

*Falk: (digging a hole) Shall I dig more?*

*Thomas: Yes, in there. Fine sand, isn't it.*

*Falk: Yes, sand.*

*Thomas: Fantastic. We'll try to place it [the pot] back again. It's almost like it's in a shop for decorations. Haha. Let's see. Exciting. It's quite amusing, isn't it? Yeah. It's quite effective, isn't it?*



Falk: Yes.

Thomas: One takes something, manipulates it and puts it back again; then, it is completely modified. And I have thought a lot about whether I should plant a pot; but in a way, I think, one associates the fern and moss with this here [pointing at the forest]. It's strange, isn't it? No. The only thing that is strange is the pot. And pot signifies culture. How one blends....

Falk: Hmm, yea. But when we are in our gardens, we have a lot of pots, at least many have, but one experiences them not as culture, but more as... also as nature, as something that is different than the city and urban space that has another logic and atmosphere.

Thomas: It is quite exciting, when there begins ... civilisation or when begins this site ... a cultivation of this environment.

Falk: I think it is quite fascinating, as I said before, that one can make the association that these pots come out of the earth and are not put into the ground. They grow out of the earth like ferns. I want to question the distinction between nature and culture, one that we are socialized into. Also, what we do, that we craft culture. To generate culture is our nature, somehow.

Thomas: It is pretty. Yes. It looks good.

The planted pot is a paradoxical statement that plays itself out in-between perception and semiotics. The pot is a human-made container that allows us to grow nature in artificial environments (such as houses and terraces) and is therefore a sign for human endeavor and thus culture. The planted pot with fern and moss disturbs our normal categorization of nature and culture, it inscribes the latter into the former and vice versa. The artistic embodiment of thought (forming questions) led to a situated tableau where the pots and plants are estranged – with Shklovsky's word *ostrenje*<sup>19</sup> – by fiddling with their habitual context. In this constructed situation, we perceive the pot either as an almost naturally growing thing or as artificially planted cultural distinction between nature and nature (that seems to become culture). This distinction is a quite literal separation line (a clay wall) between the same (nature) that demands a categorical displacement on one side: either the planted fern is now a part of culture or the forest floor is a part of culture. Taking the round form of the pot into consideration, most likely we will consider the fern in the pot as cultural artifact. Thomas associated it with a decorating shop, which amused us. Important is that the embodied idea can be considered an artistic answer, but only if the answer itself constitutes a playground for further questions and thoughts and not definitive answers. Artistic embodiments spur cognitive indeterminacies and associations, recollections, imaginations, etc. Embodiment means here a structured but not hierarchized and not categorized simultaneity of well-selected constituents that together aspire to a transient whole. The constituents are both material objects (the pot, the fern, the moss), the place (the venue in the forest) and the perceptual associations and semiotic connotation these objects occasion. The thoughts (the questions) are directly linked to, or better, are parts of the artifact's constituents and their chancing relations. At that moment, we cannot any longer determine what came first, the thought or artifact initiated the fern-pot-forest floor-*Gebilde* (in this case, a kind of tableau). Nonetheless, this tableau elicits more thoughts and further questions that, in a

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19 Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. by E.L.T. Lemon, E.L.T. and M.J. Reiss (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965).

recursive movement, shapes our perception of the artifact through varying interpretations and yields possibly further modifications of the tableau.

But there is one thing missing. Until now, my elaboration of the pot-in-the-forest-floor has focused on the objects and their relations, but not on the action of digging up the fern, of putting it in the pot, and putting the pot back into the earth. Are they just intermediary means towards a goal, which in this case is the tableau and ultimately, the finished artwork? Or do these physical actions entail an essential function of their own? Of course, my questions are rhetorical; I claim that these actions (beside the objects) quite literally embody the artistic questions by slowly constructing an artistic answer. Embodiment is thus not only the engendered result (the artwork), but also the very act of producing it. Here, thoughts are transformed into moving and working bodies; these bodies are constructing tangible statements (in our case, by displacing objects and composing new constellations). In our Western culture, these tangible statements are seen as works of art, as final results of artistic creation that can be perceived and contemplated, analyzed and judged, and distributed with the support of our economic system. However, Wind's project and idea of embodiment needs human bodies and human labor.

