



# THE PAPER IS TOO DRY

A case study essay about the process behind a collaboration between Science and Art.

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## ABSTRACT

*The essay deals about the collaborative work in the initial part of the filmmaking process, the making of the story for the short film "Vem ropar för Alvar" (Who stands up for Alvar) 18 min.*

*The film is about Minna an artist and a single mother to a eleven year old ice-skating daughter. She works as an assistant nurse at the home service and is driven into an ever-increasing work spiral and is faced with the dilemma of also dealing with the terminally ill and lonely but grumpy neighbour who refuses all forms of municipal help even though he clearly cannot take care of himself.*

*The essay sheds light on the strategic steps creating both a scientifically insightful as well as artistically ambitious story for film. The essay lists the specific dramaturgical problems that had to be solved through the negotiation of important aspects of the research in moral stress and moral agency within Swedish elderly. The essay also reflects on the artist's complex relation between commissioned work and artistic input within a set framework. Evaluation of the film as a tool is dealt with through a focus group screening and follow up discussion. Conclusions about what steps and nurturing environment is needed to create an engaging story with both artistic as well as scientific aspects.*

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## **Introduction**

*“But why don’t you just DIY?” And I continued, “film is really accessible these days with video and editing possibilities at hand on your phones so why do you need to involve me, a screenwriter and filmmaker, to do it?”*

*“What do you mean?” Katarina seemed confounded by my suggestion. “We’re researchers within social work. We write papers with the ambition to create science out of a field full of blood and bones and tears and lives taken difficult routes and turn this into something dry. Although our fields are similar treating human stories in a society, we need to change that dry paper back into blood and bones to make people really understand what is at stake. We can’t do that but believe you as an artist can.”*

This was one of our first conversation over lunch in spring 2022 with PhD Katarina Hollertz from the department of Social Work at Gothenburg University. What followed was two years of interesting collaboration between Science and Art, where we both had the same goal of creating awareness about something within the Swedish society we felt was important. But until now we had been using completely different paradigms to communicate it.

Katarina had found me through my work. Some years earlier at the time she was writing her PhD thesis she battled a severe writers block and was unable to continue writing as she had set her expectation to such a level, her self critique just ruined her progress. But something within her changed when one day at Christmas she saw my film on SVT. *Georg & Lydia*<sup>1</sup> deals with the subject of a composer who just isn’t able to finish her musical piece because of the fear of failure. In my film Lydia goes through a life changing process where eventually failing at her debut concert just sets her free of her limitations and she does an improvisation instead. This apparently made such a difference to Katarina and allowed herself some freedom alleviating the fear and enabled her to take some risks. It was of course heart warming that my film had such an effect on somebody and I could have made the decision to work with her just because of that.

But I still grappled with the question of how I as an artist could contribute by turning research into a piece of filmic art, and what I had to do to revive those lives they studied back into that pounding heart that reaches out into the world to give people emotional insight about the fate of others?

I was invited into a body of heuristically collected interviews from workers within the field of Swedish elder care. The researchers had strived to identify where the workers had encountered difficult situations in their every day work life. Situations where they knew what would have been the right thing do to in accordance with professional ethos but were prevented to do so by various circumstances. The researchers had asked three categories within the field,

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Maria Joakimsdottir-Hutri. (2011). *Georg & Lydia*. Helsinki-filmi oy. SVT.

assistant nurses, managers and assessment managers to recall situations where these situations led to a feeling of moral distress. The ambition with the research project, called “Moral stress and moral agency within Swedish elderly care”<sup>2</sup> was not only to identify moral stress, but also to evoke agency and thus supporting elderly peoples rights to good care.

### **Why fiction?**

By that time I had not promised anything as I wasn't really as sure as the researchers were, that my service as a storyteller in fiction was actually needed. I am first of all interested in the staged filmic storytelling and I wasn't sure if what they needed was actually to do a documentary? But reading the researchers case studies I realised something factual. These stories were pure drama. They all encompassed situations where the workers faced moral dilemmas and almost always had to make “the wrong” decision but the most right at that given moment which is often the core of drama. I ruled out the possibilities of documentary because this would have exposed a specific individual's decision in a way that could put that worker in an unfair scrutinising light. Thus the choice of using fiction was an only option. It was not about particular individuals having to deal with the questions at hand with limited budgets, cramped schedules or over filled care homes. To use documentary would have exposed these individuals and would have put an unfair spotlight on them. The questions were more than this, a phenomenon that needed to be addressed without accusing anyone in particular, but rather shed light on the system as a whole. The staged filmic expression, fiction, could transcend the decisions from the burden of a specific individual's shoulders and through fictional shoulders still shed light on those painfully difficult decisions.

In the documentary *Din hjärna - Kreativitet*<sup>3</sup> (*Your brain - Creativity*) Yuval Noah Harari argues that storytelling is our superpower in enabling us to cooperate in large communities. The basic function of storytelling is to unite people. But he also makes a point about fiction and its relation to truth.

*“Fiction enjoys two inherent advantages over truth in uniting people. First of all the truth is often very complicated. Fiction can be made as simple as you want. The other major advantage of fiction over truth is that truth is often painful. Truth is often unpleasant. That's why we see the most successful stories in the world is not the truth. They are oversimplifications. They are comforting myths that a lot of people want to believe.”*<sup>4</sup>

Yuval Noah Harari

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<sup>2</sup> <https://lnu.se/forskning/forskningsprojekt/projekt-moralisk-stress-och-moraliskt-aktorskap-i-svensk-aldreomsorg/>

<sup>3</sup> Anders Hansen. (2023). *Din hjärna - Kreativitet*. SVT.

<sup>4</sup> Quote from interview in Anders Hansen. (2023). *Din hjärna - Kreativitet*. SVT.

