The opening gambit of a losing game:

the UGOT Centre for Public Culture, including *Six contentions about transdisciplinary research in the cultural sciences*

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Abstract

The *Transvaluation* conference calls for "alternative, cooperative environments of knowledge, of creation and invention, of 'making and thinking'". This presentation will offer such an initiative (in fact, a failed one) for discussion: the Centre for Public Culture, one of many proposals submitted to the on-going process of establishing new transdisciplinary research centres at the University of Gothenburg. As a complement, I also present a few of the assumptions – my own personal ones – behind the transdisciplinary framework of our application.

Keywords (in alphabetic order): artistic research, cultural sciences, democracy, the humanities, public culture, transdisciplinarity

The *Transvaluation* conference calls for "alternative, cooperative environments of knowledge, of creation and invention, of 'making and thinking'". This presentation will offer such an initiative for discussion: the Centre for Public Culture (CPC), one of almost eighty proposals submitted to UGOT Challenges, an on-going process of establishing new transdisciplinary research centres at the University of Gothenburg with 'global challenges' as their common concern. "UGOT Challenges", the call for proposals declared, "is a significant strategic initiative intended to take advantage of the university's joint resources to tackle global societal challenges in a collaborative environment and from different angles. By bringing together our strengths and expertise across faculties, departments and disciplines the university has a unique potential to explore possible solutions to some of the world's huge challenges. With new knowledge, new perspectives and valued partners, the University of Gothenburg will contribute to a better future." (GU 2014)

Which was our take on this rather bold statement? Drawing on the notion of public culture as formulated by Arjun Appadurai and others, the CPC was intended to address no less a challenge than the accelerating loss of confidence in the established framework of democratic politics – the "hollowing of democracy", in Peter Mair's evocative phrase – both in Europe and beyond. Our point of departure was the insight that democracy, far from being only a question of political organization, is also embedded in our memories and stories, customs and habits, social and economic arrangements. This is the reason why public culture has proved indispensable to any democratic society, and hence why any sustained attempt to further the cause of democracy must also entail a renewal of the forms and modes of public culture. But how is scientific research and, more broadly, academic institutions to take part in such a renewal? Can we develop, not only new theories, but also new modes of academic practice that engage in unexpected ways with other types of public culture? In what respects can the university contribute, analytically as well as actively and proactively, to a reinforcement of the infrastructures of public life? It was such

questions that the Centre for Public Culture would try to answer, 'makingly' as well as 'thinkingly', by way of a collaboration between the arts, humanities, social sciences, information technology and, last but not least, architecture.

I will return to this transdisciplinary framework shortly – but first things first. As my use of the past tense in the previous few paragraphs hints at ("*was* our take", "*was* intended", "*was* such questions"), the fate of our initiative has already been decided. Indeed, UGOT Challenges is still under way – but the Centre for Public Culture was not one of the twelve proposals that made it to the second stage of the application process. In fact, when the decision was made public in early March, I got the distinct feeling that we had acually been playing a losing game from the very first. Of course, we all had our suspicions – and, unfortunately, these suspicions would seem to be confirmed by the first actual 'output' of the process. Predictably, the initiatives that were selected put a heavy accent on the natural sciences (chemical use, fishing, mariculture, water utilisation) and medicine (aging, antibiotic resistance, nervous system dysfunction, reproductive health). Only a few gave prominence to political questions in a broad sense, and only one – on the social and psychological mechanisms behind collective action – belonged to what we had deemed our immediate competition. Overall, an emphasis on technical solutions to narrowly specified problems would seem to have gained the upper hand over wider scientific and cultural resonance.

In my original abstract for this paper, I wrote: "As the *Transvaluation* conference takes place, our proposal has either been rejected by the university management or proceeded to stage 2 of the application process. In the former case, it would be valuable to discuss what we did wrong – and in the latter, what we could still do even better." Today, only the first option remains – but the idea of discussing what we did wrong seems a bit too narrow and defeatist for the present context. Hence, what I offer for discussion is actually two things. On the one hand, the project plan of the CPC as it was submitted to the first stage of the UGOT Challenges process – the first move in our gambit, as it were.[1] On the other hand, one of the pieces – literally (of the draft) and metaphorically (in the game) – that had to be sacrificed in the course of its collective formulation. The only trace left is a hint towards the end of the project plan: "In the next phase of the UGOT process, we will [...] develop the general transdisciplinary framework of our proposal into a kind of charter or constitution for the CPC, consciously constructed as a system of checks and balances that aims to contain the risks involved in the collaboration – from a traditional scientific perspective, the central role allotted to artistic research – and simultaneously make the most of the potential rewards." (see p. 5 below) As a complement to the botched project plan, what I would like to share with you are a few of the assumptions – my own personal ones – behind that intended 'system of checks and balances'.