My endeavor is different from Wind's and therefore also my idea of embodiment. My question is: How to embody philosophical thoughts in or through my own physical activity of art making? My bodily actions are (somehow) intended to be the instrument with which I want to embody Heidegger's "contemplative declarations."<sup>20</sup> Or expressed differently, can the performative body be the locus for an integration of artistic practice and theoretical discourse? And is this at all desirable? The closest integration of these two approaches is to be found in the field of somaesthetics. From its conception, this field is thought as a field that crosses between aesthetic theory and body practices, where one informs the other.<sup>21</sup> However, the most radical approach is found in post-human theories, such as Barad's "agential intra-action." Standing on both Foucault's but also Deleuze's shoulders, Barad proposes a novel approach: "The primary ontological units are not 'things,' but phenomenal-dynamic topological reconfiguration / entanglements/relationalities/(re)articulations. And the primary semantic units are not 'words' but material-discursive practices through which boundaries are constituted."<sup>22</sup> The basis for Barad's assertion is the conviction that statements ("discursive formations"<sup>23</sup>) and, for example, material and performing bodies, have a direct formative impact on each other, thereby constituting agencies (and not objects). She elaborates on this by referencing Bohr: "On the basis of this profound insight that 'concepts' (which are actual physical arrangements) and 'things' do not have determinate properties, or meanings apart from their mutual intra-actions, Bohr offers a new epistemological framework that calls into question the dualism of object/subject, knower/known, nature/culture, and word/world."<sup>24</sup> In a specific way, my project tried to make Barad's first assertion physical by bringing specific words into the closest possible contact with body actions within an artistic framework. The concept of my experiment thus is the physical and

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20 Ironically, one could claim that contemplative declarations are the very method of modern art making where rationality and irrationality make a tension field. Collenberg-Plotnikov writes: "Mit Warburg sieht Wind das Kunstwerk im Spannungsfeld von Rationalität und Irrationalität. Dabei wird um jeweiligen Kunstwerk aber eben kein Ausgleich zwischen den Polen erreicht, sondern beide Pole bleiben, [...] stets als solche erhalten; die Synthese bleibt labil" (Collenberg-Plotnikov, 2016. "Forschung als Verkörperung" in Siegmund, J. (ed). *Wie verändert sich die Kunst, wenn man sie als Forschung versteht*, Bielfeld: transcript Verlag, p. 79). Does that mean, seen from the perspective of Wind, that Heidegger's philosophy is art in disguise? Certainly not. However, it shows that both art and science are nurtured by the force of inducing rationality (understood as an ordering, coherent system) to the (yet not) inexplicable.

21 Shusterman, 1999

22 Barad, 2003, p. 818

23 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

24 Barad, 2003, p. 820

agential vicinity of all the constituents (Heidegger's words, video camera, Thomas, my actions including perception and proprioception, the material objects on site, etc.).

Let's get back to the transcript. My last comment in the cited passage is a critical and theoretical question about the validity of the historic-cultural distinction between nature and culture. This thought obviously has roots in my academic reflection and was prompted by the pots in the forest ground. Clearly, Thomas was not interested in this academic excursion and responded to my invitation with an aesthetic judgment, "[t]hat is pretty. Yes. It looks good." We concluded this session. I turned off the camera and we agreed on a date for our next meeting.

#### 4. World and earth – opening and concealment

I came back several days later. I came a bit earlier, because I wanted to see what he had done in the past few days and I wanted to have some time alone, which meant some time with the camera and Heidegger's essay. The weather was still very nice and warm, the forest floor dry and inviting. When I arrived at 'our' site, I put on the camera and inspected Thomas' progression of the work.

*Falk: Now, I am here again and I want to see what Thomas has done yesterday and the day before. [...] He has made a wooden construction with tiles under it. This appears to become a terrace. And here, I think this will be the outline of the house.*

After having inspected the work from various angles, I thought about this project's main objective: how to fuse academic essays with artworks, how to fuse one specific essay with one artwork that is not even finished? For some decades, I have been working as an academic, which means I quite naturally started with text. I sat down on the moss, in the middle of the unfinished work and began to read and interpret some of Heidegger's key notions. This form of improvised interpretation is more a series of associations than academic answers. These associations transform theoretical notions into concrete images placed into a very concrete context.