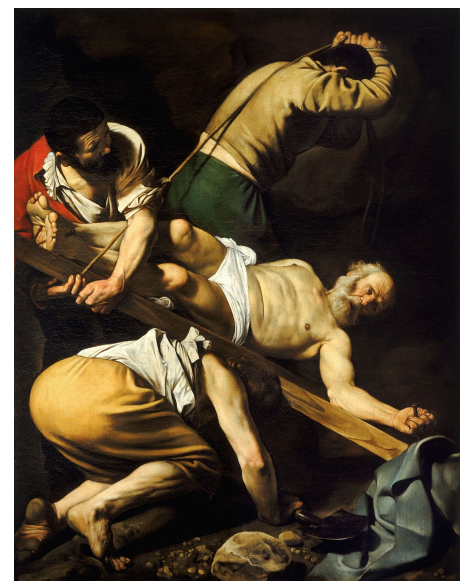
### **Would this film even be artistic?**

What I felt was important to me in engaging with the research was the potential of getting access into something truthful. The researchers ambition is to get into the core of the objective truthful rendition of the situations within the elderly care. My ambition as an artist is to get in touch with truth although to me the objective truth is not as important as the subjective truth. I realised though that in this cooperation I could join our mutual goal for truthful storytelling in a way that the film could become something larger and beyond the figment of my mind.

To me the worst lies in storytelling are commissioned commercials as they only strive for one objective of selling a product and that, in my opinion, is not art. As this film is also a commissioned work this film could be deemed not artistic work at all if judged through puritan glasses of the need for full artistic freedom, story drawn from an intrinsic motivation or even the fact that the film was developed within a collaboration that had several decision makers. In worst case, the film would be judged instrumental, made for the purpose of becoming the researchers' tool for instigating discussion among the elderly care workers and politicians when the research group eventually would tour the municipalities with their scientific findings.

But I felt the researchers ambition was a noble cause and I wanted to join them in contributing my talent in storytelling. So instead I decided to embrace the commission as I reflected on the history of art's close ties to commissions by clergy or somebody in a high estate that gave the artist a task to work for a specific purpose. This fact doesn't take away the awe and emotional turmoil when looking at for instance Caravaggio's "*Crucifixion of St. Peter*"<sup>5</sup>.

In Derek Jarman's film "*Caravaggio*"<sup>6</sup> he treated how the artist still negotiated with the tasks at hand and added deeper aspects to the motives than what was observable at first sight. Choosing his models from the lowest segment of society he elevated bums and outcasts to portray the divine and with this maybe suggested "*we are all equal in the eye of wisdom*"<sup>7</sup>. Moreover Caravaggio's innovative treatment of light and shadow through chiaroscuro also paved a new way for future painters who since then have made a mark on artistic expression. The most familiar to a larger population are



Caravaggio "*Crucifixion of St. Peter*"

<sup>5</sup> Caravaggio. (1601). *Crucifixion of st Peter*. Ceraci Chapel, Rome.

<sup>6</sup> Derek Jarman. (1986). *Caravaggio*. British Film Institute.

<sup>7</sup> I have taken the liberty of twisting Pauls quote "*In God's Eyes All Are Created Equal*" from the Roman chapter 14 as I don't engage with the idea of an anthropomorphic god but rather refer to the oneness using the metaphor of of an all encompassing wisdom.

Rembrandt and Rubens and I mention these because I want my example to be graspable for as many as possible.

*What is art?* Is a treatise in written form by Lev Tolstoy and although the book is a refreshingly strong mark of the writer's opinion he strives for an understanding if there is such a definition possible. Having plunged through history's large thinkers in the matter he concludes that the definitions about what art is, are as many as the thinkers. Therefor he reasons that looking at the "object" of art is an unsatisfactory perspective but one should rather treat the whole matter as a relational event between artists, their works and the viewers<sup>8</sup> of art.

*"Every work of art causes the receiver to enter into a certain kind of relationship both with them who produced<sup>9</sup>, or is producing, the art, and with all those who, simultaneously, previously or subsequently, receive the same artistic impression."*<sup>10</sup>

Lev Tolstoy

He continues in his book by stating his own values of an artist's ethos being individuality, clarity and sincerity and talks about art being a human condition of the longing to engage other people into sharing an emotional experience. He argued that ordinary things like lullabies or a caressing hand or the way you make tea for someone or an argument etc. also qualify under the definition of what is art because it had a relational quality of human interactive engagement in the world.

I don't believe it is possible nor constructive to define what is or what isn't art but I agree one should rather treat the event created as there is a sender wanting to communicate something, a personal experience, an opinion, observations etc. that enables others into a shared experience where a social negotiation is possible.

Still individuality, clarity and sincerity resonates with my own ethos. Just as long as I would take responsibility for finding a deeper purpose for the story and make sure that I would treat the work process with sincerity in what I do, I won't bother too much about the opinion of the film's instrumental purpose and judgmental attitude towards that.

### **Meeting the commissioning structure of the MA program in Film**

Moreover the commissioned structure is how the pedagogy is founded in at the MA program in Film with their fixed content and rigidly structured assignments, where the assignment films are instrumental products for the purpose of having a reason to do research. This further motivated

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<sup>8</sup> With *viewers* I mean this as an umbrella, for there are many ways of appreciating Art through the multiplicity of the sensory system combined with the emotional and reasoning faculties.

<sup>9</sup> The word producer is from the English translation and might be ambiguous in the context of filmmaking and should rather be considered the direct relation between the Artist and what they create.

<sup>10</sup> Lev Tolstoy. (1904). *What is Art?*. Chapter 5.

me to focus on a commissioned work as a final thesis as it is more in accordance with the present education rather than being an education promoting a deepening and development of the artistic individuality.

