



LISTAHASKOLI ÍSLANDS
Iceland Academy of the Arts

Myndlistardeild

Myndlist

Me, You, Us:

Observation, Analysis, Identity and Relational Art

Ritgerð til BA-prófs í myndlist

Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir

Vorönn 2015

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Abstract

This essay is a dissection of my artistic endeavours, looking to begin with at the methodology I have been developing over the course of the last three years; the use of observation and analysis within the wider context of relational aesthetics. Further to that I will look at the themes of identity and melancholy which have been prevalent in my work. I do not set out to answer any specific question, rather intend this as a means by which to delve deeper into my own artistic practise by looking closely at the themes and concepts mentioned above which I will then examine in the broader context of contemporary art, looking specifically at Tracey Emin, Sophie Calle and Gabriela Friðriksdóttir as artists I admire and as focal points in order to draw parallels with my own work and practises.

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Introduction

I like to look at things. This is a simple but good starting point for me when it comes to talking about what concerns me artistically, though it is essentially quite a redundant statement, as it goes without saying that most people probably enjoy having the ability to look at and see the things that sit in front of them, so this is nothing altogether too special and perhaps not worthy of announcing. However, to make things clearer, I will rephrase my original statement to say that I derive great pleasure from the pastime of closely inspecting things with both my eyes and my mind. The dictionary definition of ‘thing’ (“1. an object whose name is not known or stated, 2. an object, animal, quality, etc., of any kind, 3. a particular event, occurrence, or situation”),¹ is somewhat limited, so I should probably point out here that I use this word in the loosest possible sense to include matter, both material and nonmaterial, including but not limited to natural, manufactured, social, metaphysical and political phenomena.

To make a rather sweeping statement about observation with all personal enjoyment of it aside, observation and the desire to examine things is a critical factor in any artistic process, whether the artist is aware of and encouraging of this or not and could in a sense be described as a basic principle of artistic methodology.² With this statement in mind, this essay will in part be an examination of my own art in the context of the themes of relational aesthetics, identity and melancholy. However to start with I will examine the idea of observation as a conscious methodology I utilize, and in addition to this, a foundation principle of artistic practise generally speaking.

¹“Thing”, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, 2014, retrieved October 25th 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/thing>

² Humphries, Lee, *Artistic Process and Elegant Action*, Thinking Applied: Mind tools and Interactions, 2000, accessed on October 8th 2014, http://www.thinkingapplied.com/artistic_process_folder/artistic_process.htm#.VDqKBtSsVy8

I will use this opportunity to start with, to examine closely my use of observation and analysis in order to delve into my own artistic motivation and background. Further to this, the value of observation in art will be investigated with the previous statement about the role of observation in the artistic process being more thoroughly considered.

In order to take in the whole range of my artistic interests I will look at the idea of observation as a critical connection between the different aspects of what I am doing. Essentially the concepts of observation and thus analysis will be used as a bridge in order to examine the themes of identity, relationships, and melancholy in my work with reference to my underlying artistic motivation. The idea of total art or art which stretches across many mediums and the intertwining of life and art is also key in the examination of both my aesthetic and broader motivations and finally, I will use the work of artists such as Sophie Calle, Tracy Emin and Gabriela Friðriksdóttir, to name a few, as a basis for comparison.

Observation as Motivation

The photographer and children's book author Walter Wick wrote in an article in *Booklink* that learning to observe carefully is a good primer for education in general.³ He was in this case referring to the way that it led to his interest in science which of course differs somewhat from my interest in the idea of observation, however, as a statement I feel that it contains a great deal of truth, especially in relation to art education.

There is a generally held belief that life is not a series of well-timed, interlinked events, one leading to the other with surgical precision, culminating in a 'ta-da' and a round of hearty applause. Things tend to happen randomly, in a fog, and often all our best laid plans can go to waste forcing us reassess everything. That said, I would like to look at my own chronology briefly because I feel it lends some insight as to why observation has become quite central to my work.

³ Engberg, Gillian, Walter Wick on The Art of Observation, *Book Links*, Volume 12, Issue 2, October/November 2002, Page 10.

Prior to studying art, the enjoyment I got from observation was something which drove me to write, principally as a means to organise my thoughts and process my observations with pen and paper. The satisfaction gained from writing these observations in turn led me to use it as my primary means of self-expression, which then fostered in me the desire to document my thoughts in a more 'total' way and thus into the artistic process. It is therefore, apparent to me how important both the skill of observation and the enjoyment of that process is for me personally, as it was and is a fundamental driving force in what brought me to study art, and beyond that, serves as the basis for almost all of my artistic work today.