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[1] Although I acted as secretary for the project and should therefore be held accountable for the resulting text, the application benefitted greatly from input by Catharina Dyrssen, Marisa Ponti, Cecilia Rosengren, Catharina Thörn, Mick Wilson and Johan Öberg as well as many others researchers in our ad hoc scientific network.

STAGE 1 PROJECT PLAN

UGOT CENTRE FOR PUBLIC CULTURE

Today, democratic and transitional societies across the world are confronted with a range of profound trials. The decline of voter turnout and the concurrent rise of populist parties, the displacement of political contestation by publicity, marketing and image culture, the erosion of privacy under the impact of new technologies, the increasing privatization and segregation of urban space, the consolidation of new oligarchies with transnational reach, the cultural and economic effects of global migration flows, and the drastic extension of temporal horizons in the face of impending ecological crisis all contribute to a consistently diminishing confidence in the established institutional framework of democratic politics – in Peter Mair's evocative phrase, to the "hollowing of democracy" (Mair 2013). If we take the word 'challenge' in its negative sense of a problem to solve or an obstacle to overcome, then this is the challenge that the CPC will address.

As every development of broad societal significance, this 'hollowing' can be approached from a variety of angles. We contend that it is most fruitfully conceived as *a crisis of public culture*. In the words of Manuel Castells:

> It is the interaction between citizens, civil society, and the state, communicating through the public sphere, that ensures that the balance between stability and social change is maintained in the conduct of public affairs. If citizens, civil society, or the state fail to fulfill the demands of this interaction, or if the channels of communication between two or more of the key components of the process are blocked, the whole system of representation and decision making comes to a stalemate. (Castells 2008, 79)

It is such a disconcerting situation, increasingly evident since the end of the 1980s, that Mair alerts us to in a West European context: on the one hand, a withdrawal of citizens from the arena of conventional politics; on the other hand, a corresponding withdrawal of political officials into national or supra-national institutions. "Disengagement is mutual, and for all the rhetoric that echoes on all sides, it is general." (Mair 2013, 77) Even though all of the cogwheels are still spinning – even faster and faster – the machinery described by Castells is showing severe signs of malfunction. During the same period, components of the liberal democratic system have been exported to political settings where the necessary cultural conditions (viz. public culture) are lacking – a kind of 'hollowing from the outside' that has further contributed to the depreciation of democracy.

Meanwhile, renewed engagement is progressively making itself felt, both within Europe and in other parts of an increasingly interconnected world. As Pierre Rosanvallon has noted: "Although electoral democracy has undoubtedly eroded, democratic expression, involvement, and intervention have developed and gained strength." (Rosanvallon 2008, 21) In the public imagination, this tendency is epitomized by the wave of popular protests sweeping the globe in the last few years. Democratic aspirations have taken center stage, most recently in Sub-Saharan Africa (the "Black Spring" of Burkina Faso), in a way that few would have predicted only a decade ago. From Tahrir to Maidan and beyond, new as well as older forms of public culture – even the oldest form of all, the public square – have demonstrated their political potential, although they are still faced with powerful enemies.

As a result, democracy today is both everywhere and nowhere, "at once the language of military power, neoliberal market forces, political parties, social movements, donor agencies and NGOs" (Gaventa 2007, x). Confronted with such contradictory trends, we argue that a public revival is the only prospect that will prove viable in the long term (as opposed to short-term, technocratic interventions). Far from being only a question of political organization, democracy is embedded in our memories and stories, customs and habits, social and economic arrangements. This is the reason why public culture has proved indispensable to any democratic society, and hence why any sustained attempt to further the cause of democracy must also entail a renewal of the forms and modes of public culture. But how is scientific research and, more broadly, academic institutions to take part in such a renewal? Can we develop, not only new theories, but also new modes of academic practice that engage in unexpected ways with other types of public culture? In what respects can the university contribute, analytically as well as actively and proactively, to a reinforcement of the infrastructures of public life? Taking the word in its positive sense of a call to action or a project to engage with, this is the challenge that the CPC will take up.

