

## THE FUTURE FACTORY

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# THE FUTURE FACTORY

*by Ivar Björkman*

Konstfack may be said to have a collective memory that is constantly developing. Everyone who works here as well as all our students are contributing to this memory. The extent to which one is formed by one's environment is a central issue for an art, craft and design university. What knowledge have our students gained at Konstfack? What will be the significance of their studies here? Education is a balancing act between freedom and limitations, high and low, breadth and depth, between practice and theory, the past, the present and the future.

This year's Spring Exhibition will, for the first time, present graduation projects from both the Bachelor of Fine Arts and the Master of Fine Arts programmes. There are an impressive 144 works in total. In the last year we have doubled the number of graduates, as we, along with other Swedish and European academies and universities adapt our existing programmes to the Bologna process. We have designed a two-level education programme, comprising a three-year Bachelor of Fine Arts programme and a two-year Master of Fine Arts programme. This provides our students with the freedom of choosing how to continue after their Bachelor's degree; one could go straight into their chosen professional field, or immerse oneself in a Masters of Fine Arts programme, at Konstfack, elsewhere in Sweden or abroad. The BA and MA programmes have their own characteristics, but there is one they both share; an impressive vitality and creativity.

The ambition and relevance displayed in all of these graduation projects is outstanding. And this impression will remain with us for a long time to come; indeed it contributes to the collective memory of this school and in turn the character of Konstfack.

A word to our graduates; You are now in possession of an extraordinary body of knowledge to carry with you whatever your future holds, for you have completed one of the most enlightened education programmes in art, design and craft. With this possession, you will find your own special place in your field.

Our age is the place between impression and expression. Now is the time to enter your future.

*Ivar Björkman*  
*President*

*Applications can be made to Konstfack's new Master programme beginning this year:*

*Storytelling (GDI)*

*Form Giving Intelligence (ID)*

*In Space (IA)*

*Experience Design (IS)*

*Critical Writing and Curatorial Practice (IS)*

*Art in the Public Realm (K)*

*Ceramics and Glass (KG)*

*Jewellery and Corpus (MF)*

*Textiles in the Expanded Field (T)*

# ENJOY

*by Maria Morberg & Renée Padt*

This spring's Konstfack graduation exhibition represents a wide variety of artistic production, merging genres and media. There is much attention to detail in craft, yet uninhibited transcendence between disciplines. These seventy-one students receiving the Bachelor degree, and seventy-three Masters of Fine Arts, have created torrents of investigation, experiment and vision.

There is an interest in recycling, either with a critical eye towards consumer society, or expressed as a passion for the coolness of the past. Current trends also include personal narratives, interpreting and configuring both subconscious and conscious experiences. While often working with elements from everyday life, fundamental issues such as globalization, public space and gender, are filtered through individual perspectives.

Subtle alarm bells but no utopian solution. Here are pragmatic, some idealistic and some humorous, suggestions. Enjoy.

*Maria Morberg*  
*Editor in Chief*

*Renée Padt*  
*Curator Master Exhibition*

# THE FRAGILE PROJECT

*by Annina Rabe*

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*Annina Rabe is a freelance writer and critic in publications such as Svenska Dagbladet, Plaza Magazine and Litkes. She was one of the editorial team for the magazine Bibel, published in 1998-2000.*

You the visitor; look around you at this graduation exhibition. Look at these students. Look at their work. You are witnessing something which is quite unusual in this day and age: something which lives and breathes possible artistic freedom – in every pore. Never are ideals so high, originality so great or willingness to compromise so little than at exhibitions by graduates from artistic courses. It is also true that many, probably most, of the students will progress even further in the future. It is to be hoped they still have their best work ahead of them. They will probably reach a completely different stage in their artistic expression in ten or twenty years. Or they will have refined the work they started here at university. Consistency is another rare commodity, but so attractive when done the right way.

But that is then and now is now. Yet one more year-end exhibition right in the middle of the most intensive part of spring. And today is more important than one might believe. After today, the hard work begins. On defending artistic freedom. On keeping hold of that oh so slippery integrity. On learning to adapt when necessary, but doing so on one's own terms. It sounds easy, but anybody who is commissioned to do work knows that it is extremely hard. It is also a process that never ends.