If I think about the background to this enjoyment for a moment, it stems from the satisfaction found, both personally and artistically, in the experience of taking an object (or an idea or a space) that we look at without much thought, and examining it closely, reading it, focusing on the details, the nuances, which add then adds dimension and interest to it, which one would never have seen in passing. One popular work where this idea has been used is the work *The Clock*, by Christian Marclay.⁴ In the work he takes second fractions of films which in some way show timepieces in order to build an artwork which also functions as a 24 hour clock. While the artist is not necessarily one I would find parallels with, the act of taking a forgotten moment or element and making it interesting is something I find compelling.

Materiality and touching with the mind

The material aspect of this observational approach is best exemplified in my book works, where the material becomes the subject of observation, either in the handling of it, as in the deconstructed book work,⁵ or in the subject matter of the book *Píparinn*⁶ where the contents of the book revolve around physically zooming in on and closely observing something otherwise easily forgotten. By looking at these works more deeply, I can see the way that using material

⁴ See figure 3

⁵ See figure 4

⁶ See figure 5

alone with no conceptual framework around it as a point for observation enables the viewer to move easily into analysis of the observations.

For example the deconstructed bookwork, *Untitled*, which consists of three separate bookworks, each created out of only one material; glue, cardboard and gauze. The result is a deconstruction of a book, where, due to the differing qualities in the material used, the book changes shape, going from being more object-like in the case of the cardboard book, to textural in the case of the glue book and finally in the case of the gauze book sculptural. In any case, all the books lose the ability of a traditional book to contain written information or be browsed or thumbed through. Through the loss of their practical elements due to the focus on material, the viewer is forced to consider, or analyse the elements which make up a book and in this way, the command of observation has its effect.

In another example, which does not take material as its focus, however uses a dominant motif in order to achieve the same effect as *Untitled*, the zine/bookwork, *The Phallus in our Daily Lives*, uses examples of the primacy of the phallus in various aspects of society. This work takes more of an abstract approach, where instead of using something as direct and tactile as material to force the viewer's hand, the zine uses the symbol of the phallus in rather far-fetched, tongue in cheek manner, looking at the varying ways in which the symbols of the phallus recurs in our daily lives, using humor to draw attention to a facet of our lives we barely even notice.

To look at observation from a more allegorical perspective, it becomes apparent that when I break the idea of observation down into an abstract and slightly romantic phenomenon, the reason I like looking at things is because it's almost like a type of escapism. Everyday objects, politics, philosophy, society, bodies, light, movements become textures, colours, lines, woven together, dreamlike and disconnected from how we experience them fleetingly in passing. That is, as said, the romantic view. I don't literally experience my observations of the world in such a way, but when I think about it abstractly, this is how it seems. Somehow a way to escape the hard

reality of things by embracing the tiny details of them and thus losing the harshness of the whole picture.

Taking this idea even further, I would hazard a guess that, growing out of what Walter Wick stated in his article, this enjoyment is just a critical element in the creation of art, that to even want to create something as simple as a figurative drawing, you have to be interested enough in looking at things closely, breaking them down into lines, shades and colours, detaching yourself from the labels attached to objects in order to get to the most realistic possible depiction of them. Essentially then, an enjoyment of observation is, in one way or another, imperative to the desire to make art. This doesn't necessarily go any further than the original impetus to look and then create, however, for me personally this has been a major motivating factor in my work thus far.

In briefly looking at an example from art history, we can see through the use of the situationist method of 'undirected walking',⁷ *dérive*, or deliberately getting lost in order to detach from the conscious mind and observe things they would otherwise not have noticed, that artists are often aware of the benefits of observation. This example may seem flimsy or trivial but shows in a small way a concrete example of the awareness that what we see and how we see it is important.

For me this interest in the idea of why I so enjoy looking at things and analysing them is a fairly new development, or at least I have only recently become aware that this matters to me and is an important part of my artistic process. At a glance, my interest in it in an artistic sense is not altogether clear because the idea of observation in art is, conscious or not, a critical part of the artistic process and this enjoyment is undoubtedly not unique to me. However, upon closer investigation the idea of 'looking at things', to put it casually, is essentially the thread which runs through my work and in examining my own work it is therefore necessary for me to examine the phenomenon of observation.

