Fictional Strategies
In the creation of spaces-in-between
By Gry Worre Hallberg, 2010

Abstract
*"It's easier to meet someone and fall in love within the fiction than it is in real life …
This special room is created … the fiction creates possibilities that real life doesn't"*
Performer of SIGNA, interview for my thesis, 2008.

I will examine a new tendency to use *fictional strategies* in the creation of 'special rooms' where the premises of everyday life are put on hold and an aesthetic, liminal and potentially transformative experience is activated. Fiction and reality blurs and new possibilities open. This tendency that has grown over the last decade is especially evident within the art world where a new phenomenon has occurred that I term *live and relational fictional parallel real universes*. I understand performance groups such as SIGNA (DK), much debated in the Danish press this spring, and Punchdrunk (UK) to be pioneers of the field and together with the performance agency Fiction Pimps (DK), that I am co-founder of, they will constitute the case material of my partly practice based project. Further, the growing use of fictional strategies is not limited to the art world, but also evident within other areas such as (experience) economy, (pervasive) gaming and political spin. Thus on one hand the project will pioneer with specific findings on the use of fictional strategies and defining findings on a new phenomenon within the art world, and on the other the research will inform other areas and explore the far-reach of this new tendency.

Aims of the project
A pivot in my studies is available modes of being or states of becoming in given situations. Rooted in critical theory I consider economic premises, such as efficiency, duty and discipline to largely dominate western society. Thus opposed to theories that argue that we are witnessing a general aestheticization (Kaare Nielsen, Friberg, Gade) I understand aesthetic premises to be more or less allocated within the modern art system, leading to an exclusiveness of this mode subjugated by the emotional and sense-oriented and it's availability mostly for so-called 'art-geniuses'.

My hypothesis is that this assertion leads to a continued need for 'special rooms', that I from now on will term *spaces-in-between*. The term spaces-in-between is based on ritual theory and the idea of the liminal phase (Van Gennep) – a 'between and betwixt' (Turner) mode of being where the premises of everyday life are put on hold and a sensuous experience is accentuated. This state is often used as a reference to describe the artistic experience, thus Bourriaud borrows Marx's term 'interstice' (gap) when applied to (relational) art works, and theatre studies labels it 'transitional' and 'transformative' (Féral, Fischer-Lichte, Schechner). Hence I define spaces-in-between as: *spaces where the premises of everyday life are put on hold and an aesthetic, liminal and potentially* (Müller-Scholl) *transformative experience is activated*[1]. As indicated the research on spaces-in-between extends to different fields of study, among others ritual-, theatre-, and performance studies. These studies in different ways emphasize the ontology or level of becoming and the framing of these spaces. Yet none have studied a new tendency that has risen within the last decade, where the space-in-between are situated within a distinct fiction: A narrative

---

[1] The term spaces-in-between is based on ritual theory and the idea of the liminal fase (Ven Gennep) – a 'between and betwixt' (Turner) mode of being where the premises of everyday life is put on hold. This state is often used as a reference to describe the artistic experience, thus Bourriaud borrows Marx's term 'interstice' (gap) when applied to (relational) art works, and theatre studies labels it a 'transitional' and 'transformative' space (Féral, Fischer-Lichte).

framework applied as the shared reality as opposed to a non-representative framing of the 'ritual situation'.

I will pinpoint and map this tendency and the first question I intend to answer is: *How the use of fiction affect the frame of and thereby the ontology or becoming within the space-in-between?*

This tendency is particularly evident within the art world and the phenomenon that I term *live and relational fictional parallel real universes*: Fictional frame stories are acted out live in certain framed spaces between performers and audiences (or relational co-participators) resulting in the sense of being in a parallel, yet real, universe. I will examine the methods used by the performance- and theatre groups SIGNA, Punchdrunk and the performance agency Fiction Pimps to define how the use of fictional strategies affects the creation of and becoming within the space-in-between. Recently this new phenomenon have been much contested in Denmark, as the latest work of SIGNA, Salò, gave rise to a heated debate, on both the thematic and the form of the work. E.g. it was asked whether the work reproduces the power structures they claim to criticize? Whether more ethical reflection should have been taken into consideration? And whether this form forces the participators into a certain level or state of becoming that they do not necessarily wish or could have foreseen?

Despite the debate these spaces have gained a growing popularity throughout the last decade as the attraction toward them indicates, and participants talk of addiction toward fiction[2]. What is the attraction?