From a policy-oriented perspective, the task of building and maintaining democratic decision-making processes at state and inter-state levels is a consistent theme in the "global challenges" literature.[1] Nevertheless, it tends to find unsatisfactory articulation in terms of clear operational goals within specific policy programmes.[2] In our estimation, this failure can partly be attributed to a lack of understanding for the role of public culture in the implemen-

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[1] E.g. in the United Nations' *Millenium Decaration* (United Nations General Assembly resolution 55/2) and *Global Issues* (www.un.org/en/globalissues), the *Millenium Project* (www.millennium-project.org/millennium/challenges.html) or the Council of Europe's *Strasbourg World Forum for Democracy* (www.coe.int/en/web/world-forum-democracy).
[2] As evidenced e.g. by the uneven translation of an overarching ideal of democracy from the *Millenium Declaration* into the specific *Millenium Declaration Goals* (www.un.org/millenniumgoals).

tation of democratic forms of organization in real-life settings. Within the framework of Horizon 2020, our initiative is of broad significance for all of the calls within the 13th program, especially "European societies after the crisis" and its focus area "Unity in diversity: prospects of a European identity and public sphere".[3]

Outside the purview of the Horizon framework, the European Commission has further acknowledged the significance of public culture by promoting "A new narrative for Europe" (www.ec.europa.eu/debate-future-europe/new-narrative), a project launched in 2013 where artists, scientists and intellectuals come together to articulate a vision for European citizens to rally behind. However admirable such an initiative might seem, its dream of a political and cultural renaissance is bound to remain a reverie as long as it is orchestrated from above. In the words of Carl Henrik Fredriksson, "it would not only be futile but also dangerous to try to prescribe to Europeans a certain potentially hegemonic narrative that should fit all contexts and account for what is in fact a multitude of social, economic, political and historical experiences" (Fredriksson 2014, 3). In short, a 'new narrative' cannot be invented out of whole cloth, no matter how concerted the propagandistic effort. Rather, it must be stitched together in rhapsodic fashion through a consistent endeavor of exploration, experimentation and expression. It is to this "complex task of translation" (Habermas in Fredriksson 2014, 4) that the CPC would contribute.

At both ends of our transdisciplinary spectrum, such an ambition may well come across as overly idealistic. Surely, it is important to acknowledge the realities of power politics – if nothing else so as to pinpoint all the more precisely those mechanisms of exclusion that still inhere in hegemonic forms of public culture, raising critical questions of class, gender and ethnicity. But although publicness is an ideal, it is very real precisely as such. In the words of Pauline Johnson: "The idealizing expectations of the modern public sphere have left deep marks upon us. Its norms are embedded in the institutions and in the complex cultural histories of democratic societies." (Johnson 2006, 11) And although this ideal may well be unattainable, "we can still emphasize the critical role of the cultural arena in which representations and opinions of society are formed, de-formed, and re-formed to provide the ideational materials that construct the basis upon which politics and policies operate" (Castells 2008, 80).

Against this background, the challenge we are faced with could be summarized as follows: in an era of commoditized publicity, media saturation, digital networking and increasing electoral non-participation, how can the institutions and practices of public culture be renewed so as to underpin the wider renewal of informed participation and citizen trust for democratic institutions? To fully address this issue requires a multiplicity of disciplinary perspectives so as not to reproduce traditional hierarchies of value and exclusion. This line of research must hence institute itself as a form of public inquiry in its own right, already operative within many diverse publics. Hardly conceivable within the framework of an ordinary academic department, only a dedicated research centre could provide the degrees of freedom necessary for such an undertaking.