⁷ Debord, G, *Theory of the Dérive*, translator unknown, The Bureau of Public Secrets, 1958, 20. desember 2014, <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.derive.htm>

Analysis and relational aesthetics

Analysis is a logical continuation of observation and therefore a necessary part of any conversation about the artistic process in the context of this essay. Analysis is also the point where I believe that my work, particularly the more performative works, moves into the realm of relational aesthetics.

Relational aesthetics is a concept conceived of by French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud, who coined the term to describe artists who create art “taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space”.⁸ While this concept sparked debate in its time, because of among other factors, a perceived lack of intrinsic democracy which Bourriaud had suggested in his initial theorisation of the concept,⁹ it was generally well received as a manner in which to understand the changing role of participatory art in the 1990’s art scene.

Defined as is it is then, by an artistic praxis of human interaction in a social context, or a decision to open up the boundaries of art from the personal to the public, audience participation in one form or another is essential to relational art. This might come in the form of direct interaction, in the case of artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija with his works such as *Pad Thai*¹⁰ and Pierre Huyghe with *Streamside Day*,¹¹ or in a more abstract sense, audience interaction as in the work of Sophie Calle (who I will have a closer look at later) wherein the subject matter of the work itself causes the audience involuntarily to become involved in and interact with the work.

Thus we arrive at the ever pertinent subject of audience participation. By dealing with subject matter which is socially relevant or in some way connected to social ideas and constructs in a

⁸ Bourriaud, N, “*Relational Aesthetics*”, Les Presses du réel, Paris, 2002, pp. 113

⁹ Bishop, Claire, ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’ *October*, Vol. 110, Fall 2004, pp. 51-79

¹⁰ See figure 6

¹¹ See figure 7

revealing or challenging way, artists put their audience on the spot and force them to take a position on the subject, making the work either deliberately or by default about the audience's interaction with it. Into this fold of artists and audience comes the added layer of analysis which takes place both in the process and intentionality of the artists and then from audience in their forced position as participant. This analytical layer is therefore essential in the workings of relational art.

Overlaps

All theory aside, analysis is a large part of the process of making a work and very often overlaps with observation, combining and then, at a certain point, becoming independent from it. As with observation, analysis is an element in my work which fell into place unconsciously because of the enjoyment gained from the process. Perhaps as a result of my background in political science and gender studies, analysis is a somewhat ingrained element in what happens when I look at things. That is to say, it has become almost habitual for me to analyse the things, people and phenomena which surround me, not least of all myself and my own behaviours. As an extension of this habit, analysis, along with observation were quite naturally absorbed into my artistic process.

In my general experience, analysis comes in the conceptualisation of the artwork, at the point where the idea, person or phenomenon is still being observed. Essentially analysis serves me to process of the act of observation. The experience of creating the work is very much a blending of observation and analysis, in other words a synthesis of method and process, and while my love of observation goes back much further than my enjoyment of analysis, the two come together and form a balance in which both now play equally important roles.

While some work I have done has obviously been driven by critical analysis and a particular thought process, there are other works, in particular book works but not limited to them, where I have been engaged in such close observation of the material that analysis has followed almost automatically. This causes me to question whether perhaps observation and analysis can be seen

as interwoven concepts in which each lend support to the one another, that is, effective close observation is a useful way into critical analysis because by nature if it is effective it will lead to analysis of what is being observed.

Beyond the idea of analysis as intrinsically being part of the process of observation and therefore, in my case, creating a piece of work, analysis also stands alone for me as a theme, knitted with and essential to the wider ideas which I have been working with. Analysis of the idea of identity, melancholy and society are all recurring themes in my work. The next part of this essay will look at these themes and their importance both personally and their role in art as a whole. I will also connect them back to the theme of observation.

On looking at who we are...

The idea of identity has long been thematic in my artwork, whether manifestly or latently, and both as a result of and causal to this, identity is a critical factor in any artistic process, whether or not the artist is aware of and encouraging of this or not.¹²

My interest in the idea of identity in art stems from wanting to look at it as an independent phenomenon, to investigate the various aspects of it irrespective of one another, to close in on the fabric of it, the individual particles which make the whole. This is closely aligned with the core motivations in the methodology of observation I discussed above and is additionally a good example of where observation and analysis have met in a work for me. Thematically, this was the starting point for me in the work 'Self-portrait by proxy',¹³ wherein I looked at the idea of the fallacy in the individual units we use as a means to define ourselves. I took as examples in the work clothing, voice, thoughts, cells and as an extension of cells, hair and created an installation with photographs, sound and performance. In this case I used myself as a medium in which to create the work after the analysis had taken place.

