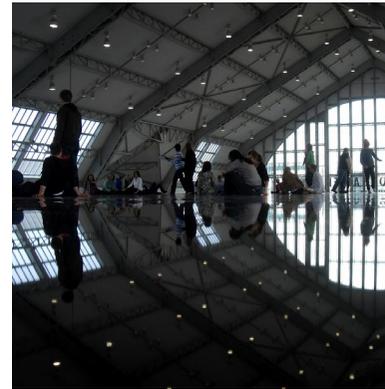
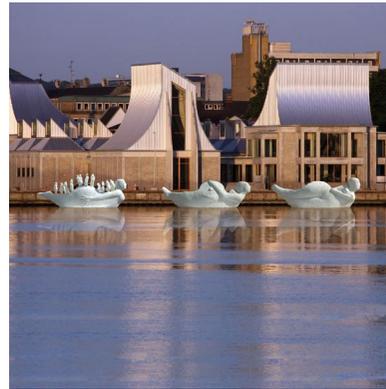


The impact of modern technology on contemporary art projects with a social and meliorist goal



"A work of art which did not begin in emotion is not art."

Cézanne

PAPER TO BE PRESENTED AT THE START OF THE SEMESTER AT THE DEPARTMENT ART AND TECHNOLOGY - FEBRUARY 1 2013

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A closer study of the long cultural history of Western Europe reveals the visual arts as the art form with the closest correlation to the natural sciences and technology.

The many new digital tools and other new technologies, which constantly create dramatic changes in our society have conquered the art world increasingly over the past 50 years. One of the art forms to have been developed in numerous and unexpected ways in the last 30 years is installation art. It often combines video and computer with other artistic strategies to create a space for experience which has a richly expressive power and many layers of meaning. This art form can develop a sense of free spaciousness, in that it relates to a multifaceted network of relationships to both a variety of artistic and scientific discourses as well as to institutions and different media.

Many artists have also created new art forms based on a reshaping of new technologies with a focus on embodied creation and perception. Their works can be seen as visual parallels to, or directly inspired by, Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics, which is – as he has remarked – “a natural extension of my work in pragmatist aesthetics. Bringing aesthetics closer to the realm of life and practice, I realised, entails bringing the body more centrally into aesthetic focus, since all life and practice – all perception, cognition and action – is crucially performed through the body.”¹ Shusterman has repeatedly stressed that it is

“the living body – a sentient soma” he is referring to and not “a mere mechanical corpse”.² Somaesthetics contains three keywords: Soma (body), Self and Society. His own precise definition of this discipline is as follows:

“Somaesthetics offers a way of integrating the discursive and nondiscursive, the reflective and the immediate, thought and feeling, in the quest of providing greater range, harmony, and clarity to the soma – the body-mind whose union is an ontological given but whose most satisfying unities of performance are both a personal and cultural achievement.”³ An essential core message in somaesthetics is embodied transactional experience and experimentation. He defines this as follows:

“Experience forms the generating core of my pragmatist philosophy, in theory and in practice. Most of my philosophical views derive from experiences outside the library, seminar room and the philosophical texts I have read. Experience for me, implies experimentation, creative exploration and involvement.”⁴

He has a vital focus on lived experience and its influence on self-knowledge. The experience is never “passive reception, mechanical habit or distanced observation.”⁵ Thus an artwork is never complete until the viewer has experienced and interpreted its particular qualities. This is why there is always an interaction between the artwork and the viewer and the viewing experience:

1. SHUSTERMAN, “SOMAESTHETICS AT THE LIMIT”, *THE NORDIC JOURNAL OF AESTHETICS*, NO 35, 2008, P. 18. 2. SHUSTERMAN, “THINKING THROUGH THE BODY, EDUCATING FOR THE HUMANITIES: A PLEA FOR SOMAESTHETICS”. THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PRESENTED ON APRIL 6, 2006, AS HIS INAUGURAL LECTURE AT THE DOROTHY F. SCHMIDT EMINENT SCHOLAR IN THE HUMANITIES AT FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY, BOCA RATON, P. 3. *THINKING THROUGH THE BODY.NET*. IT WAS LATER PUBLISHED IN *JOURNAL OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION*, VOL. 40, NO. 1, 2006, PP. 1-21. 3. SHUSTERMAN, “SOMAESTHETICS AND THE REVIVAL OF AESTHETICS”, *FILozofski VESTNIK* NO 2, 148-149. 4. RICHARD SHUSTERMAN, “A PHILOSOPHER IN DARKNESS AND IN LIGHT. PRACTICAL SOMAESTHETICS AND PHOTOGRAPHIC ART” BIENNALE, P. 280. 5. RICHARD SHUSTERMAN, *OP. CIT.*, P. 280.

"So conceived experience can be a helpful notion for appreciating the varieties of energy, value, meaning, knowledge, and behaviour that extend beneath and beyond the realm of intellectual thought."⁶

In both philosophy and art, he aims for the realization of "the aesthetic experience of collaborative creation, and even the cognitive gains from exploring new practices that provoke new sensations, spur new energies and attitudes, and thus probe one's current limits and perhaps transcend them to transform the self."⁷

Another "key and distinctive pragmatist orientation is the meliorist goal of making things better deconstructing or circumventing various obstacles and opening thought and life to new and promising options."⁸

I will be highlighting a series of projects created by four artists whose works, in different ways, contain visualisations of the basic themes in Shusterman's somaesthetics. Their projects are based on various forms of technology - including new technologies - which seek, from a series of perspectives, to improve the quality of life of the individual or society's aesthetic values whilst also addressing environmental objectives. It is also about technology-based works that draw us out of the fixed framework of everyday life and provide space for new experiences and insights and thus have a liberating function. Finally, I will

highlight works which in a series of surprising and unexpected ways, establish new connections between art and architecture and are thus able to create new orientations new orientations and new perspectives in our daily life.

In the works that the forceful American artist and designer *Michael Singer* has created, different technologies have been used to create projects which both inside as well as outside, both in the urban space as well as in nature, create impressive relations between art, architecture and ecological renewal.

His remotely sited sculptures from the '70s such as *First Gate Ritual Series 4 /79* (1979), have been at the forefront of environmental consciousness and nature-based art in the U.S. **(fig. 1)** The ritual element of his artistic work processes out in nature is later carried over to his indoor sculptures, for example *Ritual Series. Retellings* (1999-2010) **(fig. 2)**. The wood and the stones tell and retell the story from Michael Singer's homeland in Vermont. But its system of inter-relationships, its many openings and its complexity is a visualization of our surrounding world and of our folded space.