In the next ten years, most of the students here will have had to adapt, not once, not twice but many, many times. They will learn that only in very rare cases do they own their artistic expression, even though it is their own and it is precisely what they are selling. They will be misunderstood by philistine employers. Perhaps they will be obliged to take assignments which they really would rather not. There will be days when they feel like prostitutes, with only one thing to offer – something which is truly their own, only theirs and nobody else's. Something most personal and essential on offer to the highest bidder – and if nobody is buying, they will have to lower the price. And perhaps do things they would not normally do.

There are those who assert that there is no artistic freedom anyway. It is a myth – quite simply, an illusion. As long as the majority of pictorial artists and designers do directly commissioned work, it cannot be called freedom. As long as we live in a market-dominated society where free, sometimes uncomfortable, artistic expression is worth less and less, it will be increasingly difficult to maintain artistic integrity. Red Bull Exhibitions will abound. Art will be forced to put even more effort into attracting business sponsors. Make itself more amenable,

perhaps. Few will have the privilege of being so popular that they can dictate the terms for their own activities.

I read a roundtable discussion in the Konstfack magazine *Insikt & Flit*, in which a number of artists, both students and professionals, were talking about the conditions surrounding artistic activities today. Some of the discussion was about how one should relate to history – to the artistic tradition each country carries with it. How can an artist of today be free from history? One suggestion was to change artistic disciplines lots of times. Somebody else gave a country painter from Gotland as an example of a person as close to artistic freedom as one can get. On one thing, however, they mostly agreed – it is not possible to be entirely free from history. The question is whether there is even any reason to be.

It was interesting and slightly puzzling to me that when artistic freedom came up in that discussion, they talked about how to relate to history. Not at all much was said about how to relate to the present day. Somebody said that the most important thing current artists should know about is MySpace. Several believed there would be an Internet backlash in the near future. And perhaps there will be. There are movements and counter-movements. There are trends and counter-trends, in Sweden maybe more than anywhere else. For people to carry on any kind of artistic activity, they must relate to trends, and to the fact that they are active within one of Sweden's most trend-sensitive areas – not least when it comes to design and illustration.

Sweden is a land obsessed by its striving for modernity. This has been true for the last hundred years, and is perhaps truer than ever right now. I sometimes get the feeling that progress involves covering up all traces of the past, the dirt and the poverty. In with the new, in with the clean. The cultural editor of *Expressen*, Per Svensson, once described prime minister Fredrik Reinfeldt as “polished smooth by our age”. Although it is hardly fair to let one person symbolise an entire age – even if that person is the prime minister – there is something very apt in what he wrote. Sweden is becoming a land of shiny surfaces, a territory of well-polished aesthetics, with a permanently moistened index finger in the air. With our usual contradictory mix of cockiness and low self-confidence, we still firmly assert that anything produced overseas (in the right countries) is automatically better, and cooler. The criterion for whether something Swedish is good is often whether it is of an ‘international’ standard. At the same time, we brag about our Swedish design tradition and its great success abroad.

But what is actually 'Swedish' in Swedish design and art? It is actually relevant to speak in national terms in an era of globalisation and MySpace?

Yes, I believe that in spite of everything, it is. Not in order to bring out the 'true essence of Sweden' (which is what?), but so that everybody who carries on artistic activities here will have to relate not only to history, but also to the fact that they work in a country which seems hypnotised by trends. The standardisation of some artistic areas is very far gone and originality is minimal, even if it is always just as popular in the art and design community to claim that they are totally unaffected by trends. The myth of total artistic freedom is warmly cherished. As is the belief in one's own autonomy of expression.