¹² Ryder, Willet W., "The Role of Art in Self-Actualization", *Art Education* Vol. 40, No. 2, Mar., 1987, pp. 22-24

¹³ See figure 1

While the result of this was a work that failed to scientifically examine the idea of the self in the way I had intended, because it fell into the realm of the personal, it opened the door to me as a means to use myself as a medium for analysis of broader ideas of identity and melancholy which I would later go on to research through art. As Tom Lubbock said of Tracey Emin's show at Modern Art, in Oxford "*Her self is just an example of any self...*".¹⁴ Though I didn't know of this quote at the time of making the work, I connect very strongly with the method of using myself and my body as an example of a more generalised idea of any self or identity. Hence this work springs very much from the desire to observe things at close range and in doing so, to blur the sense we have of the solidity of metaphysical concepts such as identity.

Identity has also been a point of great interest to me and while essentially the idea of identity ties in very much with the idea of the self, the manner in which I have been exploring it separates it from the more concrete aspects of the self as described in '*Self Portrait by Proxy*' and moves into the area of how we see ourselves and particular concepts in a social context.

Identity and relational art

One work wherein I was using the idea of identity and social norms was '*Peepshow*',¹⁵ a durational dance performance which attempted to unpack the idea of sexiness as a social concept, as opposed to how it is experienced on an individual basis. The work was approximately four hours long and located in a small room on the top floor of the main art academy building on Sölvhólgata. The room, which was a practise room for music students, had a tall narrow window beside the door with venetian blinds which I was able to position so that it was possible to look in but I was not able to see out. There was nothing in the room except for me and my computer playing music and I spent the four hours dancing and enjoying myself.

¹⁴ Lubbock, Tom in DGen, *Picturing the Self: Changing Views of the Subject in Visual Culture*, IB Tauris and Co. Ltd. London, 2005, page 1.

¹⁵ See figure 2

The idea was to critique popular conceptions of sexiness by setting up a situation and giving that situation a title, in this case *Peepshow*, which creates connections with traditional ideas of sexiness, however diverting from the norm by not following the generally prescribed set of behaviours set for that situation. In this case I did that by being fully clothed and by not dancing in a sexual manner, with the idea being that viewers would experience the gap between the set up notion of sexiness in society and the sincerity and thus sexiness found in genuine enjoyment of a past time. In addition to this, the location and manner of the performance would force the viewer into the role of the voyeur and thus force their hand in the consideration of peepshows as a platform for sexiness in general.

This forcing of the viewer into a particular role, or causing an interaction between them and the artwork is for me a pivotal point wherein observation and analysis meet, as with the book works described above, in using the methodology of observation to bring on the process of analysis, the work becomes reciprocal and the viewer is forced to participate in the work, just by viewing it. This point is almost more important than the process that I as the artist undertake when I am making the work, it is the point where the viewer essentially activates the work and it is here that the role of analysis reaches its purpose.

Earlier I mentioned relational aesthetics or relational art and how it is in the analysis of the work where the viewer is forced to undergo, by being made to take on the role of, for example, voyeur in *Peepshow* that the work becomes relational, or references some wider social 'whole'. The theme of identity is also of a certain relevance with regard to relational art. It has been suggested that the aesthetic framework for evaluating modern art is no longer focused on the object itself but on the context of the object and the interaction between object and viewer.¹⁶ With this in mind, if the 'object' on display is identity, or in the case of *Peepshow*, sexuality, and the viewer, in possession of or possessed by the always blurry concept of subjectivity, then the interchange

¹⁶ Jackson, Ronald L. and Hogg, Michael A. (eds), *Encyclopedia of Identity Volume I*, Sage Publications, University of Cincinnati, 2010

which will take place is hopefully, according to Nicolas Bourriaud¹⁷, one wherein the viewers eyes will be opened to the problematic aspects of sexuality, identity and more.

Peepshow, as with several others worked over the last year and a half, combined my own interest in movement with the idea of investigating the flaws contained within the popular conception of ‘sexiness’. A big part of these works, while on the one hand purporting to be ‘scientific’ in nature, is also a strong physical desire to perform certain acts or make certain movements.