I am educated in the Finish higher artistic education where collaborative pedagogy is the major focus point. The Rhizomatic learning tradition<sup>11</sup> that encompasses a myriad of approaches rather than being a fixed system, was the major pedagogic objective, including each student's own specific interest and building the education from the foundation of the variation within the student body. It demanded the education at the Art University of Helsinki to be open for the unique direction the content took each year depending on the specific students. It also demanded a deep understanding of what is an allowing and constructive atmosphere to advance and deepen the individuals knowledge and artistic development within their own field.<sup>12</sup>

### **So in order to strive for clarity I state the purpose of this essay**

Then again aren't all our films instrumental in one sense or another being our artistic "tools" for the purpose of telling something about ourselves, our times or our world? I ask myself "*who wants to see a film without purpose?*" For this I think, it would require for the film to be completely free from instrument.

What I have to ask myself in this essay is if this specific scientific framework can benefit the creation of an artistic film that engages an audience emotionally to complement an Academic writing in order to create discussion and debate in a social context? Moreover I want to open up for discussion about doing artistic research before the making of the film in order to imbue the piece with the affordance of collaboration between Science and Art. Can an artistically expressed drama become an adequate tool in science?

### **The scientific and creative relation negotiated**

When I made up my mind in engaging with the project we met with the whole research group. The group had initially gathered around a shared engagement about the questions concerning the situation for workers within the Swedish elderly care and in addition to Katarina contained of two other researchers, PhD Sara Hultqvist Dep. for Social Work at Lund's University and PhD Magdalena Elmersjö Dep. for Social Work at Södertörn's Högskola, to do a study about the moral stress and moral agency in elder care. The questions and the hypothesis of the research project were if and how, moral agency can be a possible outcome of difficulties experienced in

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<sup>11</sup> <https://davecormier.com/edblog/2011/11/05/rhizomatic-learning-why-learn/>

<sup>12</sup> I have seen no such capacity nor understanding what it is to facilitate for the individuals artistic potential at the MA program in Film at Hdk-Valand, thus I have sent my complaint about the quality of the teaching to UKÄ as the education is more film studies and not an artistic education.





*Stills from the film "Who stands up for Alvar" by AM Joakimsdottir-Hutri*

working life. That is, an urge to contribute to a positive change in the field of elder care, a field well known for its profoundly poor working conditions (Elmersjö et al. 2022).

But during the process of interviewing the workers the researchers also encountered something other than despair. Talking to individuals in confidence they discovered an immense capacity for agency in finding creative solutions for these difficult situations. Solutions that were maybe a little bending of the rules or an alternative interpretation for the rules, not entirely wrong either. This capacity for agency was what made the strongest imprint on the researchers further work and so they collected these creative solutions to the difficult situations as well as the the situations where workers succumbed to resignation about the limitations of possibilities. The workers interviews have then all been anonymised into case study cards for creating a body of material to discuss within their education of Social Work.

During my artistic research into the field I have been invited by the researchers into several of these discussion groups that mainly consisted of workers within the elderly care's further education program. What I encountered was an amazing myriad of answers to what was right and wrong. Moreover I discovered something I recognised from my own field of collaborative creative team work where I like to engage the whole group of artists into developing the stories forward. What happened in these classrooms was an event of social negotiation taking place in the vision of where to continue forward.

When negotiating the understanding of the purpose of the film with the researchers we all saw a limitation with the case study cards. These were all one sided solutions and often not in relation to the other workers affected by the solution. But what would be even more interesting in understanding the problems were rather when two good solutions crashed into each other and created complexity to the solutions. I suggested that my task would be to weave together multiple premises and solutions to dilemmas in a drama through filmic expression. This could reveal the network of the chain of problems and solutions all in relation to each other and could lead to a deeper understanding of the field as one inter dependable social organism.

Most important was that the researchers would get a tool, a filmic drama they could screen to their specific audiences in order to create a shared experience to gather around in a discussion and further negotiations. In a way the film is a tool for another more important tool, as the result of screening in an open forum might eventually contribute to greater awareness of the complexity within the field and even lead to social change.

### **What was the task?**

We agreed on that I would create a story with a minimum of four characters, one from each work segment an assistant nurse, a manager and an assessment manager. I of course also had to have a minimum of one client, an elderly in need of home assistance. Considering the reality of budget I thought a 10 min filmic story could be doable and hoped I wouldn't be too off in my estimation of the costs. This was what we agreed on initially and eventually the film "Who stands up for Alvar" became an 18 min filmic drama.

### **Drama as a tool to create social negotiation about moral questions**

*"The best stories don't come from good versus bad but good versus good."*<sup>13</sup>

Lev Tolstoy

Since time immemorial humanity has strived for knowledge about the social context they are in. To be alone was to face all the dangers of life on your own and almost always lead to certain death. One of the signs in archeology that distinguishes the humans from the beasts are the ways we have tended for our beloved ones, our children, our elderly or other in a community in need of care.

But to live in a social context is challenging as every individual is unique and different and solutions to a social problem are different from each other. The origins for conflict are as many as the individuals within a social context and this would be at risk for disintegration of the community where individuals are dependent of each other for survival. So tools for social

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<sup>13</sup> Lev Tolstoy. (1904). *What is Art?*

coherence were invented to enable people to gather and unite to look beyond the problems and find ways to stay emotionally connected to each other.

One such tool is dramatic storytelling, a sharing of subjective experiences from outer and inner realities has been a way to sustain the ability to stay emotionally connected in social contexts. In the book *Sapiens*<sup>14</sup> Harari talks about how the ability to share another individuals subjective reality has developed throughout millennia and motivated larger groups to stay emotionally connected even though they don't always know each other. The position of a dramatic storyteller that could tell emotionally strong stories that motivated people to gather was revered because they were the ones that could keep large organisations of individuals connected.

But not all emotionally strong dramatic stories create unity for all. Some create division to. Because humanity interprets their reality and the knowledge about it differently and some don't always share the same values of what is right and what is wrong. What is fair for one becomes unfair for another.