I recently stood in *Designorget* leafing through two Japanese books about Swedish décor. The authors had visited and photographed the homes of a number of Swedish designers in various fields. One book was only about their kitchens, the other about their homes in general. The books were in Japanese, but this did not matter. They were the kind of interior design books I love: plenty of detail, and, best of all, they showed real homes where people actually live. No soul-less *Residence* showrooms or veiled real estate ads. I carried on leafing through the books, enjoying the soulfulness until I suddenly realised that all of the homes were charmingly original in exactly the same way. The same individualist feeling in home after home, the same cheerful colours on a white background, the same pleasure in patterns, the same slightly retro objects (spice jars from 50s and all such items), the same comfortable mess. It was like stepping into a never-ending book cover by Lotta Köhlhorn (whose home was also in the books). Absolutely nothing wrong with that, of course, but why have so many Swedish designers adopted this particular aesthetic in their home? Could it be that there is a special designer décor? And even worse, could there be a special designer style?

I continued to look around *Designorget*, which these days is in fact one of the few independent showrooms for design, and suddenly thought I saw the same standardisation there. Objects of the slightly quaint and quirky kind dominated – such as silicone oven gloves or decorative holders for dog faeces bags. Retro-humour was also well represented. Nothing wrong in that either. Like many others, I am a fan of this shop. But where are all the other things? Where are the other forms of expression, the other minds?

In the same way, I see how trend-sensitivity is creating

increased standardisation within illustration. We have an impressive number of young, talented illustrators in Sweden and I always wonder how they all make ends meet. After all, the only two areas many of them have to display their talents, magazines and advertising, have a tendency to only use one type of illustration at a time. For a few years, it was naïve, children's book-style drawings and then it was elegant, detailed glamour drawings à la Liselotte Watkins. Collage, often with humorous elements, was the hot trend for a few years. For a period, the fad was the slightly sloppy, 70s-inspired style which Dennis Eriksson is perhaps the foremost representative of. The Jesper Waldersten illustrators also belong there. All these illustrators are skilled and talented within their own form of expression. But, unfortunately, we have a media climate which in principle only allows one or two styles at a time. This is obvious to those who read monthly periodicals and the weekend supplements of the daily papers. The same applies to advertising. It is here perhaps that Swedish trend-sensitivity is at its most obvious since the places to be published are relatively few in number. And not everybody has the opportunity (or the inclination) to do their own books – books which are anyway almost impossible to make money from.

Perhaps it sounds as if I think that any trend is automatically a bad thing, but that is not so. Trends are necessary in order to allow the aesthetic climate to move forwards. Trends do not only signal anxiety and standardisation, they can just as well be a sign of curiosity and an unwillingness to stagnate in one form of expression. And after all: no trends arise out of nothing. There are always one or more mechanisms which govern what will be a trend, and these mechanisms are not always (even if they sometimes are) of a commercial nature. They might just as well depend on attitudes, political events or purely everyday observations. Not infrequently, trends arise from forms of artistic expression which are very close to being free and unencumbered. From those ideas, in fact, which are truly original. In brief, trends arise, for example, in these rooms and corridors. This is how it should be; if art colleges are not in the vanguard of new forms of expression then something is wrong. What then happens with the trends, how they are used and abused, is something else.

Please excuse the cliché, but I now intend to fall for the temptation to draw a parallel with the season. There is, after all, something special about this time of year, with all the activity that is going on. It is a fragile activity which sometimes makes it painful to be out in nature. The vulnerability level is

so high, the will so intensive. One frosty night or a hailstorm can wreck the whole spring project, at least temporarily. It feels a little like this every spring when I go to the year-end exhibitions at art and design colleges. There is so much will, so much vulnerability precisely because expression is seldom more honest than it is here. There is responsibility and care, an awareness which can be maintained or abandoned depending upon how one chooses to handle one's expression in the future. Everybody has to find his or her own way to cruise through the mines. Everybody must have his or her own mirror to look in.

British writer Martin Amis called his book of collected essays and articles *The War Against Cliché*. It is a title to remember, to think of often. It is a war that has to be fought, every day and all the time. Against the clichés of history, against present day clichés and against future clichés. It is this we should take with us from this exhibition – regardless of whether we are artists or observers. Artistic freedom depends ultimately on us all.