Scientific impact

Problem and focus

To approach this challenge from a scientific perspective, renewed insight into the contemporary and historical conditions of public culture is essential. Halfway between a wide, anthropological and a more narrow, aesthetic notion of culture, the concept intersects with but cannot be reduced to the 'public sphere' of political science. In the definition of Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, public culture is seen as "an arena where other types, forms and domains of culture are encountering, interrogating and contesting each other in new and unexpected ways" (Appadurai & Breckenridge 1988, 6). It thereby provides the spaces where a society can come face to face with its own contradictions, where battles can be fought and bonds of loyalty can be forged, where the common good can be imagined, defined, fostered, criticized and reformed. In its shifting guises, the public has been a crucial site not only for political struggle but also for the development of social solidarity (Calhoun 2002). An indispensable complement to the formal procedures of the political and judicial systems, informal exchanges in the public arena function as "a sounding board where problems are interpreted, signalled and dramatized and a public will is shaped and configured" (Johnson 2006, 168).

In short, public culture forms a crucial component of what Rosanvallon has called *counter-democracy:* "not the opposite of democracy but rather a form of democracy that reinforces the usual electoral democracy as a kind of buttress, a democracy of indirect powers disseminated throughout society – in other words, a durable democracy of distrust, which complements the episodic democracy of the usual electoral-representative system" (Rosanvallon 2008, 8). While such a 'democracy of distrust' is a prerequisite for any democratic system to function, it is only in

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times of crisis that it comes into its own. As the American journalist Walter Lippmann, who was otherwise quite pessimistic about the role of the public in political life, observed in 1927: "The hardest problems are problems which institutions cannot handle. They are the public's problems." (Lippmann 1993, 121). However, as Lippmann himself would no doubt have agreed, the public also relies on its own institutional framework. Among the structures underpinning public culture in modern societies are the educational system (including universities and research institutes), civil society organizations, independent media, publishing houses and cultural institutions such as theaters, libraries, museums and art galleries. These institutional structures, in turn, rely on a variety of linguistic, medial, technical and spatial infrastructures. It is across this entire spectrum that the combined impact of globalization and digitization has become increasingly evident over the last decades.

The effects of globalization are most tangible on the institutional and linguistic levels, for instance in the declining prominence of national institutions and imaginaries in cultural life or the parallel tendencies towards mono- (the ascent of English as a global *lingua franca*) and multilingualism (the increasing importance of minority languages). It is here that the concept of public culture shows its forte as an analytic category. As Appadurai and Breckenridge emphasize, public culture cannot be equated with national culture – "for national culture is itself a contested mode, embattled, on the one hand, by transnational cultural messages and forces (which sometimes threaten the nation-state), and, on the other hand, by indigenous critiques from the various sectors that continuously threaten the cultural hegemony of the nation-state" (Appadurai & Breckenridge 1988, 6). To further the development of new forms of participation in a post-Westphalian world, we must first acknowledge the plurality of local and national publics, as well as emerging transnational publics, while questioning their efficacy as well as their legitimacy (Fraser 2014).

The impact of digitization, in turn, has primarily been felt on the medial and technical levels, as evidenced by the ubiquity of visual information in contemporary culture or the displacement of analog communication systems by digital equivalents. Following on earlier media revolutions such as photography or telegraphy, the full consequences of digitization can hardly be foreseen, but their impact on public life has already been substantial. Its importance will hardly diminish in the near future, as attested to by predictions about the coming "nano-data-sensor fusion" resulting in a ubiquitous "sea of sensors" (Ries 2009, 71–2). In brief, what should be emphasized here is the contradictory consequences of digitization for public culture. Far from being unambiguously beneficial, the digital shift may even have brought an excess of publicness – which, in turn, has contributed to the spread of technologies (e.g. the Tor network or the Guardian project) that help safe-guarding privacy and anonymity online. To take only one example, the Internet offers unparalleled opportunities for horizontal communication and organization with a potential for both widening and deepening the democratic dialogue, but it also increases the scope for surveillance by state as well as non-state actors and has provided a platform for new, anti-democratic populist movements (Bartlett, Birdwell & Littler 2011). An undertaking such as Wikileaks would be inconceivable without both the exposure of the Internet and the protection of the "deep web". The same argument could be extended to other specific examples such as social media, mobile computing, big data, surveillance technology, etc.