Paradoxically it is my hypothesis that the use of fictional strategies amplifies the sense of 'being real' and thus intensifies the experience and the aesthetic mode of being within the space-in-between:

"It feels more real, more sensuous - Alive ... To exceed the boundaries of everyday life and feel this 'truthfulness' is easier when you are part of a fictional universe."[3]

The sense of feeling 'more real' within the fiction questions the conceptual understanding of the division between 'the real' and 'the fictive'. The blurring of these concepts has gained a growing academic interest over the last years[4]. My project will continue this debate but focus specifically on the use of fictional strategies in the creation of and its affect on the becoming within the spaces-in-between. This approach enables me to investigate the *quality* of the space-in-between and it's growing *attraction*. Further, I will relate this study to the current disruptions of 'the fictive' and 'the real' within other areas (e.g. compare political spin and experience economy) where attempts to create attractive spaces-in-between through the use of fictional strategies that activate the aesthetic mode of being are evident.

Contributions
- Mapping of a recent tendency within the art world: *live and relational fictional parallel real universes*.

---

[2] E.g. see my thesis "I Need My Shot of Fiction!". But the growing popularity of pervasive games, live action role-play, computer gaming and virtual realities are other indicators.
[3] Performer of the performance art group SIGNA, 2008. As part of the empiric material for my thesis: "I Need My Shot of Fiction!" I did a series of interviews with SIGNA-performers.
[4] E.g. see the large-scale research projects "Pervasive games" and "Hvor går grænsen?" (where is the line), both running from 2005-2008, and "After Fiction" (European Doctoral Seminar in Culture, Criticism and Creativity, Copenhagen, June 2010).

- Development of a new methodological-theoretical framework to understand the current tendency to use fictional strategies in the creation of spaces-in-between.
- The application of the developed framework to other societal areas, thus the phenomenon within the art world that the project discusses will point at and map a new societal tendency where fiction is used as a strategic attraction-generating tool.

Theory
Overall the theory of the projects serves two functions: Firstly my theoretical fundament is rooted in critical theory and secondly ritual-, theatre-, (pervasive) game-, and performance studies constitutes a theoretic juxtaposition enabling a new understanding of the creation of spaces-in-between and the quality and attraction they hold in our times where fictional strategies are applied in their creation.

Rooted in critical theory I subscribe to the stand that the premises of the economic dimension dominate western society, and that these oppose the premises of the aesthetic dimension that is allocated within the (modern) art system and therefore have become inaccessible in everyday life (Marx, Adorno, Marcuse, Debord, Lazzarato, Boltanski and Chiapello). However the French sociologist and phenomenologist Michel Maffesoli supplement this outset, in that he argues that we are currently witnessing a 're-enchantment' of the world where the aesthetic mode of being is activated in everyday life (2007), which the recent spaces-in-between framed by fiction encourages.

The second theoretic function is more concrete and aim at delivering specific analytical tools. Ritual theory (Van Gennep, Turner) supplemented by Mikhail Bakhtin and his analysis of the medieval carnival will be used to establish the elemental general understanding of the quality, function and attraction of spaces-in-between. Theatre studies (Sauter, Féral, Fischer-Lichte, Müller-Scholl, Schechner) will constitute another cornerstone of the project as the case material of the live and relational fictional parallel real universes are all created within a theatrical frame. Further, the use of fiction is a known theatrical strategy hence together with (pervasive) game theory (Huizinga, Salen and Zimmerman, Montola, Stenros and Waern) it will inform how and why fictional strategies are used in the creation of spaces-in-between. Finally performance studies (Butler, Schechner) focusing on the anti-representative nature of the spectacle will be used to emphasize the 'real-strategies' within these universes.

Method
Methodologically I triangulate between performance analyses of the three chosen cases, a critical approach and action research.

Even though critical theory avoids methodology and empery-based analysis it bears resemblances with *action research* in its aim for change. Unlike critical theory, though, action research is based on the study of empery collected through participation in a given field of study (O'Brien, Winter). As both an academic and a practitioner I inscribe myself in this approach: I do not only study my field of research to describe and understand it, but also to refine it. Further, the ideals of researcher objectivity, and researcher as passive collector and expert interpreter of data is opposed within action research, which is relevant as part of my studies is practice based.

I will choose a work by each of the three cases that will be (performance) analyzed. These cases supplement each other on different levels. For one thing, where SIGNA and Punchdrunk create hermetically ceiled fictional spaces, Fiction Pimps don't. Rather, their parallel real universes are installed in the middle of everyday life hence the most important part of the fictional frame is the mind of the participator[5]. Further Punchdrunk rooted in theatre focuses intensely on opening the interactive situations. Where SIGNA on the other hand have been criticized for creating spaces that claim to activate a transformative space for free, open and limitless interactions, but don't[6]. Moreover a pivot of SIGNAs work is provocation and a sort of 'excess-fetish', whereas Fiction Pimps seek to encourage rather than provoke. Besides the thematic differences my subject-position differs in each case: I have been performing with SIGNA, but never set the frame. In Fiction Pimps I am a co-founder and completely involved, and as for Punchdrunk I am 'only' a participatory audience and observer why I maintain the greatest distance here. The three cases have been chosen to supplement each other in the creation of a valid framework containing the variety within this new phenomenon.