This seems to me to be a linking of two artistic influences of mine, Tracey Emin and Sophie Calle. Calle scientific and methodical, and Emin instinctive and emotional, I feel there is a point where I follow them both simultaneously and the works I have described here are good examples of their points of influence. Emin often uses images, objects and materials from her own life in order to create some kind of unrefined autobiography and in doing this evokes and questions the idea of identity and its position as and within art¹⁸. Looking at examples of work from Calle and Emin, we can see the ways in which they both deal with ideas of identity in very differing ways. A good work by Sophie Calle to contrast with Emin is the early work ‘*The Sleepers*’¹⁹ from 1980, wherein 24 people, friends, family, strangers, were invited to share her bed with her over the course of 8 days. This piece is interesting to compare with Tracey Emin’s ‘*My Bed*’²⁰ which uses the same subject matter, the sleeping place of the artist. Both artists open themselves up greatly through the work, in Emin’s case however she presents the bed itself, after her own nervous breakdown, with all the detritus of her dysfunctional life at that point in time. Here, through looking at works with the same subject matter or motif, can we see the differences in their approach. In Tracey Emin there is brutal revelation, and in that a challenge to the viewer. In

¹⁷ Bourriaud, Nicolas, “*Relational Aesthetics*”, 1998.

¹⁸ Merck, Mandy. and Chris Townsend, (Eds.), *The Art of Tracey Emin*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2002.

¹⁹ See figure 11

²⁰ See figure 12

Sophie Calle there is a softer opening, risk taking, through the lens of a camera, controlled and rationed, but in a sense a bold revelation none the less.

Confessionalism in art and literature

As an extension of this revelatory quality, I connect with the literary movement the confessionalists, whose need for revelation I see as a literary form of what Tracey Emin does in art. She uses her difficulties in life as material and this is essentially the visualisation of confessionalism. As my background is in writing, and particularly of a confessionalist style, I see the logic in my attraction towards creating this kind of art. Steven Hitchens writes in the article '*Towards a Relational Poetics*' of the link between relational aesthetics and the confessionalism of the modern day literary phenomenon 'alt lit'²¹. In alt-lit, authors often write from a confessional, no holds barred, autobiographical approach. Works such as Megan Boyle's live blog, wherein she painstakingly recorded the minutiae of her daily life in an effort to 'act better via no privacy' eventually reaching 350,000 words²², or '*Everyone I've had sex with*', where she catalogues all her sexual partners in an unemotional list typify this confessionalism in alt-lit literature²³. In this way alt lit, states Hitchens, like relational aesthetics is about friendship and ethics and alt-lit authors and relational art is about in the words of Bourriaud, "learning to inhabit the world in a better way".²⁴

²¹ Hitchens, Steven, *Towards a Relational Poetics - Conceptual Writing and Alt-lit*, Poetry Wales, 2014, retrieved December 2nd 2014, <http://poetrywales.co.uk/wp/lang/en/1895/towards-a-relational-poetics/>

²² Boyle, Megan, *Untitled* from Megan Boyle Online Website Reblog Tumblr Station, March 17th 2013, retrieved December 10 2014, <http://beethoventhemovie.tumblr.com/post/45574799799/starting-today-march-17-2013-i-will-be>

²³ Boyle, Megan, *Everyone I've had sex with* from Thought Catalogue, October 9th 2010, retrieved December 9th 2014, <http://thoughtcatalog.com/megan-boyle/2010/10/everyone-sex-list-people-humans/>

²⁴ Bourriaud, Nicolas, "*Relational Aesthetics*", pp.7 quoted in Hitchens, Steven, *Towards a Relational Poetics - Conceptual Writing and Alt-lit*, Poetry Wales, 2014,

Sophie Calle on the other hand, practises confessionalism though in a very different way from Tracey Emin (or Megan Boyle) and uses the ideas of the self and the methodology much more akin to a scientific practise. In the opening lines of the book *'Sophie Calle'* she is described as a “*first person artist*” by Alfred Pacquement.²⁵ He then goes on to describe the way that she involves people, her audience and the public alike, with her private life, in a sense in the same way that Emin does, however, it is her fastidious methods, which I would describe as scientific in their commitment to observation and documentation of her subject matter. In a well-known piece made for the 2007 Venice biennale, *'Take Care of Yourself'*, Sophie Calle asks 107 women to interpret for her the contents of a break-up email.²⁶ This piece is a good example of Calle's tendency to reveal and protect at the same time, by using subject matter which is personal but approaching it from an analytic or distant standpoint. With this approach she is able to discuss a wide variety of subjects; womanhood, relationships, vulnerability, hurt, but with the distance of a sort of a puppeteer. It is this methodology which I relate to and aspire to use in the same manner in my own work.