The problem of public space constitutes a third research focus for the CPC, situating the themes of globalization and digitization in a more tangible landscape and simultaneously providing them with a common horizon. The symbolic role of the public square in the recent wave of democratic struggles points to the importance of this perspective, bringing to light the active role that public space plays in the processes of political change. Space is not merely a material condition or a scenography framing public culture, but rather an arena in which various conflicts and negotiations are enacted and, reciprocally, an agent in the formation of public culture (Ghent Urban Studies Team 1999; Hajer & Reijndorp 2001; Sassen 2006). Hence, the relations between the production of space, time and meaning (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 2005; Harvey 2006) constitute a fundamental point of departure for this proposal.

Transdisciplinary and thematic framework

The question of public culture and its role as a necessary condition for democratic process cannot be adequately grasped from within a single discipline or domain. In order to properly constitute the research agenda it is necessary to draw upon technological, economic, cultural, historical, political, social, scientific, philosophical and artistic dimensions of the conditions of public life. It is also necessary to operate at a range of spatial scales – from the macro-scales of the global, transnational and national, to the intermediate scales of the regional and the urban, down to the micro-scales of public squares and events, concrete instances of civic action and public mobilisation – with the virual spaces created by digitization spanning and 'short-circuiting' all of these levels. In analogy, it is also necessary to operate with reference to different temporal scales from the long duration processes of state formation and cultural hybridization to the accelerated processes of instant urbanism and technological change.

We therefore propose to assemble a research team from the arts and humanities in close collaboration with the social sciences and IT as well as with the Department of architecture at Chalmers. According to Horizon 2020, what is needed today are "new visions" rather than novel theories, concrete images rather than abstract models (Eu-

ropean Commission 2014, 5). Together, we contend, the arts and humanities are in a singular position to provide such images by integrating the findings of technical and social scientific research into forms of knowledge closer to lived experience. GU is currently the leading environment for artistic research in Sweden and a strong contender internationally, but the field would benefit from additional integration with the larger academic community. This need, which has already prompted the Faculty of Arts to establish its new publishing and conferencing initiative PARSE (www.parsejournal.com), can only be met in the transdisciplinary setting of a research centre, combining the experimental and engaged approach of artistic research with the historical and normative depth of the humanities, the empirical and analytical precision of the social sciences, the technical and technological know-how of IT and the spatial and urban operations of architecture. Only by such a joint effort can we hope to discover if there still remains, in Habermas' memorable phrase, "a secret at the inner core of publicity" (Habermas 1989, 9).

Within this wide transdisciplinary framework, we plan to develop a set of thematic and sub-thematic groupings – essentially a matrix approach – to constellate researchers in a way that cross-weaves different modes and different scales of inquiry. Many examples could be provided, but two in particular should be emphasized even at this preliminary stage. Firstly, the CPC will devote itself to the theme of translation and, in particular, to what we would call *translational publics*. As a result of globalization and migration, the translational is transformed into a general agency crucial for the production of publicness today. The translational comprehends a multitude of activities: literary translation and writing as well as advocacy for human rights, citizenship and freedom of expression in a 'glocal' world, access to cultural life as well as access to the law and participation in politics. The translational poses a challenge to contemporary academic research and education, which are typically compartmentalized into artistic translation, technological research in translation, post-colonial translation studies and a more traditional philological study of translation. Drawing on notions of "cultural translation" (Buden & Nowotny 2009) and "public diplomacy" (Castells 2008), the CPC would contribute to the integration of academic competencies in translation, specifying the needs for new research, translation and education in close collaboration with a variety of public partners.

Secondly, a central preoccupation of the CPC will be with the idea and institution of the university itself as a constituent part of public culture and how this role is curtailed by the current restructuring of higher education after the blueprint of neoliberal policies. At such a juncture, it is imperative to assess "the prospects for creating and preserving a public sphere through higher education, so that universities may serve as sites for discovery, discussion, and critique of even the most powerful forces and interests in contemporary society" (Pusser et al. 2013, 1). In the terms proposed above, what conditions must be met for the university to assist more effectively in the urgent tasks of cultural translation and public diplomacy? This ambition is consistent with on-going processes within GU.[4] Along the same lines, an aim of the CPC could be to develop a "public strategy" for GU, formulated in dialogue with the university management and relevant stakeholders.