*Falk: Maybe we should just read a bit, again, something with earth, which I find very interesting. "The work lets the earth be an earth." He [Heidegger] has this opposition between world and earth and earth is the covered, the hidden, one cannot say something about. "Earth is essentially self-secluding. To set forth the earth means to bring it into the open region as the self-secluding."<sup>25</sup> Earth is also a movement, it's not the material we are talking about here – moss, soil, etc. – but earth is also a symbol of something that hides, that does not want to be identified. And if you want to present earth, you will also have to present that earth does not want to be presented as something. It's a movement of disclosure, all the time. Here, we have the world of the house, of a house that will be built – also if you build a house in decay, it is built after all; it constructs a world, the world we live in, the comprehensive world we live in – and then there is the forest floor, earth, that we do not know. Yes, we know it in a biological sense, chemical and this kind, of course. But nevertheless, there is always something that gets hidden, that is closed off, a secret. The dark, not a dark force, but something we do not have access to. We only have access to it when it surfaces. (pause) And then we have the earth: "The work lets the earth be an earth ..."*

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25 Heidegger, 1993, p.172

From a philosophical standpoint, this seems very clear to me. According to Heidegger, the work of art is a “setting up of a world” and a simultaneous “setting forth of the earth” by paradoxically setting “itself [the work] back into the earth”.<sup>26</sup> Following Heidegger, a work of art is an ongoing movement of becoming (setting up) and disintegration. Especially seen in the light of modern art, which is (also) very much about the process of creation proper and the showing of the many possible artistic constellations and combinations of artistic means be they figurative, abstract, or in the process of become identifiable figures or, the reverse, of becoming geometrical abstractions. Heidegger’s earth can be seen as the very possibility of, but not yet actualized, cultural creation and as the multiplicity of artistic instantiations through which we see our world. My interpretation is very much influenced by thinkers such as Luhmann, who substitute the conceptual pair of matter and form with medium and form, where medium is defined by loosely coupled constituents and form by more tightly coupled ones (see Luhmann<sup>27</sup> and my elaborations<sup>28</sup>). And, for example, Rancière, who associated the “aesthetic regime” of modernity with an altered concept of beauty that no longer is associated with the harmony of “proportions of parts, or the unity of expressions of a character, but [with] the indifferent potential of the whole that endlessly mixes elements together by leaving them perceptually at peace”.<sup>29</sup> Or by Deleuze’s elaboration of the distinction between the actual and the virtual.<sup>30</sup> In my interpretation, the earth is a metaphorical description of the creative-artistic process that becomes a feature of its own in the artwork proper and thus also a guideline for its reception.

Those are thoughts that belong to the discourse of aesthetics trying to identify and describe the various workings of artworks. Evidently, the above-outlined mechanisms have something to do with the relationship between the artist, the work of art, and the recipient. The descriptions clearly are abstract in the sense that they are intended to be applied to works of art in general. In my eyes, they correlate fairly well with my concrete situation in the video: sitting on the forest floor contemplating the unfinished work through the framework of Heidegger’s notions (and my interpretation thereof). As such, this cognitive framework filters and solidifies my sense perception creating a cognitive closeness and a physical distance. Now, both the artist’s (Thomas) and Heidegger’s thoughts are present in this unfinished work of art. However, I can only partake from a distance, because I do not embody the thoughts in an agential, performative sense.

This reminds me of the artist William Kentridge and his account of studio work: “One of the fundamental things that happens in the studio is the process of creating: the physical activity of making marks, erasing and redrawing, in which there is always a gap between the head and the art – a reliance on the hand’s motor memory for the manifestation of ideas, as well as a direction from the brain in which these two forms of control are combined with unconscious memory”<sup>31</sup> Kentridge asserts that there is a difference between the physical action as an intelligence of its own compared to the cognitive intelligence. At the same time, he acknowledges that there is a productive gap at play while doing studio work. He continues by identifying “a secondary split, and that is when you step back from being the artist as maker of a drawing and become

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26 Heidegger, 1993, pp. 171-173