Dealing with human melancholy

Another theme which I have taken up in my work is melancholy, which although not related to the idea of identity at first glance, has upon close investigation proven to be very tied up in the ideas of identity and social norms which I was previously dealing with in *'Self Portrait by Proxy'* and *'Peepshow'*. The theme arose several times, first in the performance installations *'Buried'* and *'Buried II'*,²⁷ later in the performance *'I just want to like myself'*²⁸ and finally in the installation *'Stuck'*.²⁹

²⁵ Macel, Christine (Ed.). , *Sophie Calle, M'as tu vue*, trans. Pleasance, Simon and Penwarden, Charles, Munich, Prestel Publishing, 2003.

²⁶ See figure 10

²⁷ See figure 6

²⁸ See figure 7

²⁹ See figure 8

The prevalence of this theme, while relating to my own personal struggles with mental illness and, once again, the desire to perform particular actions is also rooted in a desire to hold up and examine something which I consider to be very closely linked to the self and human nature. In researching to create the installation '*Stuck*' I came upon the author Barbara Ehrenreich who has written extensively on the idea of the tension between societal expectations of a positive constitution and the human propensity for melancholy.³⁰ This idea, essentially of the tug of war between the self and society was the basis for the work which grew out of earlier performances '*Buried*' and '*Buried II*' and '*I just want to like myself*' done in the more instinctive, personal or Tracey Emin inspired manner and into a more Sophie Calle style analytical work, investigating the idea of the self using interviews and experiments to come to a conclusion. In the end I used an abstract research process consisting of interviews, word association and failure to come to a conclusion that the materiality of my subject matter were best made physical in the dialectics of tar and lamb fat, poured through the 'sieve' of my clothing which hung on a bamboo pole. It was accompanied by a video of me making a movement of opening and closing, which served as a cathartic answer to the question of our tug of war between forced positivity and human melancholy.

This brings me to another artist I would like to discuss as thematically speaking there is definitely a link to the Icelandic artist Gabriela Friðríksdóttir, however my approach is quite distant from hers. I do however connect with and aspire to the totality of her work, and use similar mediums such as drawing, sculpture, video and performance. She has also had a particular focus on melancholy and the exhibitions '*Melankólia*' and '*Kaþarsis*'³¹ were built around these subjects. In '*Melankólia*' and '*Kaþarsis*', Friðríksdóttir works with the concepts of melancholy and catharsis as they are defined by the ancient Greeks as respectively 'purgation' or 'release'³² and from Plato, as explained in the exhibition catalogue, the melancholic person is an

³⁰ Ehrenreich, Barbara, *Smile or Die - How positive thinking fooled america and the world*, London, Granta, 2009.

³¹ See figure 15 and 16

³² "Catharsis" *Dictionary.com*, retrieved January 5th 2015, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/catharsis>

‘afar næma sál sem hefði sérstaka hæfileika til að ná þeirri gerð alsælu sem æskilegust er’.³³

As explained above, my approach to working with melancholy is somewhat different, taking a more abstract approach with *‘Buried I’* and *‘Buried II’* and *‘Stuck’*. I also dealt with these same concepts in a different way and much less deliberately in my solo exhibition, held in the student gallery Kaffistofan in November 2014. Here I worked exclusively with the materials of white cotton, dead wood and clay.³⁴ Because of the nature of these materials and how I chose to work with them, the exhibition ended up dealing with matters of melancholy and catharsis, however it was not intended as the initial focal point of the exhibition.

While these examples focus primarily on the aforementioned ideas of identity, melancholy and society, and these are undoubtedly the bigger works I have done, the basis or source of my motivation is the enjoyment of close observation and examination of things, and this moves also into the realm of the physical as well, particularly in my book works, which have primarily focused on the investigation of material as opposed to concepts. While these works are made usually using a very different approach, usually with a focus on production and enjoyment of the process of using my hands, they are nonetheless of the same root as my bigger works.

Conclusion

When I started this essay, I made a decision to use it as an opportunity for investigation into my own artistic process. I have been investigating my work and process as an art student, looking at the different permutations of observation and analysis and how they present themselves to me personally and in the wider context of the art world. In relation to these ideas, especially observation, I particularly focused on book works I have made as examples. I looked at the concept of relational aesthetics, a term coined by Nicolas Bourriaud to conceptually deal with the participatory art of the 1990’s, and looked at how analysis can be a means by which an audience is compelled to participate by being forced to take a position on something. I also touched on confessionalism, a movement most known in literature, and found links between poetic

³³ Doove, E and Friðriksdóttir, G, exhibition catalogue for *Kaþarsis*, Gallery i8, Reykjavík, 2004

³⁴ See figure 16

confessionalism and relational art. Finally, I examined the themes of identity, melancholy and society and the ways in which they present themselves in my work, comparing and contrasting the works of artists Sophie Calle and Tracey Emin and looking closer at my own work such as *Peepshow* (2014) in order to examine both the role of audience participation and in this case, the theme of identity.