Strategy for partnerships

In contrast to many competing initiatives in the UGOT process, the CPC is essentially a new departure that does not build on established networks within GU. From the first, we have therefore strived to make our planning process as transparent and inclusive as possible, e.g. by co-writing this project plan on an open wiki platform where everyone in the consortium was free to comment and contribute. In the same spirit, as the expressions of interest were made publicly available in late September, we invited a dozen initiatives addressing similar questions to an open-ended discussion with a view to sharing ideas and trying to identify any common research agendas that might be developed in tandem. We have also met with individual applicants (e.g. Jan Scholte, Ulf Bjereld) to discuss possible synergies. We expect that these discussions will become valuable in the next stage of the application process when a majority of proposals have been rejected and their academic potential freed up for new transdisciplinary combinations. As the collaboration with Chalmers University of Technology is central to our proposal, contacts in that direction have been a further priority.[5] At the time of writing, we already have connections within the TRADERS network (www.tr-aders.eu), funded by Marie Curie Actions with both GU and Chalmers as partners.

In line with the strategy described above, we plan to ventilate our proposal in selected departments at GU (e.g. political science, journalism, global studies) as well as Chalmers to garner additional support and further amplify our presence across our transdisciplinary spectrum. In addition, we will host an international workshop before the summer, focussing on the role of the university in public culture and featuring lectures from leading figures in academic research, artistic practice and cultural activism. This group would form the embryo of an international advi-

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[4] E.g. the vision seminar on "The democratic public debate – what is the responsibility of the university?" hosted on October 30, 2014.
[5] Among current joint ventures between Chalmers and the University of Gothenburg, the Lindholmen Visual Arena (Monica Billger), Mistra Urban Futures (Mikael Cullberg) and the Urban Safety and Societal Security Research Center (Michael Landzelius) have all expressed their interest in a prospective collaboration. According to Michael Landzelius, we can also expect economic support from the Chalmers strong research area for Built environment. In May 2015, we will present our project plan at the *Transvaluation* symposium (www.chalmers.se/transvaluation) hosted by the Department of Architecture at Chalmers with Arjun Appadurai and Andrea Phillips as keynote speakers.

sory board for the CPC. As we further extend and consolidate our consortium throughout 2015, we will also develop our network of national and international contacts.

Societal impact

Knowledge exchange and utilization

With regard to impact, we have pursued the same bottom-up approach as in our strategy for academic partnerships. In a local context, preliminary contacts with the Jonsered manor as well as with extramural stakeholders such as Kulturförvaltningen (the city's culture administration), the urban development corporation Utveckling Nordost (www.utvecklingnordost.se), the Museum of World Cultures (www.varldskulturmuseet.se), the cultural organization Nätverkstan (www.natverkstan.net), Sweden's oldest literary journal Ord & Bild (www.tidskriftenordobild.se) and the newly founded writers' centre Litteraturhuset will work to ensure that the CPC becomes an active presence in the public landscape of Gothenburg. It could also benefit from and, if deemed appropriate, contribute to parallel initiatives within the university such as the recent engagement with the Scholars at Risk network or the newly launched Global Free Speech project. Further afield, we are discussing possible collaborations with the transborder production unit Intercult (www.intercult.se) as well as the journal network and online magazine Eurozine (www.eurozine.com). Further national and international contacts will be established in the course of 2015, partly through the formation of an international advisory board (see above).

Higher education

With regard to education, the intended main applicants for the CPC have extensive experience of specific strands within university education: the liberal arts tradition (Cecilia Rosengren) and contemporary arts education (Mick Wilson).[6] An encounter between these two traditions is of particular relevance for the overarching idea of public culture and will provide great pedagogical benefits for students as well as teachers. With assistance from IT and the newly established Centre for Digital Humanities (see below), educational initiatives within the CPC will also be able to draw on state-of-the-art technical resources and know-how. Among existing or currently planned courses and programs to build on are: Censorship and controversy: the arts, the media, and the public sphere (Valand); Child culture design (HDK); Critical studies (LIR); Culture and democracy (KUV); Digital humanities (LIR); Literary translation (Valand); Publicity and entrepreneurship (Valand); Theory and text, the "Digitization and public space" theme (Chalmers); Transvaluation: challenging the formation of knowledge (Chalmers). In addition, the prospective collaboration with Nätverkstan (see above) could result in the development of more practice-oriented courses, helping students to create their own professional platforms and thereby to bridge the distance between the academy and the wider society.