27 Luhmann, Niklas, ‘The Medium of Art’, *Thesis Eleven*, 18–19 (1987)

28 Heinrich, Falk, ‘A Theoretical Foundation for Interlacing Artistic and Academic Methodologies’, *ISEA 2014 Proceedings : Conference Proceedings*, 2014, p. 4

29 Rancière, Jacques, *Aisthesis- Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (London: Verso Books, 2013) p. 11

30 Gilles Deleuze, *Repetition and Difference* 1994 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

31 Kentridge, William, *No It Is* (Cologne: Verlag der Bichhandlung Walther König, 2016) p. 25

a viewer of what you have made.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, there is nothing surprising in this account, it is the very condition of modern artmaking and, I would claim, of any creative work.

So, even in artmaking this split seems to be unavoidable and even a necessary condition. Is my aim of exploring the anticipated merger of philosophical aesthetics and art creation an impossibility? Is it in vain to look for an integration of art production as a performative act and aesthetics as a reflective endeavor? I am fully aware that philosophical aesthetics constructs its own discourse and belongs to a different social system and epistemological domain than artmaking (as mentioned earlier) and that this split and its intended dissolution since Descartes runs as a red thread through the history of Western philosophy. Reading Kentridge’s reflection on studio work, it seems clear that this split is not only a philosophical concept, but also an artistic condition.<sup>33</sup>

No wonder that frustration began to grow in me. I remember going from the site – that in this particular moment wasn’t a “clearing”<sup>34</sup> at all – back to the carpark at the edge of the forest while talking to my recording device. In order to convey through the video this confusion, this frustration about the impossibility of my naïve project, I created two simultaneous audio tracks, one with the continuation of my explication, where the artwork is just an exemplification of theory that slowly turns into frustrated exclamations of my own naivety, stupidity, and vulnerability. And the other track tries to explain the project’s impossibility.

*[Simultaneous voices]*

*Falk Voice 1: That what we do not know, undisclosed at all times, it has not yet opened itself, it hides, conceals itself. Maybe that is what I am doing here, I venture into something that seems so stupid and I also feel quite stupid going around here in an artwork that yet is not, a work of art to-be, an artwork that creates a world, represents a world and I am talking to myself with the intention to combine Heidegger’s elevated thoughts about the work of art that sets up a world and lets the earth be earth. And I expose myself, I expose myself due to my ignorance and inability to combine these two things together: philosophy, theory, language and ... this here.*

*Falk Voice 2: The world of philosophy that lives with the ephemeral, the notional and that gains meaning within its own notional system. He talks about world and earth, and things and equipment and things like this. One has to enter, go into this world and live there, breath there in order to be able to extract meaning. The work of art, or rather, the work with artworks, to install something, to take those pots and carry them that is ... that is very ... it’s the body working, carrying something, feeling the forest ground. There aren’t any elevated thoughts. Philosophical thoughts do not make sense here. In any case this relationship is not very clear to me, I feel like ...*

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 26

<sup>33</sup> There are several art strategies that try and tried to transcend human intentionality and thus also the poetic effect of reflection and assessment. For example, romanticism focusses on feeling and emotions, while the surrealists use techniques such as automatic drawing and writing in order to get beyond the above-mentioned split.

<sup>34</sup> Heidegger uses the term clearing in the sense of disclosure (aletheia) and appearance of things.





Figure 2: Still from the video article: Into the Woods with Heidegger – A video article

In the video, the image of the site fades away giving space for a, not-flattering, still of counterfeit that eventually also fades into blackness. Only the cacophony of multiple voices remains. How can art theory and art-making meet? Can only representational distinctions link those two endeavors?

## 5. Epiphany or dangerous conjunction?

Next day, Thomas and I met again. We had to finish the terrace.

*Thomas: I am thinking, on the practical side, I .... right now. If you could lay the foundation, only at a few spots.*

*Thomas: No, I have poles, thick posts over there. So, we hammer one in here and fasten it with a screw here.*

*Falk: Ok fine.*

*Thomas: And ... dum, dum.... in each corner. And then, you know, it is stabilized. Ha-ha. That's it.*

*Falk: Ok. Super. It will be good to do something physical. Not only something on a conceptual level.*

I began working, hammering the posts into the earth with a post hammer. Hammering is a very rhythmic work like rowing or similar repetitive movements. After the first post, it occurred to me that I could accompany the hammering with one of Heidegger's key sentences, or the other way around, to spice up the monotony of Heidegger with the rhythm of the hammering. In the rush, I remembered this phrase: "To be a work means to set up a world."