Our strive to reach an understanding of the ability to discern between good and bad to find the wisdom for what is right and what is wrong has been an ever lasting search. The tool of dramatic storytelling developed into play between different moral values conflicting to enable communities to see the problems at the scale of social interaction where solutions to problems were differentiated. Through a shared experience of a play with conflicting values the communities were given tools to negotiate between right and wrong. Drama is a way that can offer an understanding of the complexity of problems where there are no right or wrong answers. So drama was originally a tool to enable a social negotiation of moral values.

In the documentary *Din hjärna - Kreativitet*<sup>15</sup> (*Your brain - Creativity*) the anthropologist Robert Dunbar explains a theory about why people go and see emotionally engaging drama in film.

*"The people who react emotionally to the film, their endorphins, their pain threshold go up meaning their endorphins are being poured out. Afterwards they rate themselves much more bonded to the people they watched the film with. It confirms something theatre Directors known for a long time, that people come in to the theatre as strangers but leave as a community."*

Robert Dunbar

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<sup>14</sup> Harari, Y. N. (2015). *Sapiens*. Harper.

<sup>15</sup> Anders Hansen. (2023). *Din hjärna - Kreativitet*. SVT

### **How did we create a shared understanding?**

From my artistic practice I brought with me a tool for creating a shared ground, embarking with a creative team in the development of the story. By watching and discussing the subject matters treated within other art pieces one can get a unified understanding of certain problems or possibilities. So we watched the film *Help*<sup>16</sup> by Marc Munden that I suggested was interestingly connected to the subject matter of elderly care. <sup>(17)</sup>

### **Could watching the film *Help* spark ideas on dramaturgical strategies?**

*Help* tells a story about an unemployed young woman who is recruited by a service home for people with dementia. Because the manager sees some strong potential in her dedication towards the elderly they disregard the fact that she is without proper education. This happens in the time of the covid breakout and eventually the young woman finds herself alone in the ward at nights without possibilities to get help with isolating and tending to the clients that are infected. Moreover it tells about her agency in trying to do something about it but met with negligence from supervision. When guided to sedate the clients in order for her to better be able to manage them this becomes a turning point. Her moral compass refuses to follow this and she takes extraordinary means to prevent a newly found friend in the clientele from the undignified treatment.

Although *Help* is a powerful comment on the helplessness the whole society not only in Great Britain fell into during the covid breakout and the neglect of proper supervision the film specifically called upon the extraordinary measures taken through our main characters agency, there were some issues to be discussed for us.

### **The problem of antagonisation**

The problem of the pointing finger is one of Hans Rosling's guidelines in his book *Factfulness*<sup>18</sup> where he warns us to simplify a problem by blaming someone for it. The problems are rarely isolatable but rather needs to be addressed on a systemic level. The film *Help*'s anonymous health care system that didn't come to her rescue or the absence of her manager were villainised in their passiveness to her cry for help. They where in this sense actively unhelpful and moreover suggested a highly unethical solution of mass sedation of clients that indicated an antagonistic character with dehumanising traits. The researchers pointed out that it sometimes happened that the different work segments blamed each other for lack of responsibility but from the researchers perspective they could see that everyone were doing

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<sup>16</sup> Marc Munden. (2021). *Help*. Chanel Four Television Corporation.

<sup>17</sup> We looked at other films to but *Help* lent us the most angles of identifying the dramaturgical strategies. I guess I will stick to the thinness of not contextualising with "more films" as encouraged by the film theoretics giving feedback on my thesis as this doesn't ad to display the dramaturgical strategies. As my dramaturgical strategies was left uncommented the thickness of asking for "more films" is maybe best to omit.

<sup>18</sup> H. Rosling, A. Rosling Rönnlund, Ola Rosling. (2018). *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong about the World-And Why Things Are Better Than You Think*. Natur & kultur.

the best they could and all had the best intentions, within a larger organism that was and still is in need of attention.

Thus I made sure both aimable and disagreeable traits rendered the character's actions in order to give complexity to the story. The assessment manager's decision to bring a bed to the old man and the unit manager's impossible task of getting to know his staff properly gave them both aspects that the audience could empathise with.

### **The problem of agency being a risk**

The problem in the film *Help* was showing agency as something that leads the young uneducated employee to irrational measures taken and suggests agency as being irresponsible. The agency, the researchers had encountered where healthy actions taken in an unhealthy system of the Swedish welfare system. So they wanted me to find a way to show agency without the stigmata of it being a cause for destroying the ethical rules and guidelines.

Another aspect of agency is that it requires quite a lot of courage to stand up for something one believes is right. A whistleblowing agency can be met with disproportionate consequences and might eventually lead to exclusion of such an individual. Often the most hands-on position, the assistant nurses, encounters a misassessment of a situation but has very little room for agency in their position compared to the university educated managers and assessment managers. To address problems might therefore, in worst case scenario, lead to losing their jobs.

I felt that we had to lift such a situation to the awareness giving the audience a possibility to discuss this difficult issue otherwise we will lose the emotional connection between the ones who makes the decisions and the ones that has to execute them.

Thus I created a scene where the assistant nurse questions a superior's advice as she feels this advice isn't grounded in the everyday practice.

### **The possibility of nuanced character**

Another aspect of the film *Help* we discussed was how the characters private sphere was portrayed. The main character in *Help* is young, inexperienced, lives with her parents and have few other responsibilities than her newly found occupation. I suggested to the researchers rather to see the main character in a situation of having to balance both the private responsibilities and the occupational responsibilities. We talked about how to work out a holistic character whose private and occupational duties were in conflict with their abilities to balance between them. This would give the character depth.



*Still from the film "Who stands up for Alvar"*

Thus I drew the main character as having to balance between her private life and her professional life always torn between the two duties.

### **The problem of bending the rule protecting integrity**

The last issue was about dementia. In the film *Help* all the clients in the service home had a clear diagnosis of dementia so we could know for a fact that they were unable to fend for their rights. What the researchers had an understanding of was how not yet having a diagnosis of dementia can be the cause of misguided assessment of a client's needs in a home service relation with the municipality. The rule is that you can not offer help if this is unwanted by the client even though they are, let's say, obviously malnourished and one cannot enter another person's home if they don't invite you in.