Implementation

Taking the theoretical perspective developed above as a practical point of departure, we regard the planning process itself as an exercise in 'cultural translation' and 'public diplomacy' between the variety of academic cultures encompassed by our proposal and in relation to our extra-academic partners. In the next phase of the UGOT process, we will therefore develop the general transdisciplinary framework of our proposal into a kind of charter or constitution for the CPC, consciously constructed as a system of checks and balances that aims to contain the risks involved in the collaboration – from a traditional scientific perspective, the central role allotted to artistic research – and simultaneously make the most of the potential rewards.

    With regard to the GU policy for research centres, the Department for Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion (LIR) will act as host department for the CPC. Cecilia Rosengren, currently head of department at LIR, will serve as the director for the centre and Mick Wilson as chairman of its steering board, with remaining members representing the entire scope of our transdisciplinary spectrum. (As for the advisory board, see above.) In addition, the administration of the CPC would include a coordinator, a research developer and, crucially, a web designer who would help associated researchers harness the full potential of online modes of dissemination and interaction. As a whole, the centre itself will be organized after the model of the public arena, giving as much scope as possible to collegial principles of decision-making and allowing individual researchers maximum latitude. In line with both artistic and academic practice, residencies will provide the main work format of the CPC, helping us to secure critical mass and counteract the strong centrifugal tendencies at work in the contemporary university. This choice of format also points to the the importance of the physical location of the centre, presumably in the vicinity of the new Näckrosen campus (scheduled for completion in 2021).

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[6] The UGOT guidelines require main applicants to be at least *docent*. As artistic research is a recently established field with few senior researchers, only Rosengren is able to figure as an applicant for the time being.

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Six contentions about transdisciplinary research in the cultural sciences

1) ... that the nascent field of artistic research has yet to develop its full potential.

What we call art invariably tends – or so I would contend – towards what might be described as a zero degree of subjectivity: the point where object and subject, being and meaning, needs and wants converge. It follows that artistic research cannot deviate too far from this point of departure without ceasing to be artistic in any meaningful sense. However, the relative convergence of object and subject in artistic research becomes problematic from the point of view of established academic research, which presupposes a more or less sharp distinction between object and subject as a condition of possibility for knowledge (as opposed to strictly personal insight) in general. It is probably for this reason that artistic research has typically taken artistic 'practice' as its object: the nebulous notion of practice, in part on account of its very vagueness, has provided a kind of comfort zone which has lended artistic research a measure of scientific legitimacy but also inhibited it from developing its full potential. In the long run, such an approach even runs the risk of permanently isolating artistic research from the wider academic community.

2) ... that the potential of artistic research can be developed to the full only in a transdisciplinary setting, in the first place alongside the humanities.

The 'humanities' – another nebulous notion, to say the least. For present purposes, I primarily use the term as a shorthand for a mode of knowledge that, although not embodied to the same radical extent as artistic research, is nonetheless characterized by a significant level of entanglement with its object of knowledge – an object which, by implication, can only partially be dissociated from the subject that seeks to know it. All knowledge of human culture belongs in this category, on the condition that such culture is conceived as something to which we ourselves belong. In the apt description of William Franke: "To gain knowledge of human beings one must actually participate in human experience and know it from within, personally, as a subject, rather than only analyze it detachedly and objectively from without. [...] For in all knowledge in the humanities, we experience ourselves. This includes our possible selves – the possibilities for our existence." (Franke 2011, 450) From such a perspective, it is clearly no coincidence that the humanities have traditionally turned to the arts (or at least to their products) as a privileged object of study. It is this twofold proximity – in form as well as subject matter – that make the humanities seem an obvious point of connection to harness the potential of artistic research.

3) ... that any collaboration between the arts and humanities will also need to be extended to include the social sciences.