Perspectives and relevance
Included in the expected contributions some of the estimated perspectives are:

I will develop a new methodological-theoretical framework to understand the recent tendency to use fictional strategies in the creation of spaces-in-between, through the mapping of a new phenomenon within the art world. Thus firstly a whole new perspective, that of fiction, will be thoroughly examined as a central component in the creation of and becoming within the spaces-in-between of our times. Secondly a new and yet undefined phenomenon within the art world will be mapped and thereby given status as a new genre. Thirdly this research will be applied to other societal areas, enabling a new general conceptual understanding of the blurring of 'the real' and 'the fictive' and of the quality and attraction of spaces-in-between framed by fiction.

Thus it is my understanding that the project will be positioned within an interdisciplinary and international research perspective, and contribute to the consolidation of the current research on the subject, where e.g. SIGNA, Punchdrunk and Fiction Pimps have been examined as separate unique entities and not as new genre with common traits, and where fictional strategies haven't received specific attention in the research on the ontology, quality and attraction of spaces-in-between.

Network and stays abroad
Due to my interest in the proposed field of study over the last four years, I have established a solid academic and artistic international network that know and find interest in my project.

Over the last year I have participated in two PhD-courses[7] carried out by the European Doctoral Seminar in Culture, Criticism and Creativity. At these occasions I have presented papers on the proposed field of research and have had positive response from Prof. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Interart, Freie Universität and Prof. John Hutnyk, Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths[8], who have also introduced me to Punchdrunk. Further, I am corresponding with Prof. Richard Schechner, Performance Studies,

---

[5] See Photo Appendix and the visual expression of the three cases in the attached files.
[6] E.g. see the articles: "Pia Kjærsgård i *Villa Saló*" and "Saló trækker SM folk i teatret" in the Danish news paper Information 13.03.10 and 16.03.10.
[7] *Forms of engagement, concepts of politics*, June 2009 and *After Fiction*, June 2010.
[8] See *Commitment by external partners and institutions* in the attached files.

NYU, from whom I have also had a positive reaction. Currently I am planning to visit all three institutions.

Besides the international network, my academic network include Center of Arts and Leadership at Copenhagen Business School, where I have been employed as a scientific assistant, the Danish School of Education (Aarhus University) through Ass. Prof. Lotte Darsø who among other is a leading figure within the research of Arts-in-Business and I have discussed my project with Ass. Prof. Fabian Holt from Performance Design at Roskilde University.

A wide-ranging network has also been established through the forums I have co-founded (Theatre-in Business, Sisters Hope, Club de la Faye and Fiction Pimps). E.g. the new institute for future studies House of Futures where Fiction Pimps have been accepted as working members, the organizations and institutions TrygVesta where Theatre-in-Business inaugurated their innovation lab, Copenhagen JazzHouse and Trampolinhuset with whom Club de la Faye have worked at several occasions and visual artist Lucas Ajemian i.a. co-founder of the Palm d'Or Social Club, NY.

Finally I stand in some kind of relation to all the three cases I have chosen to work with thus enabled to gain inside knowledge on these and draw on their network.

Time-plan **(See attached document Time-plan/Research design)**
2011: **PHASE I. Case studies (action research)**
Spring: Overview and mapping of existing research within the field of study, plus development of a new methodological-theoretical framework.
Fall: Collect and map empery. Initiate analysis of the empery in accordance with the methodological-theoretical framework. Stay abroad (1 months): To study the work of Punchdrunk and discuss the project with Prof. Hutnyk, Goldsmiths.
Result: *Newly developed methodological-theoretical framework to understand the empiric data on live and relational fictional parallel real universes and the way they use fiction to create spaces-in-between.*

2012: **PHASE II. Performance analysis**
Spring: Continued analysis of the empiric material in accordance with the performance analytical method with special attention on the use fictional strategies.
Fall: Stay abroad (3 months): Visiting scholar at InterArt, Berlin to be supervised by Prof. Fischer-Lichte focusing on the relationship between the use of fictional strategies and the liminal and transformative potential of the space-in-between.
Result: *Thorough mapping of the use of fictional strategies within the live and relational fictional parallel real universes and their ontological encounter, quality and attraction within the spaces-in-between.*

2013: **PHASE III. Application of results to other 'realms' - Interdisciplinary and international perspectives**
Spring: Apply research results to tendencies within other areas. Stay abroad (2 months): To discuss project with Prof. Schechner, NYU, aiming at placing my research results in an international context.
Fall: Finish the dissertation.
Result: *The pioneering findings as understood when related to a phenomenon within the art world are applied to other areas, enabling a new general conceptual understanding of the blurring of 'the real' and 'the fictive' and of the quality and attraction of spaces-in-between framed by fiction.*