*Annina Rabe*

# THE RETURNS OF THE CONSENSUAL

by Kim West

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*Kim West is a critic and translator, based in Stockholm.  
He is an editor of SITE Magazine.*

“Ugly!” “Incomprehensible!” “Vulgar!” “Socialist!” were some of the judgements levelled by critics at Gustave Courbet’s *Burial at Ornans* when it was shown at the Paris Salon in 1851. What critics were reacting against was not primarily the realistic painter’s well-known and unashamed politics. Courbet’s socialism was sooner used as a convenient excuse to dismiss his paintings. What they were reacting against was the indefinability of the large painting. Who were these black-clad people standing around a grave in the countryside? Some of them did not seem especially mournful and some just seemed bored? What social class were they? And what was one to say about the style of Courbet’s painting? It did not follow the established order of historical or genre painting. Parts of it looked smudged and lifeless, with large almost monochrome areas. The problem was not so much that the content of the painting was unacceptable, rather that both the subject and the style resisted simple categorisation.<sup>1</sup>

These days, the outrage shown by these critics may seem strange, almost incomprehensible. It is difficult to understand how anybody could find a realistic painting so provocative or how it could be seen as subversive. Nothing like that could happen these days. Could it? Are the conservative guardians of the social order of 1851 an extinct species? Or do they have modern equivalents?

What Courbet’s critics wanted was a painting in which the style corresponded with the elevated status of the subject, i.e. where the artist used noble styles and techniques in order to represent noble subjects. In this respect they stood for what the French philosopher and art theorist Jacques Rancière calls a ‘consensual’ attitude. A ‘consensual’ philosophical or political attitude, according to Rancière, is when people believe that everything has its right place: that some things may be expressed and others not, that some things may be shown and others not, that some things may be done and others not, and that a person according to such rules also has a given place in (or outside) society. The aim of all politics in the real sense of the word, says Rancière, is to work against such ‘consensus’, to change the boundaries of what may be said and what may be seen and, in this way, open society up for other subjects and objects. It is in this respect that the aesthetic may also become politically significant: art should help to change the boundaries of what may be said and seen.<sup>2</sup>

The ‘law’ which the realists, with Courbet as one of the central figures, thus broke was the one which throughout the entire history of art said that works of art in order to qualify as

‘art’ had to represent noble subjects – classical or biblical scenes, aristocrats, princes, the wealthy, etc. – and that they had to do so in styles appropriate to the status of the subjects. The realists broke this ‘law’ not only by depicting ‘low’ subjects: peasants, stonebreakers, the petty bourgeoisie, the mourners at a funeral in the country on a grey autumn day etc. They also broke the ‘law’ by using ‘low’ techniques and styles: by borrowing imagery and devices from ‘popular’ sources, from newspaper illustrations, leaflets, etc.<sup>3</sup> When Rancière discusses the rise of what is usually called ‘modernism’, he gives central importance to the break made by realism with the old order in which art was subjected to a social hierarchy. It was namely this break with tradition, he says, that made it possible for artists at the beginning of the following century to not only use ‘low’ styles and techniques, but also use the ‘low’ everyday life and raw reality itself as art materials (collage, ready-made), or to show the ‘low’ materiality of colour and use the ‘low’ practice of painting directly on the canvas (‘abstraction’).

In other words, ‘modern’ art, according to Rancière, arose through the overthrowing of the rules and hierarchies which defined ‘art’ as a practice which consisted in using certain noble techniques and styles to present noble subject matter. With the artistic experiments in the decades around 1900, all the pragmatic criteria gradually disappear by which one could differentiate art from non-art, artistic techniques from other techniques, and artistic objects from everyday objects. Art in “the aesthetic regime” – an expression used by Rancière in order to avoid problematic concepts such as ‘modernism’ and ‘postmodernism’ – is characterised by an absence of such criteria, an absence of clear definitions by which one can identify art as a set of styles and techniques. ‘Art’ becomes an empty category, a series of practices without any predetermined affiliations or tasks. The artist becomes a figure without a defined character, a figure whose primary characteristic is absence of definition, or of a given place.