Often the falling into dementia is a gradually progressing condition and can go unnoticed until some larger or smaller catastrophe happens, like for instance forgetting the gas stove on where the condition creates awareness. The client's gradual dementia might lead a client to turn down help they would actually be in need of. This requires the knowledge that the client doesn't always understand what is best for them. The agency for evaluating the client's situation, in order to further building on the relation with the client to continue the negotiation so the client won't suffer, is quite a huge demand on assistant nurses who go equipped with very short education about such matters. Together with the researchers we addressed this conundrum about how this could be worked out in order for it to be a fruitful example to discuss within the elderly care discourse, having rules and regulations to protect the integrity of the aging population.

Thus I created a situation where Minna needs to break the rules of integrity in order to save her neighbour.

### **The anonymous cases revived with names, history and feelings**

In order to tell stories with characters that reverberates from an emotional reality one needs to dig deep into understanding and empathising with the characters and dive into the personal experiences and the emotional understanding drawn from a deeper collective mind of human condition.

To get in touch with the collective mind of understanding I often engage a team of creative collaborators in order to get multiple views of reality to impregnate the stories. Usually I work with other artists like actors, writers, cinematographers, set designers, sound designers, costume designers etc. to attune the stories and impregnate characters and their world with the artistic emotional wisdom of each collaborator. This time I worked in a collaboration with a team of scientists. So I wanted to try out a different approach through the oral storytelling when developing the story to hear how my stories reverberated with them.

### **Artistic Research for the story about the elderly care in Sweden**

During the first five months there was an intense artistic research done with me educating myself in the premises and the reality of workers within the elderly care, diving into the scientists body of interviews and visiting home service facilities. We also set up unofficial home dinners with workers within the elderly care that shared their stories in confidence so I had the opportunity to get first hand encounters. Some of these workers had faced such difficulties handling the stress that they had to change their careers into another field because they felt hopelessness and not listened to when whistleblowing grave situations.

My task as an artist was to take all that scientific knowledge and personal emotional experiences and within my emotional capacity as an artist transmute that knowledge into emotional insight that would impregnate the story that felt vibrating of life. So what I did was reanimating the researchers anonymous case studies and retell the stories now with names, places and new context. These stories I retold to the researchers as “new” stories with as much vividness and emotional impact I could conjure.

### **The creative collaboration process through encouragement and nurture**

Storytelling is an event of tuning between the listeners reactions and the storyteller who shapes and forms the story in such a way that it will have the most insightful emotional impact. Throughout the process of developing the story I asked the researchers to listen to my stories so I could get those reactions. During long lunches about every second week during my artistic research period they offered a meal and I told the stories of the characters that I founded in the personal stories from workers and on the anonymised interview material from the researchers. I also threw in some own experiences. The unofficial easygoing atmosphere of the lunch setting gave room for the ongoing negotiation of the stories. I went all in and developed in this way a whole feature length treatment. Maybe because I as an artist rarely can afford to go to

restaurants for lunch but mostly just because it was an open, encouraging and stimulating situation that enabled us as a group to feel emotionally connected to the story we developed.

After about five months I wrote a feature length film treatment from all the stories we had worked out. The researchers got really excited about the possibility for us to continue development and eventually make such a feature length film and I agree that rarely have I seen a feature with the topic of elderly care environment although there are some, for sure, like for instance Friðrik Þór Friðrikssons *Children of Nature*<sup>19</sup> a melancholic drama about elderly love and loneliness.

But for the purpose of the initial task I told the researchers that we would have to choose one storyline and that I would take the Artistic liberty of making this choice myself. As we have built up trust and emotional connection during our collaboration the researchers trusted me in this.

### **Synopsis of the story that I chose for the short film**

Minna a single mother to a twelve year old daughter and works as an assistant nurse in a home service environment. She performs her duties with empathy and dedication for the ones she is helping but pressured by unit managers that needs to keep the budget, the more she tries to be helpful the more her benevolence is used.

On top of this, she is faced with the dilemma of also dealing with the terminally ill and lonely but grumpy neighbour who refuses all forms of municipal help even though he clearly cannot take care of himself. How can Minna sustain her empathic core for her fellow human being and care for the elderly with compassion despite the infernal cut downs of budgets and can she stay present for her elite practicing ice skating daughter at the same time? Driven into an ever-increasing work spiral one day she realises she's had enough.

### **Story drawn from a personal strong emotional experience**

One of the stories I had told during lunches was my own experience with elderly loneliness and elderly care insufficiency.

I lived in Stockholm some years ago and one ordinary morning standing on the balcony I saw a huge pile of darkened smoke come out of one of my neighbour's windows. This was no ordinary frying smoke but seemed more grave. Realising the urgency, I rushed towards that neighbour's door while I alarmed the SOS of the possibilities of an apartment fire. The neighbour didn't open the door but when I accidentally tried, it wasn't locked. I entered a smoke filled room with morning television blasting out. I called out but nothing happened, I went further in despite the thickening smoke to see if someone lay unconscious. Towards me came a brittle, skinny man dressed in pyjamas, who looked malnourished and weakened by some grave physical condition. He staggered towards me crutching on a wheeled stand with nourishment liquid attached to his leg through a needle.

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<sup>19</sup> Friðrik Þór Friðriksson. (1991). *Children of Nature*. Icelandic Film Corporation.



He was grumpy and asked me to leave him alone and go away. By that time neighbours were gathering in the stairway as I had knocked on peoples doors to warn them. We had to lift him out of his apartment to be able to close the door to secure the smoke wouldn't spread. The fire brigade was soon there and ambulance personnel checked others for smoke related injuries and took the man to the hospital.