Since the late 1980s his often large projects outside the realm of galleries and museums are also well recognized and distinguished by their creative force and innovative practices addressing such diverse areas as public art, architecture, landscape and infrastructure along with urban planning and policy. These

6. SHUSTERMAN, "INTELLECTUALISM AND THE FIELD OF AESTHETICS: THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED", *REVUE INTERNATIONALE DE PHILOSOPHIE*, 220, 202, P. 331. SEE ALSO WOJCIECH MALECKI, *EMBODYING PRAGMATISM. RICHARD SHUSTERMAN'S PHILOSOPHIE AND LITERARY THEORY*, BERLIN, P. 25. 7. SEE THE CATALOGUE FOR THE EXHIBITION *AESTHETIC TRANSACTIONS. PRAGMATIST PHILOSOPHY THROUGH ART AND LIFE*, CURATED BY RICHARD SHUSTERMAN, GALERIE MICHEL JOURNIAC. PARIS, MAY 24 THROUGH JUNE 6, 2012, P. 29. 8. RICHARD SHUSTERMAN, "WHAT PRAGMATISM MEANS TO ME, TEN PRINCIPLES", *REVUE FRANÇAISE D'ETUDES AMÉRICAINES*, NO. 124, 2E TRIMESTRE 2010, P. 64.



Fig 1 Michael Singer: *First Gate Ritual Series 4/79*. 1979. De Weese Park, City Beautiful Council, Dayton, Ohio.



Fig 2 Michael Singer: *Ritual Series. Retellings* (1999–2010).

“projects exemplify how artistic practice can cross over into and include other disciplines.”⁹ His houses, gardens and infrastructure are, like his sculptures, the result of his intense interest in exploring the intersection between design and the natural environment and in interconnecting these with the human world. He considers his sculptured and large projects as complementary processes, which have in common that they “create meaning for a place.”

His sculptures and photographs of his large projects can be studied in many outstanding museums like the Guggenheim Museum, Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art and Louisiana in Denmark.

Many of his impressive projects are the collaborative work of the multifaceted *Michael Singer Studio* and his interdisciplinary team of environmental planners, naturalists, engineers, scientists, social anthropologists, historians, economists and other professionals collaboratively working to propose and realize new environmental, social, political and economic solutions. He has two studio project managers: Jason Bregman in the Studio in Florida and Jonathan Ferguson in the Studio in Vermont in the North.¹⁰

He has created the structure of his integrated sculptural gardens from many viewpoints, watching nature’s own rhythm, responding to diverse environmental conditions. The variations in the rhythms and in the formation of spaces within his gardens are endless. Together with the colours and fragrance of flowers,

the flowing water and the many green plants and trees, an intense atmosphere has been created that draws us into a magical sphere and stimulates us to experience with the entire body and all its senses.

Singer’s combined artistic, architectural and ecological goals are realized on a large scale and in a very convincing way in the outdoor and indoor garden projects that he and his Dutch, German and American colleagues worked on for the *Alterra Institute for Environmental Research, IBN. DLO Wageningen, The Netherlands* (1999). It is the Dutch research institute for the environment and is an integral part of the partnership for European Environment Research. The institute focuses on interdisciplinary collaboration for sustainable development in balance with ecological systems. Singer has created impressive sculptural interactions with the building’s core environmental systems. He has developed a series of sculptural spaces within the two core atriums of the building complex and worked closely with the project architecture team, Copjin landscape architects as well as the scientists and researchers who will ultimately work in the building. The entrances to the atriums are very impressive and visibly connect the indoor gardens with the surrounding landscape. **(fig. 3).**

Singer’s atriums expressively visualize the ecological principles that characterize the work of the institute. Realizing a sustainable practice strategy for the project was the starting point for Singer and his team. And it became, as he expressed

9. “AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL SINGER” BY JOHN GRANDE, *SCULPTURE*, SEPTEMBER VOL. 17, NO 7, P. 3. 10. SEE ELSE MARIE BUKDAHL, *THE RE-ENCHANTMENT OF NATURE AND URBAN SPACE, MICHAEL SINGER PROJECTS IN ART, DESIGN AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGENERATION*, UTZON CENTER, AALBORG, 2011, (WWW.UTZONCENTER.DK),



Fig 3 Michael Singer: *The Front exterior of one of the atriums.* 1999. *Alterra Institute for Environment.*

it, “a key to how we looked at the building and landscape being interconnected, and meaning of place flowed from there.”¹¹ His principal design goal was “to unify the outdoor and indoor architecture” by means of aesthetic interconnections with special pathways and gardens¹², as well as allowing the building’s air, temperature control, and water systems to work with its outdoor and indoor landscape. Using these concepts, he and his team created a unified and more dynamic space. He also wanted to give the new buildings many of the nuances and variations in textures of older buildings. He thus selected “patinated wood and metals for the meeting shelter and trellises, worn-looking pavers, fountain-like water channels, and pools (which) all make reference to former use and mystery.”¹³

The two gardens were nicknamed “twin green lungs and kidneys”, because both the plants and the watering system produced an optimal inner climate. The gardens each have their own special aesthetic character as well as distinct water filtration and cleansing interactive dynamic systems. “My concept was for each atrium space and its garden to have its own ambience”, Singer reflects.¹⁴ The process in the Atria Gardens begins with storm water, filtered through an exterior retention pond and constructed wetlands, which is then conveyed into atria spaces. That the artwork pulls water from the outside of the building is rather unique.

In the first atrium (**fig. 4**) adjacent to the library the water moves through



Fig. 4 Michael Singer: *The first atrium*. 1999. Alterra

a series of pools and weirs with a range of aquatic and emergent vegetation and fish that continue the filtration process. This garden has luxuriant undergrowth with indigenous flora. When you leave the pool located at the front of the library and continue your journey of discovery towards the large glass wall that concludes the first large atrium, you encounter fascinating walkways, winding staircases and “trellis structures” (**figs. 5, 6**). Between these fertile, green

11. REBECCA KRINKE, “MAP OF MEMORY, AN INTERVIEW. MICHAEL SINGER AND REBECCA KRINKE” *CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPES OF CONTEMPLATION*, 2005, P. 94. 12. FREDERICK STEINER, “NATURAL INTERFERENCES”, *LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE*, SEPTEMBER 2001 P. 72. 13. FREDERICK STEINER, *OP. CIT.*, P. 72. 14. FREDERICK STEINER, *OP. CIT.*, P. 72.



Fig. 5 Michael Singer: View-point looking back through the first atrium. 1999. Alterra.