*Bang- to be – bang - a work – bang - means to set – bang - up a world- bang - to be - to be – bang - a work – bang - means to set – bang - up a world- bang to be – bang - a work – bang - means to set – bang - up a world- bang to be – bang - a work – bang - means to set – bang - up a world- bang to be – bang - a work – bang - means to set – bang - up a world- bang to be – bang - a work – bang - means to set – bang - up a world- bang ....*



**Figure 3:** Stills from the video article: Into the Woods with Heidegger – A video article

I felt an immense delight, not only in the movement, but especially in the found simultaneity and integration of rhythmic physical and vocal performance, semantic content, the concept of the work of art, and the forest. After the hammering scene, the video shows the following text:

*This is the closest relation between practical building work and one core sentence of Heidegger's philosophy on art, I have experienced. It's an embodiment of words and a word-becoming of action. This rhythmic conjunction melts both the semantics of action and word into pure performance, into energetic transformations of air to muscles to sounds and movements of an earth-opening post, back to my hands and arms. This is an opening of my human earth, where my momentary body, all my perceptions and thoughts are moulded, transformed and again hidden away. This is my human earth, where pure but blind energy amalgamates with joy, sorrow, movement, sense, breathing, indoctrination to form my perception of this work of art to-be and to create my world.*

In retrospect, the incidence appears to be fairly simple; a simple simultaneity of unrelated actions and words combined by a repetitive rhythm. There is no common origin, just a heterogeneity of things, words, and actions that got forged into a peculiar amalgamation. On the face of it, my action embodied the words, primarily as sounds stripped of their semantic content or, vice versa, my action constituted the materiality and performance of word-sounds. The occurrence can be approached from two different angles: firstly, as the performativity and materiality of signs and, secondly, my working body uttering signs.

## 6. Performativity and Embodiment

Mersch asserts that every sign needs to be performed as presentation (as graphical or uttered signs). He characterized this as "Existenzsetzung" (setting into existence, my translation).<sup>35</sup> It is an occurrence that brings the sign into a factual existence. However, the sign (as reference) cannot indicate this performed existence, because medial existence is not a part of signs. According to Mersch, this is the paradox of the performance (of signs). Luhmann's claim that art has something to do with the productive distinction between perception and communication, between the perception of the performance of materiality and mediality, and the communication as sign operations and that art makes this distinction visible/palpable. Both assert that this

<sup>35</sup> Mersch, Dieter, 'Paradoxien Der Verkörperung', in *Inervalle 9 Körper – Verkörperung – Entkörperung* (Kassel: kassel university press, 2005), p. 32

paradox is productive. Mersch states that the setting into existence of sign yields “eine Kraft [...], die sinnlich *angeht, anspricht, zufällt oder ergreift*.”<sup>36</sup> This paradox might be true for academic reflection that is based upon (onto-)logical either-or distinctions. But does an actor not fill the semantic of signs with expressive and thus perceptual flavors that are part of the signs, part of their mediality? Mersch seems to identify the performance of a sign as an aesthetic dimension that establishes a direct and sensuous contact to the sign recipient that the sign as such cannot account for but also does not need to account for. In this unaccountability, which is nothing else than the necessity of another initiating force outside of the conceptual field of semiotics, lies a sign’s aesthetic dynamic: “eine sprengende Potenz, die darauf hindeutet, dass keine Theorie sich je selbst erfüllt, sondern dass sie notwendig an Anderen teilhabt, das ihr entgeht.”<sup>37</sup> In this very sentence, Mersch draws the consequences for theory: theory can never be able to capture the act of “Setzung” in the very moment of its utterance. Here, theory is in need of the participation of something that ‘performs’ it, another agential force that theory in the moment cannot capture. Hence, also reading and interpreting (which means performing) theory (here, fragments of Heidegger’s theory) needs another agential force: my operating body ‘doing’ it.