The man's electrical sheet had malfunctioned and was now smouldering the neighbours bed. The fire was extinguished and the bed had been tossed out and the man's apartment was left in turmoil.

The next day I saw the the old man delivered back home with a taxi and so I went there and asked how he was, if he had any family to help him and where he would sleep as his bed had burned. He was defensive and said "there hasn't been no fire here, go away and mind your own business. Don't poke around!" Well, I could have picked him up on that but investigating that he had no next of kin I was worried and my moral compass just wouldn't leave the fate of my fellow human being alone. So I started calling around the municipality to ensure the man would get the help he needed. It was not an easy task as I wasn't family but eventually he got a bed to sleep on although I felt he could have needed to be in a care home facility to be taken care of properly.

My neighbour died shortly after, alone in his apartment. He had lived there for 35 years and was something of a collector of objects that one would maybe rather have called trash and I went there to help out with cleaning out his things. The strange thing was that I was struck with such a striking back pain I couldn't continue. I could hear his last words pounding in my head "don't poke around".

The back pain continued next day so I went into his apartment in another way. I called on him, or rather called on his spirit and asked permission to enter and I found a candle, a portrait and small pocket icon that was tucked into his chest pocket of his coat. I made a little shrine and sang a song to the dead man and sat down in solitude and silence. Maybe what happened then was magic or maybe it's fully scientifically explainable but... like lukewarm water poured along my spine or like a caressing hand, the back pain lingered and went away.

### **Strategies of identification drawn from my tacit knowledge**

An aspect of my own artistic research in this particular process has been enveloping my tacit knowledge and the ways I transmuted that knowledge into practical understanding. Memorising texts, ability to list references and having such kind of impressive intellectual knowledge does not necessarily lead to an understanding of how to practically apply that knowledge.

One wise question arose from Amila Puzic after screening our films off-giff<sup>20</sup> that observantly pointed out the fact that I've used multiple strategies for identification in my storytelling. She wanted to know how I made those decisions and for what purpose?

### **Holistic identification with multiple roles within the same character**

What is depth in character? I suggest to you a new concept of a holistic character as this is a helpful metaphor. It is not my concept but rather my naming the phenomenon "holistic". Many years ago I attended a seminar<sup>21</sup> where Adam Price spoke about his work developing the drama series *Borgen*<sup>22</sup>. He shared then how they had worked chiselling out an interesting main character who would be torn between two important personal duties that could deepen the character and drive the dynamic of the drama forward. They had a motto that they always could check up on, if the drama was at the tearing point of these two conflicting forces. *"How can Birgitte stay true to her family values and still maintain her position at the top of political power?"*<sup>23</sup> Drawing from this knowledge I divided my main character into conflicting roles of duties, her duties towards her occupation, her moral compass towards her fellow beings and the private duty towards her daughter and the support of her ice-skating ambitions. This gave the character a dimension of having to make the difficult choices of where she devoted her time. It gave the character depth as I in this sense had created a holistic character battling an inner conflict.

### **Brechtian identification distancing the target audience from the fiction**

The estrangement effect or the distancing effect of Brechtian theory<sup>24</sup> suggests a way how an audience engages with the suggested fiction inviting them to a critical thinking about the reality that surrounds them outside of the fiction. This stylistic element arose in difficult times when fascism was growing in Germany before WW2 and was a way Brecht wanted the audience to pay attention what was going on. This knowledge is something I've carried with me long ago from my Film and Drama Theory studies in Lund and that I've sometimes found useful as a play writer wanting to make the audience stop and think, through pulling down the fourth invisible wall in theatre, addressing a dialogue directly towards them. I have rarely used this in film but you can often find it when characters speak directly into the camera or if there is another meta aspect of the drama, often used in comedy mixing present issues in society with the fiction.

As I imagined the researchers would tour around municipalities I pondered on the effectiveness of getting their messages through and how scary they might be perceived by the workers. The researchers were coming from "a high place" with university degrees and a perceived superiority of knowledge. How could I help the researchers in creating a feeling of equality that

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<sup>20</sup> colloquial for final work screening during Gothenburg International Film Festival but not incorporated in the festival itself.

<sup>21</sup> The seminar was held at YLE in Helsinki in 2006 and focused on story development for the drama series format.

<sup>22</sup> Adam Price. (2010-2022). *Borgen*. DR-Drama.

<sup>23</sup> The quote is how I remember it from a seminar Adam Price gave at YLE in Helsinki many years ago - I can't recall when.

<sup>24</sup> Järleby. (2009). Inlevelse och distans: Bertolt Brecht - om dramaturgi och skådespeleri: [Stanislavskij, Piscator, Aristoteles, Shakespeare].

would offer confidence that the discussions are open for all point of views no matter what degree you have. Comic relief is a powerful tool for releasing tension and offering your vulnerability, invites the audience empathy and builds trust.

The scene where the main character employs her civil courage to question the researchers theories that seems ungrounded with the circumstances of the nurses, is such an attempt to make the audience think out of the fiction and to relate to the current circumstance they're in. They would recognise the researchers also playing the characters holding the lecture about the importance of sharing difficult situations with colleagues and maybe recognise their own conscious or subconscious feelings they have.

### **Eclectics power's intimidating effect**

Eclectic power can have an intimidating effect on individuals sense of their own voices importance. Meeting with the university educated researchers have for many a silencing effect. This was one of the researchers worries. They would like to be able to reach out to all the voices in the community and grappled with strategies of how to create report that would make them "less intimidating". These researchers wants to be questioned, they welcome different views on solutions, they believe in communities willingness to get together and negotiate. Because in the end it is in our interest as a society to find out in what way we can go forward to create a field that offers elderlies dignified lives and the workers possibilities to do their best without compromising their own health. The researchers' ambition is that together with as many as possible, we will discuss and debate through the means of the film a way to reach a sustainable work and living environment for the whole elderly care sector.