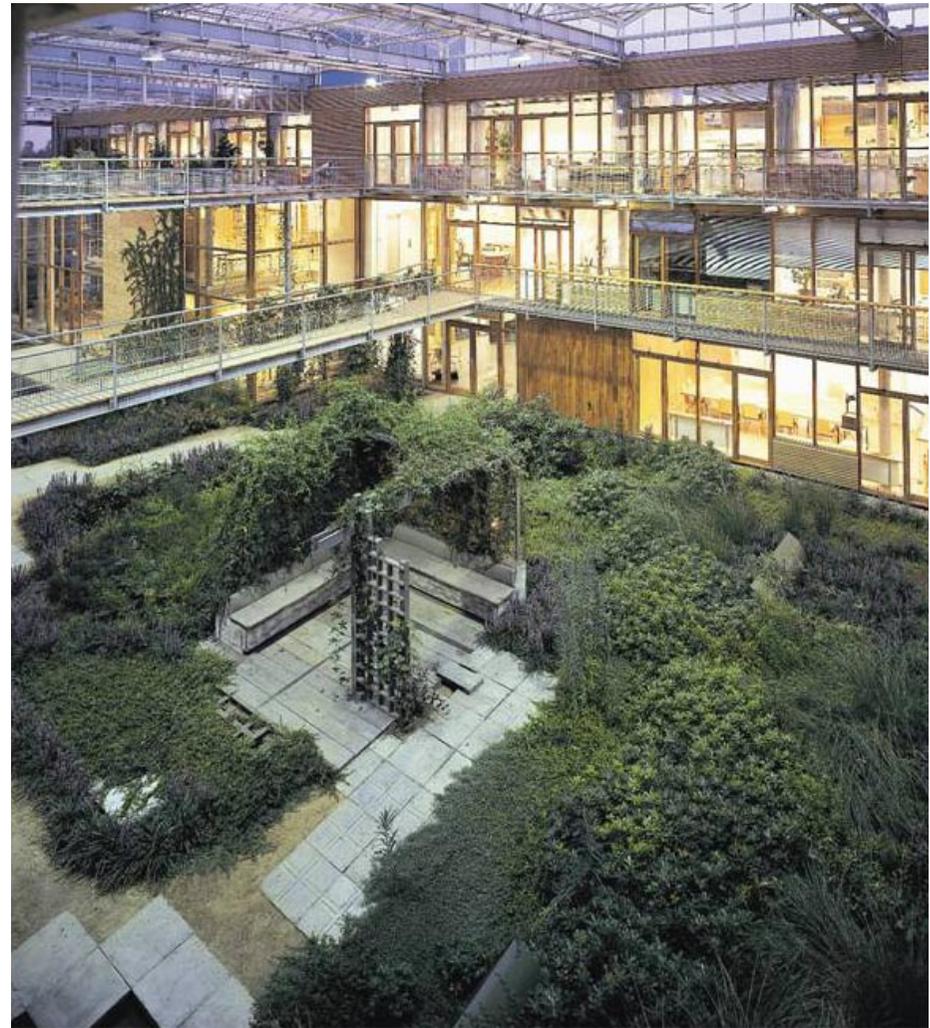


Fig. 6 Michael Singer: Details of the area in the first atrium. 1999. Alterra.



Fig. 7 Michael Singer: *Another perspective of the first atrium.*

areas, a poetic “shallow water pool” emerges, which inspires the wanderer to sit down and meditate or just enjoy the poetic surroundings with the many small and surprising artistically crafted details (**fig 7**). About “the more public atrium”, (**fig. 8**) Singer writes, “it has a more arid sparer plant palette. The large shallow suspended pool in this garden has an audible flow of water that drops to the storage cistern below”¹⁵ and recycles in the building’s irrigation system and returns for reuse in the toilets.



Fig. 8 Michael Singer: *The second atrium. 1999. Alterra.*

15. F. STEINER, *OP. CIT.*, P. 72.

In both atria the water features help to clean the building's grey water and storm water systems.¹⁶ Singer added that "the gardens reference the integration of systems. They also really function to accomplish this integration."¹⁷

Below the surface of the water, the pools in the atria have a variety of sculpted layers and forms that provide shelter for fish and support vegetation requiring depths of water (**fig. 9**). These sculpted layers are small evocative artworks and demonstrate one of the many connections between art and architecture. The multitude of green plants and flowers in the two atria reduces air pollution and imparts to the air a wonderful fragrance.



Fig. 9 Michael Singer: Underwater artistic detail of one of the pools. 1999. Alterra

"The two atria spaces form the enclosed courtyards of the E-shaped building and are the principal foundation for the building's innovative energy strategy. You can best understand the connection between the two atria and their place in the whole project when you look at the plan of it. It is a composite drawing with the base architecture sketched in black and white provided by The Behnisch Architekten and with Michael Singer's overlay in green and blue areas (**fig.10**). The atria allow for natural light to infuse the entire complex and for most offices to have garden access and views. The atria help to moderate temperatures between the interior and exterior of the building. They are used for solar heat gain in the winter, reducing heating requirements within adjacent of-

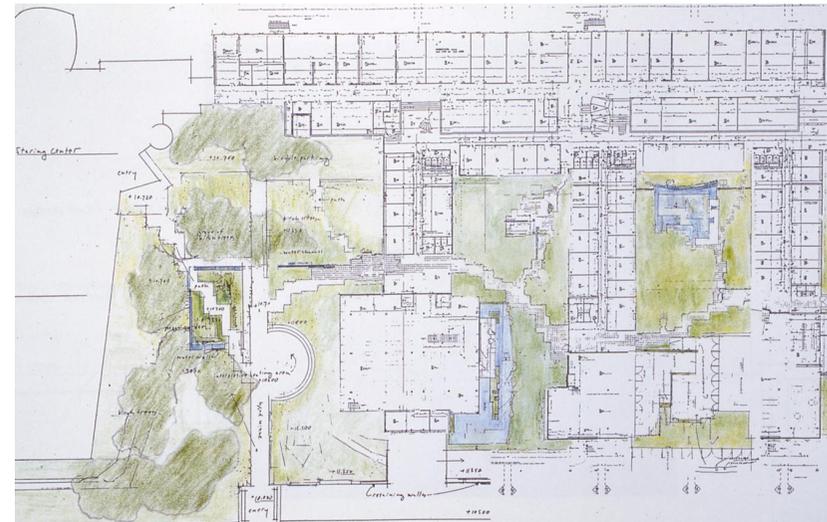


Fig. 10 Michael Singer and Behnisch Architekten: Composite Drawing of Alterra Gardens.

16. INFORMATION ABOUT "THE WATERSYSTEM" IN TWO ATRIA IS TAKEN FROM *OP. CIT.* (PP. 72-73) OF F. STEINER AND IN PUBLISHED AND UNPUBLISHED FORM, WHICH I HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE MICHAEL SINGER STUDIO. 17. F. STEINER, *OP. CIT.* P. 72.

fices and rooms. In combination with sensor-activated shading devices, increased ventilation and its interior vegetation (for shade and evaporative cooling) the atria allow for the building to function comfortably in the summer with no air-conditioning except in the library and in the kitchen. The sculptural water pools were carefully integrated to combine with this innovative energy strategy, assisting with humidity levels.”¹⁸

Scientists use the gardens for their research as well. These gardens can also be used as places for contemplation and quiet conferences or study. As Singer remarks, “why should contemplative space be outside of our everyday experience?”¹⁹ Several of the ecologically oriented researchers have responded to the very rich visual experience and have also emphasized that they especially enjoy the good and healthy inner climate and inspirational surroundings.²⁰

The garden in *Eco Tarium (New England Science Centre)* (1996–2000) is another example of Singer’s combination of artistic and climate-improving objectives that include responsibility for the wellbeing of the environment. *The Emerging Garden* which seems to invade the space and the *Four Season Water Wall*, which uses “nature’s own artistic and creative force” are the focus of the central courtyard. The summer season’s water wall flows gently down the patterned grid (**fig. 11**) but in winter – says Singer – “the garden and water wall are transformed by the forming and melting of ice. This freezing and melting ice



Fig. 11 Michael Singer: Summer Season Water Wall. 1996. *Eco Tarium*.