My article so far should have made it clear that I am not interested in a recipient’s perspective, but in the performer’s experiences (in Mersch terminology, the one who sets the sign into being). Uttering the sentence “*To be a work means to set up a world*” demands choices, but not an (onto-)logical choice between either the semantics or the performance of its ‘setting into existence’, but rather a choice between the expressive timbre that evidently modifies the semantic-associative field of the uttered words. This expressive quality is not only dependent on the performer’s (the utterer’s) psychological-associative background and agential intention, but also on the physical action and context the utterer is part of. Therefore, I claim that a shift in perspective from the recipient point of view (which traditionally is the viewpoint of academics) to a performative perspective, dissolves the paradox into mutually enforcing simultaneities. The actions of my muscle incorporate Heidegger’s phrase into my body and those actions colored the phrase itself on an aesthetic-expressive and on a semiotic level. My body actions were substantially building the world of the artwork and thus a certain experiential and cognitive perspective on the world. But more importantly, my repetitive actions were opening my body. In the video, I called this my human earth – at the same time expressive and receptive. My operating, working body filled words with constructive energy and my body-mind with significations.

Fischer-Lichte states that “At this point, we are able to radically redefine the term embodiment. By emphasizing the bodily being-in-the-world of humans, embodiment creates the possibility for the body to function as the object, subject, material, and source of symbolic construction, as well as the product of cultural inscriptions.”<sup>38</sup> The body is both something that in our awareness constitutes us as subjects, a material that can be formed and culturally inscribed and an object of reflection. However, according to Fischer-Lichte, the body proper is “elusive” (Germ.: *unverfügbar*) because “bodily being-in-the-world cannot be but becomes [...]”<sup>39</sup>

However, when dealing with performativity and the delight in pure bodily action, one question is often omitted; what kind of world do we want to set up? Asked differently, who (or what) is the observer that could make a critical and ethical assessment during the hammering

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36 Ibid, p. 33

37 Ibid, p. 33

38 Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 89

39 Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 89

and reciting? Asked differently, does this kind of merger between bodily action and semantics deplete any critical position?<sup>40</sup> In order to include reflective dimensions into her notion of phenomenon as intra-action, Barad needs to replace ontological distinctions with agential ones. She talks about agential separability and agential cuts: “The notion of agential separability is of fundamental importance, for in the absence of a classical ontological condition of exteriority between observer and observed it provides the condition for the possibility of objectivity.”<sup>41</sup> Barad is talking about phenomena as intra-actions of various elements (for example, materiality and discourse) that entail the possibility of second order (or meta-) observations as inherent elements of “measurement” of phenomena. But what about occurrences that deliberately remove this self-reflective possibility? History has shown that the human body is not a guaranty for the good, because the performing and sensuous body cannot any longer be understood differently than as intra-actional relations. The soma is the result of effectuations of different agential forces.



Figure 4: Still from the video article: Into the Woods with Heidegger – A video article

## 7. Questions to Somaesthetics

The practice-based research experiment *Into the Woods with Heidegger*, which includes these reflections, opens up a vast field of indeterminacy and questions concerning, for example, embodiment. It is to be understood more as a journey of (personal) discoveries within an artistic-experimental setting. With this paper, I have embarked upon an expedition into embodiment, its concrete perceptual physicality, and its various artistic and academic-reflective aspects, while knowing that the body and thus embodiment are elusive; elusive in a performative sense (as shown by Fischer-Lichte and Mersch), but also elusive in an ethical sense. To elaborate on the latter, let me have a look at Shusterman’s “Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal”.<sup>42</sup>

In a way, the concept of somaesthetics seems redundant, because the aesthetic (aesthetic perception, aesthetic experience, aesthetic recognition, etc.) presupposes sense-perception or the recollection of those perceptions, which are bodily acts. Thus, aesthetics as an academic

40 I am aware that the physical setting of my experience is highly abstract in the sense that I am (almost) alone in the forest; there is neither an audience or other performers doing the same act as we find it in, for example, religious rituals or militaristic mass demonstrations, where a direct access to the body of the practitioners is pursued. Yet, this ‘abstract’ setting gives me a platform to experience some sort of embodiment stripped of a problematic content of the uttered sentence and a ritualistic context – but, of course, a research or investigatory setting. In that moment, my action did not harbor any inherently critical or self-reflective dimension, but solely surrendered to movement.