My hypothesis was that the estrangement effect in this scene would demystify the researchers through three aspects, example of civic courage, the comic relief effect and the meta effect of recognition. This I hope, would give the workers, elderly and their next of kin the courage to speak up in the following discussion after screenings.

### **Reactions from a focus group audience testing the film as a tool**

One of the researchers main orientation within their educational approaches is the practice-based interaction between the university and the field. Keeping the dialogue going between the scientific research and what is going on through seminars and further education courses where dialogue between education and the field of practice gives both perspectives new insights. This is important to keep an emotional connection between the university's research and the workers' knowledge and deeper understanding of premise and factual circumstances. Otherwise the science the university produces would stay disconnected to what is actually applicable and the field would be at loss with continuing to develop through the perspective of scientific knowledge.

Our focus group of ten persons, all actively working in Gothenburg municipality within assessment management, sat for a beat of a moment after seeing the film in late November 2023 and then the reactions came like a flood. The assessment management position is the one

with the most power out of the three groups<sup>25</sup>. Often the blame for the problems fall back on this group as they are the ones that should have the overview perspective and distribute the resources in the best possible way. But also they face infernal budgets and difficult situations where limitations in regulations and resources makes them having to discern who is in most need. So a firm personality and a deep understanding of regulations is required of this group.

The first reactions were in how many ways the assistant nurse broke the regulations and this seemed to profoundly provoke some of them. What happened was that the discussion went right into the core of the problems the researchers had wished for. In the film the assistant nurse enters an elder's home on several occasions without permission thus breaking the rules. The assessment managers addressed the problem of integrity being violated in the story.

This was one of my conundrums we had predicted and so I used a strategy when writing the story. As I had created an assistant nurse both in her professional as well as her private role I had distributed her attention towards her neighbour as something she does as a fellow human being and not in her professional role. This allowed me to let her break all the rules and act out of compassion and understanding of her neighbours condition. This invited the discussion to actually get right into the actual dilemma of how to treat the ones that are in the gradual phase of dementia to get deeper into the questions of reaching out to such an elder that refuses help but who clearly needs it.

The discussion also concerned the incorrect procedures by the assessment manager delivering a bed in person. So the researchers could raise another dilemma they encountered in interviews where assessment managers in stead of delegating a job just had to do it themselves because there would be no one else to do it.

The initial feeling of provocation the assessment managers had, transformed into a negotiation about what to do in all these situations.

The researchers were mind blown after the focus group discussion. To get in touch with the dilemmas in an instant and to be able to negotiate the different possibilities through the storyline of the film was just better than anything they had ever imagined. The knowledge accumulated as a result of seeing the film was surprisingly vast with a multitude of informed solutions that the researchers now got in touch with and could include in their continued work.

We all understood with what potency this 18 min drama held in treating so many difficult moral questions through a network of conflicting needs. The future screenings the researchers are going to have on their tours around municipalities, will most probably be bountiful. In best case scenario new and constructive ways of creating sustainability within the elderly care is reached.

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<sup>25</sup> The three groups of workers within the elderly care the researchers have interviewed are: assistant nurses, managers and assessment managers.

### **The distinction between Artistic research and Scientific research**

The distinction and importance of distinction between research done in science compared to research done in art is that scientific research produces Science and artistic research produces Art. Luckily this is backed up in Högskoleförordningen (1993:100)<sup>26</sup>. Under the paragraph *Tillstånd att utfärda examina (§ 5d)* it is clearly stated that the artistic education keep a high quality artistic development and artistic production for high quality art. This production is done via artistic research in order to incorporate this into art of high quality. This seems to be unclear at Hdk-Valand where I have asked about their strange definition about artistic research's scientific goal. I have been served an answered that GU demands the education to become "more scientific". Thus the importance of a film's reachability through its communicativity with an audience in the long tradition of high quality filmmaking is of less importance. The emphasis at Hdk-Valand is the research and written publications around filmmaking or the development of pedagogical products rather than the high quality filmmaking itself.

This notion that the artistic educations needs to become "more scientific" is incorrect though, there are no such regulations nor demands for artistic research to become "more scientific" in Högskoleförordningen.

As you can see in my description of the collaboration between the researchers in Social Work and my artistic research for the MA in Film program there is a fundamental difference. It can be narrowed down to the aspiration towards truth, which makes us alike but differs in the fact that scientific truth needs to be objective and the artistic truth subjective in order to fulfil their task. That's why one can never call artistic research scientific or make it "more scientific" it just stops being artistic research and transforms into scientific research with the objective of art. This rather fits the Humanities department and not the Artistic department.

This in no way excludes artists to incorporate the discourse they feel is adequate into their artistic research just as long as it inspires and develops that artist's pursuit of subjective truth and lends them the tools to create high quality art of their preference.

### **Artistic research towards the creation of the art piece**

I want to open up to you with some thoughts about the artistic thinking process as I have been accused of having a negative attitude towards artistic research. Nothing could be more wrong. I have rather positive attitude towards artistic research but we<sup>27</sup> differ in its definition. I have sent the collegium at Hdk-Valand a written a letter by 13 February 2024 to the Institutional board about this addressing the importance for Hdk-Valand to discuss the understanding of

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<sup>26</sup> Högskoleförordningen [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/hogskoleforordning-1993100\\_sfs-1993-100/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/hogskoleforordning-1993100_sfs-1993-100/)

<sup>27</sup> My opinions differs from Hdk-Valand MA in Film's opinions

artistic thinking and the valuable qualities we would like to describe it with at Hdk-Valand within an open, fruitful and welcoming of opinions discussion forum.

### **My ideas about the intellectual-practical activity required to make art**

To me artistic research is an embodied and intellectual activity and the creation of art is the chain of active decision making through the artists' subjective tacit knowledge and understanding. That is why the most important aspect of Artistic theory is imbedded in how it manifests itself in practice.