18. UNPUBLISHED LETTER OF 30 OCTOBER FROM THE ARCHITECT JONATHAN FOGELSEN, WRITTEN IN COLLABORATION WITH THE MICHAEL SINGER INSTITUTE.. 19. R. KRINKE, *OP. CIT.*, P. 85. 20. FREDERIC STEINER, *OP. CIT.*, P. 73, *OP. CIT.*, P. 52.

wall changes shape and appears different throughout each day.”²¹ Nature has taken over the role of technology and created an “ice sculpture” (fig. 12).



Fig. 12 Michael Singer: *Water and Ice Wall*. 1996. *Eco Tarium*

Singer believes that his gardens are only finalized when visitors have walked through them and discovered the many new, small nuances and perspectives, which continuously change character, depending on the effects of the lighting. “Singer” comments Rebecca Krinke “engages the body in unconventional ways and in unconventional places to wake us up to the experience of having/being a body and the power of the moment.”²² He also focuses on what Shusterman calls “the living, feeling, sentient, intelligently perceiving and performing body.”²³

Singer has in his many technology-based projects in the interior and outer urban space and in the landscape, challenged and expanded traditional boundaries between artists, designers and planning practitioners. He draws on unprecedented priorities that can inspire both artists and architects to discover unexpected artistic models for urban and ecological renewal and enhance the quality of life. This can be described as another visualisation of a aspect of so-maesthetics.

The three Danish visual artists Bjørnstjerne Christiansen, Jakob Fenger and Rasmus Nielsen formed a project group in 1993 that they called SUPERFLEX. And they have already gained international recognition for their projects, which are based on new technology but also function on a conceptual level and use social processes and networking as their working material. Their solo exhibitions include Basel Kunsthalle, Mori Museum in Tokyo and in Los Angeles, London,

21. QUOTED BY ELSE MARIE BUKDAHL IN 22. R. KRINCKE, *OP. CIT.*, P. 85. 23. SHUSTERMAN, “A PHILOSOPHER IN DARKNESS AND IN LIGHT” IN *OP. CIT.*, P. 280.

Porto Alegre, Brazil, Bangkok. Their projects are represented in MoMA, New York, Queensland Art Gallery, Jumex collection, Mexico and other Museums and art collections. They were all educated at the Royal Danish Academy of Art and are former students of mine.

They describe their most important aim with their often site-specific projects as follows:

“We are three members of SUPERFLEX and are joined by various international collaborators on individual projects. Since 1993, we have worked on a series of initiatives involving issues such as energy production in developing countries, Internet television studios for specific neighbourhoods and communities and brand name copy production in South East Asia. Though very different, all these projects relate closely to questions of power relations and democracy. We are interested in using our position as artists to explore the contribution that the field of art can make to social, political and economic change. At a time of extreme disillusion with the current representative system and hysteria around immigration and security, it is our suggestion that some possible new ways of thinking and acting can be found through the activity of art and artist.”

There are some clear parallels between the aims of SUPERFLEX and one of the keywords in Shusterman’s original development of pragmatism. This deals with what he calls “community” which he characterizes as “an indispensable medium for the pursuit of better beliefs, knowledge, and even for the realization

of meaning through language and the arts.” He is convinced that “community is not only a cognitive theme in pragmatism but an aesthetic, ethical, and political one, and it contributes to pragmatism’s fundamentally democratic orientation. Pragmatists have offered cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic arguments for democracy.”

SUPERFLEX describe their projects as Tools that invite people to take part in the creation of their experimental models which often are aimed at changing the economic and cultural conditions in various societies, both in the East and in the West. Shusterman also emphasises the active, creative elements in the experience of art, even though he expresses it in more general terms: “aesthetic experience is not a passive purposeless affair of disembodied contemplation but rather involves the active somatic engagement of purposive perceptual discrimination.”

Researchers like Troels Degn Johansen and Åsa Nacking have included SUPERFLEX projects under the heading of relational art. This art form was developed by Nicola Bourriaud in 1998 in his book *Esthétique relationnelle (Relational Aesthetics, 2002)*. His definition of relational art is a description of what is precisely the central element of Superflex’s projects. He describes this art form as “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole human relations and their social context, rather than an independent

and private space. "This type of art is, according to Åsa Nacking, also called "socializing art" because it comprises elements of interactivity and because "its most noticeable characteristic is its socializing effect. This is a type of art that wants to bring people together and to increase understanding for each other and for our own situation." Bourriaud indicates that artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija and Carsten Höller are prominent examples of artists who work with relational art. It is precisely these artists that Shusterman highlights in his writings. According to him it is "obvious that art is an essentially relational enterprise, especially due to its fundamentally communicative dimension." In an interview by Aude Launay on Biological Aesthetics he tells us, that he admires "some European artists of such "relational orientation" e.g. Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Philippe Parreno. He met them at an Art and Experience event in Venice (2004) organized by the Italian art critic Maurizio Bartolotti. But even if Shusterman has clear sympathies with their artistic and social aims, his "aesthetic theory does not regard them as essentially superior to other ways of art making." His "theoretical position is more pluralistic. There are many ways that art can express its inescapably relational condition and our essentially social existence."²⁴ Höller had a great "interest in Pragmatist Aesthetics' themes of full bodied, participatory aesthetic experience and the blurring of the established oppositions between life and art, the aesthetic and the ethical, knowledge and amusement." That is why he asked Shusterman in 1996 to write the text for the provocative *House of Pigs and People* he created together with Rosemarie Trockel for *Documenta X* in 1997.²⁵

Karlskrona2 (1995) is an impressive example of a SUPERFLEX relational Internet art project. It is an exact digital replica – a 3D World – of the Swedish city Karlskrona. When the virtual citizen begins to intervene in various functions and creates simple, virtual buildings, the scenery changes. The virtual Karlskrona can be seen via a large-scale video screen which displays online images of it. It is placed in the central square of the real city (**fig. 13**) Here citizens can study the activities of themselves (their avatars) and see the difference between the real and the digital city (**fig. 14**). Citizens are thus able to discuss the future of their city on a very concrete level through this project.