Literature

Adorno, Theodor W. and Horkheimer, Max: *Oplysningens dialektik*, København: Gyldendal, 2001 (1947)

Bakhtin, Mikhail: *Karneval og latterkultur*, Frederiksberg: Det lille forlag, 2001 (1965)

Bey, Hakim: *T.A.Z. The Temporary Autonomous Zone. Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2003 (1985)

Bishop, Claire: *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, in: *October*, no. 110, 2004

Bourriaud, Nicolas: *Den relationelle form, Kunsten i 1990'erne, Udvekslingens rum/tider og Skærmrelationer*, in: *Relationel æstetik*, København: Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi, 2005

Butler, Judith: *Performative acts and gender constitution: an essay in phenomenonology and feminist theory*, in: *The Performance Studies Reader*, London & New York: Routledge, 2007.

Davis, Tracy C. and Postlewait, Thomas: *Theatricality: an Introduction*, in: *Theatricality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003

Féral, Josette: *Introduction* og *Theatricality and the Body*, in: *Substance*, 98/99, Vol. 31 Nos. 2 & 3, 2002

Fischer-Lichte, Erika: *The Transformative Power of Performance – A New Aesthetics (*oversættelse af første kapitel; *Begründung für eine Ästhetik des performativen*, in: *Ästhetik des Performative*, Suhrkamp, 2004), New York: Routledge, 2008

Fischer-Lichte, Erika: *Theatre, sacrifice, ritual*, London & New York: Routledge, 2005

Gade, Solveig: *Rammen om værket i verden – Relationelle og intervenerende strategier i samtidskunsten,* Ph.d.-afhandling, Teatervidenskab v/ Institut for Kunst og Kulturvidenskab, Humaniora, KU, 2008

Izzo, Gary: *The Art of Play: The new genre of interactive theatre*, Portsmouth: Heinemann Drama, 1997

Jerslev, Anna and Christensen, Christa Lykke (red.): *Hvor går grænsen? Brudflader i den moderne mediekultur*, København: Tiderne skifter, 2009

Kristeller, Paul Oskar: *The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics I*, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 12, No. 4, okt., 1951

Luhmann, Niklas: *Kunstsystemets uddifferentiering*, in: *Iagttagelse og paradoks*, Gyldendal, 1997

Maffesoli, Michel: The Time of the Tribes – the decline of individualism in mass society, SAGE Publications Ldt., 1996

Maffesoli, Michel: *Le réenchantement du monde - Morales, éthiques, déontologies*, Paris: Table Ronde Editions, 2007.

Maffesoli, Michel : *La République des bons sentiments,* Paris: Le Rocher Editions, 2008.

Maffesoli, Michel: *Apocalypse*, Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2009.

Marcuse, Herbert: *Eros & civilisation*, London: Sphere Books, 1970 (1955)

McKenzie, John: *Perform or Else*: *From Discipline to Performance*, London & New York: Routledge, 2001

Montola, Markus and Stenros, Jaako and Waern, Annika: *Pervasive Games Theory and Design*, Burlington: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, 2009

Müller-Sholl, Nikolaus and Schuller Marianne: *Kleist lessen*, XX: XX, 2003

Nielsen, Thomas Rosendal: *Glemslens hospital,* in: *Peripeti,* nr. 7, *Teatralitet,* Afd. For Dramaturgi, 2007

O'Brien, Rory: *Methodological Approach of Action Reseacrh*, Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto, 1998

Ryan, Marie-Laure: *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001

Sandvik, Kjetil og Waade Anne Marit: *Al verden er en scene*, in: *Rollespil – i æstetisk, pædagogisk og kulturel sammenhæng* (red.) Sandvik og Waade, Århus: Århus Universitetsforlag, 2006

Sauter, Willmar: *Reacting to Actions. Concepts of Theatricality*, in: *The Theatrical Event - Dynamics of Performance and Perception*, Iowa: Iowa University Press, 2000

Schechner, Richard: *Between Theater and Anthropology*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985

Schechner, Richard: *Performance Studies - An Introduction*, New York: Routledge, 2006 (2002)

Turner, Victor: *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Aldine Transaction, 1995 (1969)

Turner, Victor: *From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1983

Turner, Victor: *The Anthropology of Performance*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1988

Papers given at conferences and seminars
Dithmer, Monna: *Reality Strikes Back: Reality Friction and Fiction in the Work of SIGNA and Das Beckwerk*, til PSI-konferencen; Interregnum. 2008

Fischer-Lichte, Erika: *Culture as Performance*, til ph-d.-kurset Samtidsteater, afholdt af Georg Brandes Skolen, KU 2008

Websites (alphabetic)

www.fictionpimps.com
www.punchdrunk.org.uk
www.signa.dk
clubdelafaye.wordpress.com
sistershope.wordpress.com