41 Barad, 2003, p. 815

42 Shusterman, ‘Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal’.



discipline has in one way or another to deal with sense-perception (the manifold of empirical data). However, in Shusterman's view, somaesthetics is important, because it focuses on the amelioration of the (human) sensing body. It is an aesthetics of exercise and improvement enhancing the possibilities of aesthetic experience and sense making. In his view, somaesthetics contain at least three perspectives: an analytical, a pragmatic one, and somaesthetics as practice. The bearings of the last form seem to be that body practices are a means to development and healing and thus includes self-understanding. This is the transformative and didactic foundation for, for example, yoga, meditation, gymnastics, Feldenkrais method, martial arts, and many other somatic methods. There is no doubt that these kinds of practices can lead to more self-understanding (for example, of the very functioning of the body, the connection between body and self-awareness). The inherent claim behind these methods seems to be the assertion that the soma contains an ethical dimension that can be brought to work by those exercises. Mere body awareness (the alignment of body and mind) seems to entail promises of liberation and redemption. But is the human body the locus of pureness and the pristine? Does a retreat to an awareness of somatic functions and states rip from us societal, ideological contaminations of any kind? Not if we were to subscribe to Barad's model of new materialism, where the body (among other objects) cannot be seen apart from discursive statements. A closer look at the various body practices discloses that the different somatic practices come with a certain 'ideology'. In yoga, for example, body practices are seen and supported by the believe that exercise balances the psyche and lead to a more accepting attitude towards oneself and others. The same goes for Zen, Taiichi, and most of the martial arts. However, martial art at the European gymnastics seems to serve at least two masters: training for warfare (Gymnastics was in the Greek origins composed of physical exercise for young soldiers) and improvement and maintenance of somatic capabilities (that always include the psychic dimension such as discipline, endurance, the will to transcend limits, etc.). Shusterman is very aware of this danger and distinguishes between representational and experiential forms.<sup>43</sup> Representational forms are concerned with the body representation (for example, beauty in its various forms) and sees the body as an object composed of functional parts and as mechanics that can be improved for external objectives or, it can, if not suitable, be disposed of. The fascistic employment of gymnastics is to be found in this category. Here, bodies are externalized and alienated in regards to "the spiritual self".<sup>44</sup> The other category is based on experience, where somatic exercises serve the bodily experience (of the spiritual self?). Shusterman seems to find that the ethical component in the "body's subject-role as the living locus of beautiful, personal experience" seems able to escape societal inscriptions. According to Shusterman, this practice and perspective on the soma negates externalization and does not "impose a fixed set of standardized norms of external measurement (e.g., optimal pulse) to assess good somaesthetic experience."<sup>45</sup> But like embodiment or the performance of utterances, the occurrence of experience is elusive in that it is deprived of critical assessment. According to theories that promoting the human subject as unified entity, this can only be done post-factum or as an ethical inscription prior to the somatic experience. The act of experience proper melts discursive statements and materiality momentarily into an emergent unity. This is an experienced unity that cannot be assessed backwards by analysing its components.

So, how to assess a "good" somaesthetic experience and distinguish it from bad ones in the moment of experience? To rephrase the question: how can critical reflection be an intrinsic part

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43 Ibid., p. 305

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., p. 306



of the somatic experience?<sup>46</sup> Surely, fascistic gymnastics and body exercises can elicit a fulfilling experience precisely due to the amalgamation of ideology and body experience as can yoga. But fascist body cultivation and yoga seem totally different. My claim is thus that any somatic practice must be reflected, subjectified, and assessed by its ideological bearings as part of the experience proper.



Figure 5: Still from the video article: Into the Woods with Heidegger – A video article

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<sup>46</sup> The conceptual bearing of my question is that reflection and doing belong to different systems that operate in parallel but interrelated. According to Luhmann's system theory, bodily actions can, for example, contribute to communicational acts and be subject to conscious. Looking at neuroscience, the human brain is a highly complex structure that can simultaneously be activated in many different, more or less interrelated locations.

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