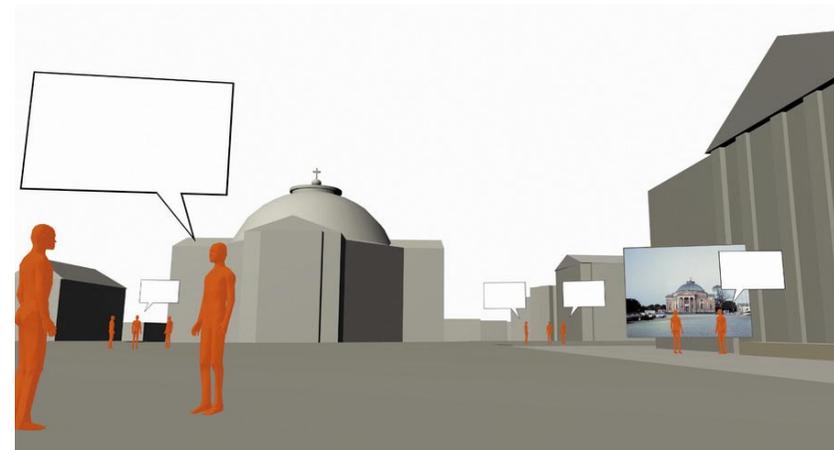


Fig. 13. SUPERFLEX – The internet project Karlskrona 2. 1999

24. "BIOLOGICAL AESTHETICS. RICHARD SHUSTERMAN, AN INTERVIEW BY AUDE LAUNAY IN 02. REVUE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN TRIMESTRIELLE ET GRATUITE/ÉTÉ 2008, NO 48 WITH ENGLISH TEXTS. 25. SHUSTERMAN'S DOCUMENTA TEXT "A HOUSE DIVIDED" WAS REPRINTED IN C. HÖLLER AND R. TROCKEL, *A HOUSE OF PIGS AND PEOPLE*, KÖLN, 1997, PP. 31-35.

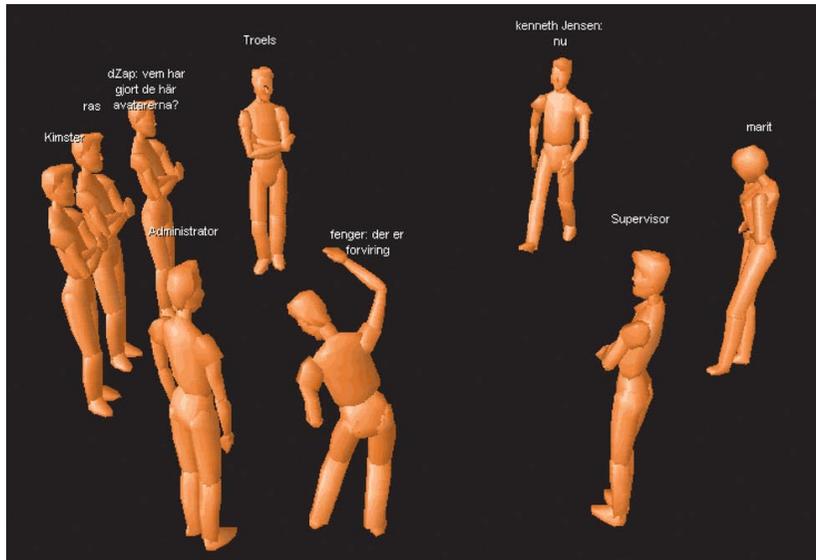


Fig. 14 Superflex: Digital representations of the citizen in Karlskrona 2.

SUPERFLEX have described the work and their goals as follows: "As the virtual citizens meet and interact things will change, buildings will redefine their function, social hierarchies will alter, and laws will be reconstituted and renewed. The project is designed as a research experiment, using the Internet as a local network rather than a global communication tool. *Karlskrona2* is a "free space", in the sense of not having to obey the legal, economic or social rules of Karlskrona. At the same time, it is inhabited by at least part of the same community of individuals as the real city, bringing the challenge of virtual reality into the lives of neighbours and friends (**fig. 15**). To what extent will

there be a fulfilment of individual or collective fantasies? To what extent will it conform to the pattern of Karlskrona? What new possibilities does the Internet's "free space" offer to an existing community? *Karlskrona2* is perhaps a model for other places and other situations. A similar project, *Wolfsburg2*, was also implemented in Wolfsburg, Germany."



Fig. 15. SUPERFLEX: Digital citizens in Karlskrona 2. 1999.

Through their projects, SUPERFLEX support the requirement of "free space" and make it possible for information to be free, i.e. that "citizen users should be able to retrieve and share the visual information that he or she find most relevant for decision-making."²⁶

SUPERFLEX also realised this aim in a project that established an Internet-ba-

26. TROELS DEGN JOHANSSON, *OP. CIT.*, P. 20.

sed dialogue in the public space in Sharjah in The United Arab Emirates. This was called *Sharjah Moon Channel* (**fig. 16**) and broadcasted during the 5th International Biennale in Sharjah from April 17th – 27th, 2001. SUPERFLEX calls a channel like this a Superchannel, which they describe as “a local studio used by people and communities as a discussion forum, presentation medium and a physical gathering place. It is a tool that enables one to produce internet TV directly. During live productions the viewer can communicate directly through a chat with the producer and with all other viewers. All productions are archived, so viewer can continue to watch and discuss them.”²⁷



Fig. 16 SUPERFLEX: *Sharjah Moonchannel*. 2001. UAE-

This Superchannel project at the Sharjah Biennale was combined with an interactive pictorial studio environment created by the painter Stig Brøgger, the

sculptor Øivind Nygaard and the graphic artist Annemette Larsen (**fig. 17**). The visual artist Dorte Dahlin curated the project. (www.superflex.net/tools/superchannel/users/moon.shtml). This project was part of a larger collaborative project between Else Marie Bukdahl, who at that time was the president of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, Dorte Dahlin and colleagues from the Sharjah Department of Culture and Information.



Fig. 17 SUPERFLEX: *Sharjah Moonchannel's studio*. 2001. UAE.

The studio was open for any visitor or artist at the Biennale. The studio manager Christoffer Bruun produced more than 25 shows during the 10 days covering poetry, architecture, happenings, talk shows, sightseeing in Sharjah, etc. (see www.super-channel.org). The various programs could be accessed worldwide

27. SEE SUPERFLEX'S DEFINITION OF SUPERCHANNEL IN *TOOLS BOOK*, ED. BARBARA STEINER, GALERIE FÜR ZEITGENÖSSISCHE KUNST, LEIBZIG, 2003.

via the Internet. They presented a large number of the artists, from both east and west that were exhibiting at the biennial. There was also a series of different features from cultural and societal life in Sharjah, as well as interviews with students from the universities. Many of these people, who came from countries like India, Pakistan and the Philippines and were working in Sharjah, also contributed to the project. They sang, talked or danced. It was fascinating to see how well a digital democratic platform worked in a society with a different political system.²⁸

In their Internet art projects SUPERFLEX has succeeded in “making things happen by establishing and “staging” a variety of relations between individual human “agents” and investigating their development in a computer-mediated communication environment.”²⁹

The works and large projects created by the very influential English sculptor Antony Gormley can be seen in major museums in Europe and USA and in the urban space e.g. Trafalgar Square, London, around Madison Square, New York City, the Arctic Circle, Norway and Les Archives National, France.

Antony Gormley interprets his artwork as “an attempt to materialise the place at the other side of appearance where we all live.”³⁰ Many of his works are created from forms moulded from his own body, because – as he says – this is “the clo-

sest experience of matter that I will ever have and the only part of the material world that I live inside.”³¹ His works are not symbolic but contain traces of a real event or of a real body.