I have asked and as I understand many of the art student complain about after reading the external evaluation of the programs, is how the theory feels disconnected from the practice? In what ways is theory integrated into the practice by the teaching staff? The answer I have been delivered by the teaching faculty is that practice and theory are two different things - two different learning objectives. This is a problematic view point though. It won't help art students feel less removed from the theory.

Neither have I found any proper guidelines defining the distinction between artistic theory and art theory in the documents that governs the educations at Hdk-Valand. I come to the conclusion therefore that this distinction is unclear and in the need of looking into.

### **Personal ideas on three steps in artistic thinking activity**

To me artistic thinking activity can be narrowed down into three steps the acquirement of knowledge, the pursuit of understanding and the discovery of subjective truth in the process of researching and producing art. It differs only in its subjectiveness from scientific thinking that is the discovery of objective truth in researching and producing science.

Usually the discovery of objective truth by a scientific researcher generates a feeling of having reached a subjective truth so reaching subjective truth is, often, a side effect of reaching that objective truth. One could develop this that if the scientific researcher reaches a feeling that the objective truth does not correlate with the subjective truth it will drive the researcher into an interesting pursuit of continued research that might revise the previous truth.

Artistic pursuit of subjective truth *can* generate objective truth as a side effect but important to remember it doesn't necessarily need to be so. Artistic research is not about generating knowledge about objective truth and anyone claiming that is subconsciously restricting artistic freedom. Moreover and more fundamental that attitude is restricting freedom of speech.

*Artistic freedom must have the right to be only about the subjective truth even though this contradicts everything we know - this is the strength of a democratic society.*

### **Reflection on commissioned work**

One of the challenges I faced was the evaluation of artistic input I could contribute with as the framework of the commission was set to meet the demands of the researchers needs. Their need was to create a story for film they could screen in order to create a social situation where negotiation can take place. Negotiation is the constructive aspect of conflict where dialogue is kept open and means and measures are taken to find a common ground. Therefore the fact that we never had any conflict would seem surprising but it is actually what happens when openness to other points of views are made and taken into account about what step to take next. To some people artistic seems to mean the artistic ego or the stubbornness to push your own ideas without listening to the collaborative dialogue. In a way this is what the pursuit of subjective truth is all about, isn't it? But consider this in a new light. In a collective art form like filmmaking encompassing multiple subjective truth is a welcome thing. To me the uncompromising artistic or the auteur attitude of the artist previously seemed important but during the process of negotiation and collaboration I want to let go of that ideal and ask - is that artistic ego leading to a sustainable work environment? Should we rather be willing to consider compromises, middle ways and creative negotiation the new way of artistic creation? I think it could be worth striving for.



*Still from the film "Who stands up for Alvar"*

## **Conclusions**

I have opened up to you the elements in a creative collaboration between Science and Art. As you can notice I have left out large parts of the actual filmmaking process and focused only on the artistic research and story development activity done together with the three researchers.<sup>28</sup>

This is deliberate as I would like to invite you into the meticulous work, artistic research and negotiation it requires to distill a story worth telling in a film. Cause film is a costly endeavour this part is also usually the one we as filmmakers needs to spend most of our time with. Only after this hard work will our projects be funded - if they are ever funded.

The initial question for this essay was if this specific framework could benefit the creation of an artistic film that engages the audience emotionally to complement the researchers academic work and if the film could create discussion and debate in a social context?

So what has been important?

I noticed that what the researchers wanted to create together with me was an inviting, fruitful and nurturing process where we came in with our different perspectives on an equal respectful basis. We all worked on the building of trust between us that lead them to invite me into their yet unpublished work and I invited them into my process of developing the stories opening up for negotiation of how and what story elements to focus on.

We set up strategies for creating a shared understanding through the medium of other films and had interesting discussions with their students who were all workers within the field of elderly care in Västra Götaland. We solved dramaturgical conundrums through reasoning and storytelling and we had a lot of good food and mind you, fun as well.

I would not have survived these two years if it hadn't been for these three encouraging and intelligent researchers - well it is not a surprise their focus is social work. They really practice what they preach all the way.

We have now been screening the film to larger audiences and the researchers have concluded that they got much more than what they had ever imagined from the discussions after the film. Some audiences are provoked, some are amused, some are touched and some tend to blurt out "but this is about me!" I think our thorough collaboration between the research in science and my artistic research has accomplished a narrative we couldn't have done on our own.

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<sup>28</sup> I have been requested to still reflect on the filmmaking process from faculty feedback which clearly points how the screenwriting process is devalued at the MA program in Film that is the most important part of the filmic process from my point of view. This educational flaw at MA program in Film is problematic. But to sum up the reasons why I don't reflect on the filmmaking is because it was done in the most unsupportive, uneducated, inexperience in the professional filmmaking process and malicious work environment at MA program in Film department, with teachers trying in every step to sabotage my work through targeting the production with as much problems as possible.



To me I initially wasn't sure a commissioned film could develop my artistic goal but I think I will revise that. The film is succeeding in being instrumental achieving the secondary goal of creating a social event of discussion and negotiation. Moreover witnessing a large audience of 140 people at the premiere I noticed the film can also stand on its own as it speaks a universal language of agency, compassion and pressure balancing between the private sphere and the professional.

Do I think I developed as an artist? I think I learned something much more valuable than the immediate. Together with the researchers, through their collaborative open discussion learning strategies, I've understood there are so many ways of creating a fruitful space for open discussion and negotiation that I have realised this is actually the best part of the film. Not the product, the film itself, but the effect of the film. I have lent myself as a tool and engaged in the *activity of art* striving for subjective truth and maybe generating objective truth as a side effect. In the collaborative work together with the researchers in social work reaching knowledge embedded in an instrumental film that is creating discussion, debate and social negotiation.

Is that what art is really about?

Sincerely Anna Maria Joakimsdottir-Hutri  
Master Program in Film at Hdk-Valand (2022-2024)

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