Indeed, such an alliance might even be a little too obvious: the dictum that 'like attracts like' also holds for academic endeavors. Hence, we must reckon with the risk that a collaboration which limits itself to the arts and humanities will only serve to confirm such cherished – and untested – convictions that both fields have in common (or, in the worst case scenario, their no less cherished prejudices against each other). Clearly, some kind of epistemic counterweight is needed to maintain what already amounts to a precarious transdisciplinary balance. Fortunately, we do not need to search far and wide to find one. In relation to both the arts and (to a somewhat lesser degree) the humanities, the social sciences represent a diametrically opposed ideal: that of a truly 'objective' knowledge of human culture, directly modelled on the natural sciences. If art tends to a zero degree of subjectivity, to the perfect convergence of object and subject, the social sciences set themselves an antithetical but equally ambitious goal: the infinite divergence of object and subject. One might argue that very few disciplines in the contemporary academy

would actually champion such an ideal, but there is no denying that it still holds sway over their practical organization.

4) ... that the arts, humanities and social sciences would all benefit from such a risky engagement.

To sum up the preceding argument, what a birds-eye view of the entire spectrum from artistic research to hard-line social science reveals is precisely the underlying continuum from minimal ('degree zero') to maximal (theoretically infinite) divergence between object and subject. As the historical expansion of academic knowledge production proceeds at an exponential rate, we must try all the harder to keep this continuum in sight. Discipline formation may be a prerequisite for specialization – not to mention an administrative necessity – but it often results in intellectual compartmentalization, thereby posing a threat to the integrity of knowledge production itself. Today, perhaps more than ever, differentiation urgently needs to be counteracted by integration, the range of fields, disciplines and sub-disciplines brought together under what the philosopher of culture Ernst Cassirer would have called the "integral of experience" (Cassirer 1957, 203). Such an undertaking is not only of common concern, but might also prove mutually beneficial – even, I dare argue, for social science in the 'hardest' possible sense. If the arts, when left unchecked, tend towards the associative, the social sciences run the inverse risk of dissociation (which can lead, for the collective just as for the individual, to both derealization and depersonalization). As regards the humanities, they would finally get a long-awaited chance to reaffirm their traditional role as an intermediary between subjective and objective experience, *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* – but only if they are both willing and able to surrender their traditional grounds of legitimacy, following the arts and social sciences out into the "thicket of things" (Kracauer 1997, 309).

5) ... that the collaboration should be further extended to include information technology.

What the humanities need in order to overcome their ingrained spectatorial passivity might just be a sound dose of epistemic electrotherapy. It remains to be seen if the newly established Centre for Digital Humanities at the University of Gothenburg will be able to administer such a treatment locally, or if it will itself succumb to the same old condition. In any case, to understand the transformations of contemporary cultural existence invariably entails addressing the experience of digitization. Hence, the field of IT would seem to provide, not only a counterweight to the humanities, but also a point of connection – empirical as well as methodological – between all of the fields involved. In thus 'short-circuiting' the faculties of imagination, judgement and reason by way of digital technology, the transdisciplinary venture outlined here possesses the potential of generating nothing short of a circle of learning – an *enchaînement électronique de connoissances*, to paraphrase Diderot – for the 21st century. We might already be a decade and a half into it, but academic knowledge still lags behind.

6) ... that architecture provides the perfect testing ground for the proposed undertaking.

To the innocent bystander, academic research in the field of architecture may seem to be a simple subset of artistic research – which is logical enough, considering that the practice of architecture is typically included in what the historian of philosophy Paul Oskar Kristeller famously dubbed "the modern system of the arts" (Kristeller 1951). In fact, such a classification is quite misleading. If the practice of architecture does indeed feature an artistic aspect, it is only because nothing – whether human, non-human or even inhuman – is alien to it. Rather than one art among others, architecture constitutes an exceedingly diverse field of practical know-how admixed with theoretical knowledge that can (and should) be approached from both artistic, humanistic, social

scientific and technical perspectives. For present purposes, architecture therefore provides an intermediary field, a kind of 'grey zone' – or, alluding to a recent article on "architectural ways to knowledge" (Gow, Ivarsson & Karlsson 2015), a 'penumbra' – where all the other forms and modes of knowledge can meet and mingle. Considering that urbanization is another hallmark of contemporary experience – the fact that more than half of the world's population now live in cities has been rehearsed often enough since it was first announced by the UN in 2008 – the choice seems altogether reasonable. In letting architecture fill in our projected circle of learning, we also complete the step from abstract to concrete, from an all-too-intangible public sphere to the tangibility of public spaces and places.

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(References for the CPC application can be found on p. 6 above.)