He describes his installations in urban and rural environments as “displacement”, “other places” or “energy fields”. All three key words can describe the very impressive installation in Deichtorhallen in Hamburg: *Horizon Field Hamburg* (2012) (**fig. 18**). It is site specific and created for the great hall with a large window providing spectacular views of Hamburg. Dirk Luckow describes the in-

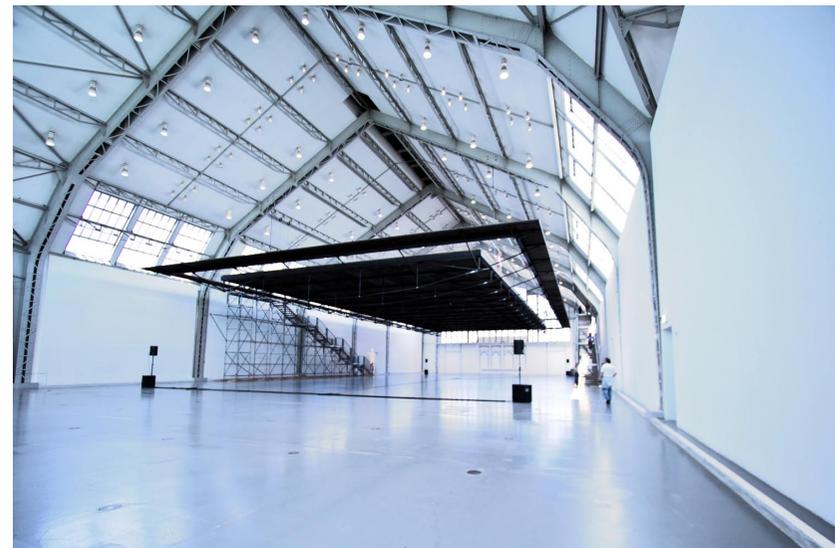


Fig. 18 Antony Gormley: *Horizon Field Hamburg*. 2012.

28. ELSE MARIE BUKDAHL, “CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE PUBLIC SPACE AND IN NATURE” IN THE CATALOGUE TO THE EXHIBITION *NOMAD ACADEMY GOES PUBLIC*, SHARJAH ART MUSEUM, 2008, PP. 1920. 29. TROELS DEGN JOHANSSON, *OP. CIT.*, P. 20. 30. QUOTED IN GORMLEY: *MAKING SPACE*, BEEBAN KIDRON DOCUMENTARY, 2007, SHOWN ON CHANNEL 4 UK, NOVEMBER 2009; CHANNEL4.COM. 31. GORMLEY, *OP. CIT.* 2007.

stallation as consisting of “a large, black, reflective, synthetic surface measuring 1200 square metres and which, suspended from a steel structure, horizontally spans almost the entire reach of the Deichtorhallen’s northern hall at a height of 7.4 metres. Rather like a large, lightly oscillating airborne raft, this object, weighing 70 tons, floats in space and can accommodate up to 100 visitors at a time.”³²

Horizon Field Hamburg (2012) visualizes the goal of somaesthetics, which is to play an important role in the art of living. In this installation the artistic experience involves the whole body and uses it as living soma in new and startling ways (**fig. 19**). There is no doubt that “the experience of ascending onto the platform, of experiencing our visual, acoustic and physical impact on it – both individually and as a group – heightens our awareness (..) and reassesses our position in the world.”³³

New communities are also established amongst the many people who find themselves on the platform. They dance, talk, enjoy themselves, rest and they are constantly placed in new and surprising situations which remove the boundaries between young and old and break down the differences in culture and working life. Spontaneous joy flows through the crowd, moving freely and boldly on the platform, which resembles “a piazza hanging in the sky” a “dark pool” or a “deep lake frozen overnight”³⁴. But participants also experience fear, anxiety and thrill. Gormley “plays on people’s fear of the limitless, the infinite,



Fig. 19 Antony Gormley: *Horizon Field Hamburg*. 2012.

the unbound void: the oscillation of the platform feels as though the earth beneath one’s feet is being pulled away – the steadfastness of one’s own body disappears.” The many mirror effects create an undefined sense of space and the mirror image that the ceiling creates on the black reflective facade provides

32. FOREWORD BY DIRK LUCKOW FOR THE CATALOGUE FOR THE EXHIBITION *ANTONY GORMLEY HORIZON FIELD HAMBURG*, DEICHTORHALLEN HAMBURG, SNOEK, P. 16. THE CATALOGUE CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES: DIRK LUCKOW, “SPACE”; STEPHEN C. LEVINSON, “A SWING FOR THE GODS”; IAIN BOYD WHYTE, “ELEVATED THOUGHTS ON A RAISED PLATFORM.” **33. IAIN BOYD WHYTE**, “ELEVATED THOUGHTS ON A RAISED PLATFORM”, PP. 139-140. **34. STEPHEN C. LEVINSON**, “A SWING FOR THE GODS”, *OP. CIT.*, 2012, P. 82 AND P. 86.

participants with a thrill, because they feel that they are stepping into the abyss and forget that they are walking on a black mirror. In addition, the “vaulted ceiling space extends beneath our own bodies into sheer infinity and engenders a floating sensation.”³⁵ (fig. 20).



Fig. 20 Antony Gormley: *Horizon Field Hamburg*. 2012

By being active participants in the completion of the artistic process, they are also provided with a more in-depth view of the process of artistic creation. It is they, after all, who are a very integral part of the work. Dewey’s key word “learning by doing” which is also centrally located in Shusterman’s somaesthetics, becomes a reality.

Gormley has described the goal of his art as follows: “The best art for me always makes you turn your back on the work and face existence with the ability to see what you didn’t before.”³⁶ In *Horizon Field Hamburg* he has fully realised this goal.

The Danish and Norwegian artist *Marit Benthe Norheim* (born 1960) is known first and foremost for the many unique sculptures and installations – often on a large scale – which she has created in Norway, Denmark, England, Sweden, Iceland and Greenland.

These works reveal new perspectives and communicate new patterns of meaning in the public space. They thus confer a new identity on the locations in which they are situated. Through her works she creates a closer and more personal contact with the audience and local population groups, raising questions of identity and the relationship between the individual and society. Like Shusterman, she is interested in how the power of art “can serve individual, social and political reconstruction” and support “the pursuit of perfectionist self-cultivation in the art of living”.³⁷ In her site-specific projects – in industrial plants, schools and other institutions – she has thus attempted to improve both the environment and the living quality of the people who live there. She has stimulated their imagination and added a poetic dimension to a one-dimensional and often cold technological world. She has what Shusterman calls “a meliorist goal of making things better, opening thought and life to new and promising options.”³⁸

Almost all Marit Benthe Norheim’s sculptures – mainly of women – are modelled directly in cement. They exude a formal simplicity, a particular sensibility and an intense expressive force. They are thus able to communicate new aspects of inner

35. DIRK LUCKOW, “UNBOUNDED SPACE – ANTONY GORMLEY’S *HORIZON FIELD HAMBURG*”, *OP. CIT.*, 2012, P. 44. 36. IAIN BOYD WHYTE, *ELEVATED THOUGHTS ON A RAISED PLATFORM IN OP. CIT.*, 2012, P.140. 37. SHUSTERMAN, “PRAGMATISM AND EAST-ASIAN THOUGHT”, *METAPHILOSOPHY*, VOL. 35, 2004. 38. SHUSTERMAN, “WHAT PRAGMATISM MEANS TO ME” IN *OP. CIT.*, P. 64.

and outer reality. The art historian Trond Borgen rightly remarks that “Norheim uses the body as a symbol and metaphor for basic human emotions, experiences and attitudes.” Through her female figures she visualises her conception of the body which is the core in somaesthetics because she, as Shusterman expresses it, “treats the body not only as an object of aesthetic value and creation, but also as a crucial sensory medium for enhancing our dealings with all other aesthetic objects and also with matters not standardly aesthetic”³⁹, particularly the basic existential questions. She considers the body to be our primary means of engaging with the world, including our mental life.