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Appendix with images



Figure 1: *Self Portrait by Proxy*

Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir

Stills from video of performance

Installation with photographs, sound and performance

2013



Figure 2: *Peepshow*

Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir

3 hours and 40 minutes

Still from a durational dance performance

2014



Figure 3: *The Clock*
Christian Marclay
Video collage
24 hours
White Cube, London
2010



Figure 4: *Untitled*

Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir

Book work using one material for each book, cardboard, glue and gauze.

Photographed by Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir

2014



Figure 5: *The Phallus in Our Daily Lives*

Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir

Zine

Photographed by Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir

2014



Figure 6: *Pad Thai*
Rirkrit Tiravanija
Installation/Happening
Paula Allen Gallery, New York
1990



Figure 7: *I Just Want to Like Myself*
Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir
Photographed by Ingibjörg Magnadóttir
Performance
2014



Figure 8: *Streamside Day*
Pierre Huyghe
Public intervention
Streamside, New York
2003

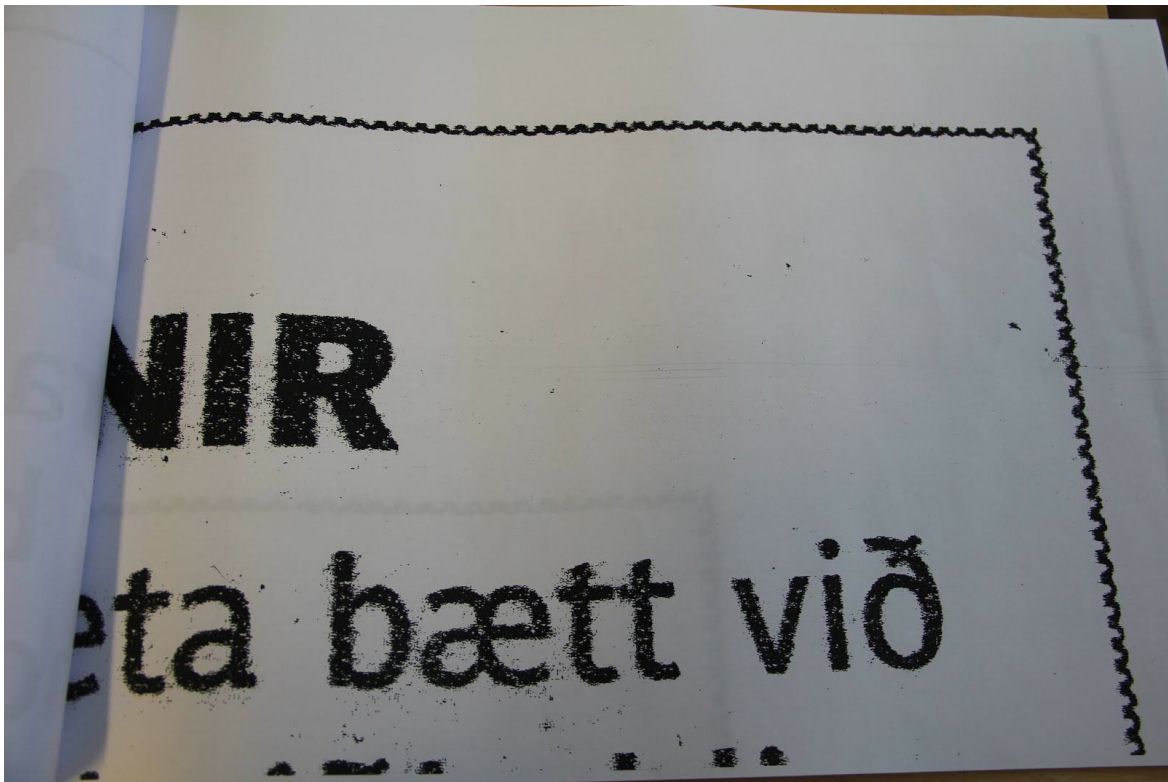


Figure 9: *Píparinn*

Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir

Photographed by Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir

Bookwork

2014



Figure 10: *Buried I*
Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir
Photographed by Ingibjörg
Magnadóttir