An important element in somaesthetics is what Shusterman calls “to break the hold of object fetishism in contemporary art, aesthetics and culture.” He calls this characteristic the “exaggerated sense of art’s demarcation from the rest of life and its autonomy from wider social and political forces that in fact penetrate even into the very forms of artistic expression.”⁴⁰

To counteract such efforts at artistic isolation and to intensify the dialogue between art, the surroundings and people, Marit Benthe Norheim has created moveable sculptures with integrated music, thus creating in them a new time dimension, which constantly creates new surprise elements, which are capable of splintering the network of conventions that envelop our everyday lives. These works are examples of vibrantly embodied art.

One of the latest and most promising examples of her realisation of this goal is a rolling sculptural installation with *Five Campingwomen* (2008). It consists of five large female sculptures built on top of five working caravans (**fig. 21**). With technological and artistic inventiveness, Marit Benthe Norheim has managed to transform old caravans into large, rolling sculptural works. The interiors of the caravans are filled partly with sculptures, partly photographs, partly porcelain mosaics. We meet five sensuous and forceful *Campingwomen*:



Fig. 21 Marit Benthe Norheim: *Five Camping women*. 2008.

39. R. SHUSTERMAN, *PRAGMATIST AESTHETICS*, *OP. CIT.*, P. 278. 40. R. SHUSTERMAN, “SOMAESTHETICS AT THE LIMITS”, *OP. CIT.*, P. 17.

The Refugee, Maria Protector/Virgin Mary, The Bride, The Siren and the Camping-mama In the interiors of each of the caravans, the renowned Norwegian composer Geir Johnson has composed or adapted music, which in a richly expressive manner, highlights the themes that each of the Campingwomen symbolize.

The Campingwoman representing *The Refugee*, for example, is a symbol of the fate of our immigrants (**fig. 22**). She bends forward lithely and gazes - with both bravery and fear - into the foreign world that she has been forced to flee to. Inside the caravan, 400 children and refugee women from Stavanger created



Fig. 22 Marit Benthe Norheim: *The Refugee on the Danish West Coast*. 2008

porcelain mosaics with motifs that express longing and loss (**fig. 23**). In the poetry that Geir Johnson has created music for - and which fills the caravan's



Fig. 23 Marit Benthe Norheim: *The Refugee, covered in porcelain tiles*

space – the famous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish has, in his poem, *State of Siege* (2002), expressed both the pain and fear that are a part of daily life for the refugee. However, Darwish also points out the “the malady of hope is incurable”. Moreover, even though the refugees must live an uncertain existence, they are “eternity’s guests”.

In the five *Campingwomen*, Marit Benthe Norheim has created expressive sculptural interpretations of the ambiguous, the mysterious and the power of light and dark in women’s personalities. These Women create new points of reference in our everyday lives, provide us with new poetic inspiration and hope for the experience of new values and new meaning. They have stretched out a network, which expresses a materiality and an intensity that has been obscured by the technology of our information society. The many surprising connecting threads, which the *Campingwomen* create between visual art, music and the worlds of adults and children, are extended in many new and unexpected ways. The *Campingwomen* travel from place to place and have opportunities to establish new dialogues with the various people they meet.

The *Campingwomen* engage the senses and imaginations of the audience directly. They create new orientation points or disseminate knowledge of reality, which cannot be mediated by verbal language. They also incorporate the viewer in a very active way, in the sense that they can enter into the caravans, meditate,

listen to music, discuss or study the photos, sculptures or other works that are inside. When it comes to the artist and the viewer, this is an example of a totally embodied experience, creation and perception.

Her next, very interactive project – the *Life-boats* – will be integrated into a European framework. She is working on creating three sculptures in cement, which will become functioning boats, shaped as female figures. They will be 12m in length. The three sailing women are My ship is loaded with:

1. *Longing* – the young one, entering into the world. 2. *Life* – in the middle of life and fertilised 3. *Memories* – the ageing or the dead (**fig. 24**). The first piece is finished in a very evocative manner. They are destined for voyages on the Euro-



Fig. 24 Marit Benthe Norheim: Photo montage of the three *Life-boats* at the Utzon Center.

pean canals and will create different and surprising activities in the harbours in which they dock. Marit Benthe Norheim emphasizes that the “life-boats project is about meetings, about exchanges, about daring to move into unknown territory. I will, as with several of my previous projects, be using direct participation and direct involvement in the process, both in the production phase as well as on the journey.”

But these sailing female sculptures, which are both sensual and monumental, require perfect and persuasive solutions to the many difficult technological challenges. Referring to the challenge of building the three ships and integrating the technical and artistic issues, Marit Benthe Norheim writes:

“Throughout the planning and production phases I was in dialogue with the naval engineer and boat builder with expertise in ferro cement boat building. The naval engineer from CDE Danish Marine Design ApS made technical drawings and calculations in accordance with my first models on a scale of 1:40, which were photographed in 3D and which, with continuous communication, were transformed into models on a scale of 1:5 (**figs. 25, 26**).

Both parties found that respect for one another’s expertise meant that we, carefully and over time, approached a common result, which meant that the sculptural ships could function optimally, both as artistic objects and as functioning vessels.

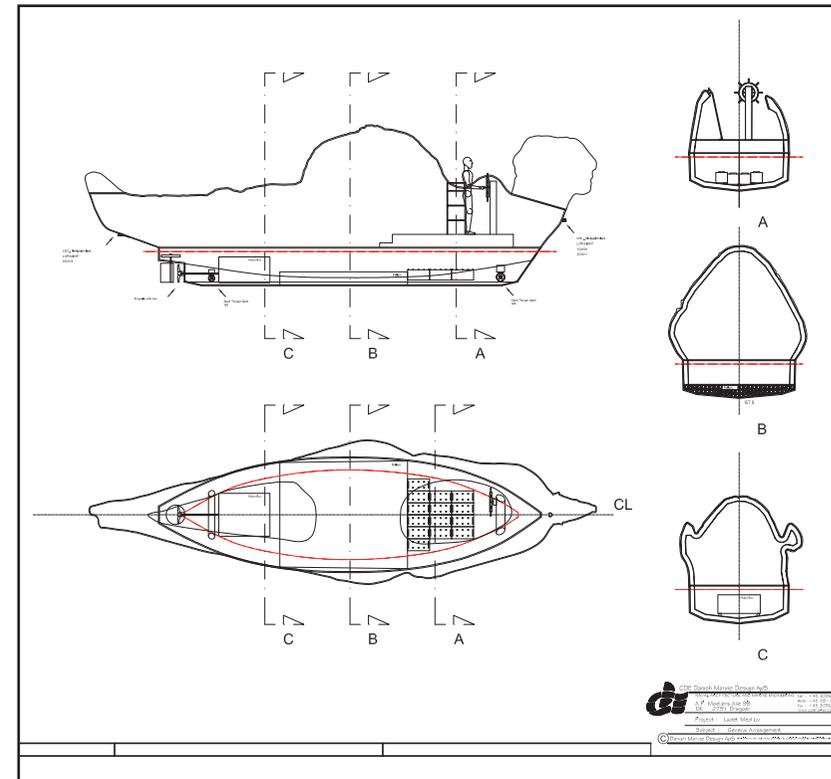


Fig. 25 CDE Danish Marine Design ApS: working sketches and calculations.

After the models on a scale of 1:5 were completed and approved by both parties, the drawings and calculations of the entire construction of the sculptural ship on a scale of 1:1 were produced (**fig. 27**). Using these, the first ship was



Fig. 28 Marit Benthe Norheim. *The finished Lifeboat called Longing*

The Chinese artist Pan Gongkai, who already has made a significant impact on the international art world, has not only been very successful in painting, installation art and video art, but also in education and administration. He is the president of the Central Academy in Beijing, and vice-president of the Chinese Artists Association. He has contributed to the Venice Biennale 2011 with four other Chinese artists. Shusterman commented on these contributions in an interview with the Chinese curator Peng Feng⁴². Shusterman believes that somaesthetics has had significance for Peng Feng's curatorial work:

"Somaesthetics has begun to have an impact not only on the analysis of visual art, but also on its practice. One prominent example is its use as a generative theoretical background for Peng Feng's curatorial project for the Chinese Pavilion of the 2011 Venice Biennale. Entitled Pervasion, this show of five installation pieces (including clouds with tea fragrance; pipes dripping with Chinese schnapps; fragrant porcelain pots of herb medicine; fog of incense; and lotus-scented virtual snow) sought to emphasize that our appreciation of even visual art is always much more than visual and to highlight the soma's role as trans-modal perceiving subjectivity by engaging also the pleasures of other bodily senses."⁴³

Like Shusterman, Gongkai is convinced that all art is created and perceived through the body. He knows that body consciousness plays an important role in contemporary Chinese painting. This is also the case with the impressive video

installation *Snow Melting into Lotus* from the Venice Biennale 2011 (**fig. 29**). It is a long, moving passage which transports you into a magical space. Both sides of a temporary corridor are covered with Chinese ink lotuses, onto which an animation of falling snow is projected. Three air conditioners help keep the temperature of the corridor much cooler than the rest of the building. The temperature never rises above 10° C. In this work Pan Gongkai juxtaposes the traditional subject of the lotus and the traditional technique of ink painting with use of modern computer technology to create elements of falling text in video, falling like snowflakes. At the bottom on the ground are actual cut out white letters which appear to have actually dropped out of the work. The text is his English translation of his text on modern Western art and art theory. Gongkai has described this project as follows:

"It is an attempt to create a poetic and vacant space that fits in with traditional Chinese culture."

Shusterman showed a video of this project in the exhibition he curated in Paris at the Sorbonne's Michel Journiac Gallery in connection with the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the French translation of his book *Pragmatist Aesthetics* in 2012.⁴⁴

Shusterman emphasises that Gongkai "is equally accomplished as an erudite theorist and we have spent many hours in Beijing in philosophical dialogues

42. SEE **THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN PENG FENG AND RICHARD SHUSTERMAN** ABOUT CAI ZHISONG, LIANG YUANWEI, PAN GONGKAI, YANG MAOYUAN, YUAN GONG IN *ARTPRESS SUPPLÉMENT VENISE 2011, PAVILLIONS NATIONAUX*. PENG FENG HAS TRANSLATED MANY OF RICHARD SHUSTERMAN'S BOOKS. 43. "21 **SOMAESTHETICS**. THINKING THROUGH THE BODY AND DESIGNING FOR INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE" IN *INTERACTION DESIGN FOUNDATION*, P. 7. WWW.INTERACTIONDESIGN.ORG/ENCYCLOPEDIA/SOMAESTHETICS. HTML. 44. **THE TITLE OF THE FRENCH TRANSLATION IS:** L'ART À ÉTAT VIF: LA PENSÉE PRAGMATISTE ET L'ÉSTHÉTIQUE POPULAIRE, PARIS, 991. SEE ALSO *AESTHETIC TRANSACTIONS*, OP. CIT. PP. 5-8.



Fig. 29 Pan Gongkai:
*Snow Melting into
Lotus. 2011.*

about art, some of which have been published in Chinese art journals." One key focus in Shusterman's discussions with Gongkai "concerned the relationship between art and life, including the pragmatist idea of the ethical art of living". Shusterman has developed this view from a western perspective in Pragmatist Aesthetics. It was only when he met the Chinese philosophers and artists – Gongkai in particular – that he was really introduced to the "rich sources in the classical Confucian notion of an ethics of harmony in which ethical education rests on the twin aesthetic pillars of art and ritual." Gongkai is a specialist in Confucianism. Another key focus in Shusterman's discussions with Gongkai "concerned the relationship between art and life, including the pragmatist idea of the ethical art of living."⁴⁵

In Gongkai's projects "West and East coexist in active harmony and moving beauty, without an isolating separation, but also without coercive fusion"⁴⁶ The same goes for the interplay between traditional techniques and contemporary technology.

The projects of Olafur Eliasson, Michael Singer, SUPERFLEX, Anthony Gormley, Marit Benthe Norheim and Pan Gongkai, which are all based on different types of technology, visualise – as we have seen – some basic elements of Shusterman's somaesthetics. Particularly when it comes to embodied creation and perception, the interactive dialogue with the viewer and the surroundings, the

unification of art and experience as well as the hope of being able to inspire and benefit life. But it is precisely this aesthetic that has also revealed new aspects of the works of the artists discussed here. It has thus demonstrated that there are several outstanding artists, who in this precise and intense way, have a new and stimulating understanding of the body's role in the arts, viewing it as a resource for working on the problems of creating and interpreting art and improving the quality of our life and society as such. It is precisely these essential elements in Shusterman's conception of art, which will be able to provide a great deal of inspiration for the artists of our time.

Shusterman's somaesthetics appeals not only to an artistic elite, but also to the whole spectrum of our cultural and social life, which it provides with new ideas and inspiration.

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45. AESTHETIC TRANSACTION, *OP. CIT.*, P. 21. 46. AESTHETIC TRANSACTION, *OP. CIT.*, P. 22.