Performance/Sculpture
2014



Figure 11: *Buried II*

Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir

Photographed by Þórvaldur Helgason

Performance/Sculpture

2014



mention: kleinsteirn@france.com

Figure 12: *Take Care of Yourself*

Sophie Calle

Installation (fragment)

Venice Biennale

2007

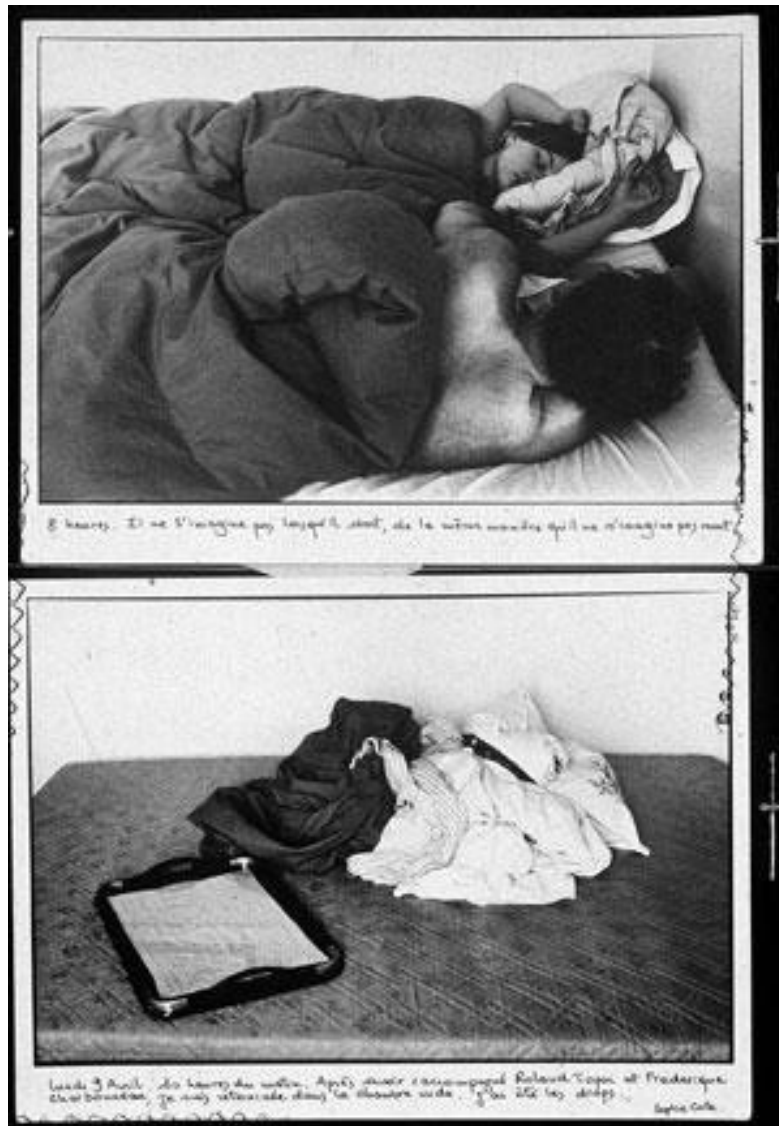


Figure 13: *The Sleepers*

Sophie Calle

Photographs and text

Paris

1980



Figure 14: *My Bed*

Tracey Emin

Installation

Tate Modern Gallery, London

1998



Figure 15: *Stuck*

Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir

Installation/Video

Photographs and still from video

2014

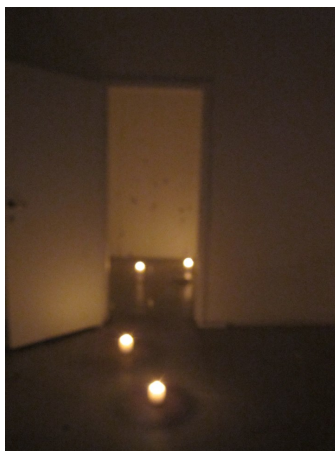


Figure 16: *Af Jörðinni/Of the earth*

Bergrún Anna Hallsteinsdóttir

Installation with performance using white cotton, clay and wood

Photographs courtesy of Heiðrún Víktorsdóttir and Auður Lóa Guðnadóttir

Kaffistofan Student Gallery

2014



Figure 17: *Melankólia*
Gabríela Friðríksdóttir
Video
2003



Figure 18: *Katharsis*
Gabréila Friðríksdóttir
Video
2003