“Is this really art?!” shout scandalised gallery visitors and critics standing before Schwitters’s collages, before Duchamp’s *Bottle Rack*, before Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes*. This is a question with echoes in ‘avant-garde’ provocations throughout the ‘modernist’ tradition. Two things can be said about it. Firstly, it is a pseudo-question. If there is a reason to ask it, in 99.9 % of cases it has already been answered in the affirmative. People seldom ask “Is this really art?” when taking milk out of the fridge in the morning. If you feel obliged to ask this question,

it is more or less one hundred percent certain that you already know that you are facing a work of art, but for some reason do not want to accept the fact. Which is the other thing that can be said about the question: that in an implicit manner it expresses the will to put things back in their proper place. “Is this really art?” most often means “This is not what art should look like”, i.e.: the artist should stick to his proper job. Or in other words, the shocked gallery-visitors and indignant critics who loudly ask “Is this really art?!” when faced with collages, ready-mades, happenings etc. are the modern descendants of the conservative critics at the 1851 Paris Salon: faced with art which defies definition, they call for consensual order where everything is to remain in its proper place.

But what does it mean that art in the “the aesthetic regime” is an “empty category”? It does not mean, as many wish to believe, that anything goes, that art history is entering in a phase of total arbitrariness.

The emptiness of the category of art and the figure of the artist has, paradoxically, turned out to be brimming over with promise. By having no clear definition or obvious purpose, the category of art and the figure of the artist, by thus finding themselves outside the general rationality of society, can then create promises of an existence beyond these definitions, beyond this rationality. It is this absence of positive definition, of a given role in society, that has led to art becoming a place for developing a myriad of fantasies and utopias, of hopes of and models for new forms of society, new ways of designing collective life. And it is the absence of strict definition which has nurtured the dream that the artist is a figure who may find himself outside society's norms or who has a special ability to criticise or experiment with the prevailing order of a culture. The emptiness of the category of art and the figure of the artist is thus not just negative. It is rather a ‘dissensual’ emptiness: an absence of definition in terms of the prevailing order of a culture, which precisely because of its non-affiliation with this order can become a promise, a utopian hope of another culture beyond the given.<sup>4</sup>

That ‘art’ is the name of a promise of other ways to shape our collective lives has a number of consequences. Such a perspective should be used to understand futurist collages – their will to make art from the shapes of reality and so create a new language for modern machine culture. It is also by using this starting point that people can understand the many and various attempts to translate the imagery of ‘modernist’ art into new architecture and new design for everyday objects,

in order to create a form of society beyond the alienation and objectivation of industrial culture – from the *Werkbund* and Russian constructivism forward.<sup>5</sup>

Such utopian projects feel very distant today. But despite this, it is from the starting point of the same ‘dissensual emptiness’ that contemporary artistic experiments should also be understood. No radical historical breaks separate us from the dismantling of the hierarchies and principles of classical art which made the category ‘art’ indefinable and opened its ‘modern’ traditions. It is unusual now to find people who want to see artists as decadent bohemians or asocial madmen who are above the law, or works of art which claim to cause revolution by creating a major synthesis between the forms of art and life. At the same time, however, it is only by applying the indefinability of the category ‘art’ and artists that today’s ‘critical’ artistic practices may be understood, from the reconfiguration of space experience of installation art to the long-winded self-examinations of institutional critics.

One could give an example, which also has a connection to Konstfack. Cecilia Grönberg's and Jonas (J) Magnusson's 1,056-page ‘artist book’ *Omkopplingar*, a conceptual, poetic, theoretical and photographic examination of Telefonplan as an artistic, literary and geographical topos, shows clearly that it is the relative autonomy guaranteed by the ‘emptiness’ of the category ‘art’ or its indefinability which allows both critical and formally challenging work to be done. Grönberg's and Magnusson's book ‘spies on’ and catalogues all the stories and artistic resources to be found in the place known as Telefonplan: ‘Ericsson City’ as a place where the Swedish ‘modern project’ was put to the test (Telefonplan was laid out as a workers’ suburb following the pattern of Siemensstadt); the Ericsson factory as one of the symbolic battlefields for the social movements of the 60s and 70s (Konstfack has now taken over the factory premises where Göran Palm found work in 1970 which later enabled him to write his two reports on the conditions experienced by industrial workers); the artistic, theoretical and poetic opportunities offered by telephone technology (where Grönberg and Magnusson discuss such varied predecessors as Jean Cocteau, Moholy-Nagy, Avital Ronell and Marguerite Duras etc.). Grönberg and Magnusson use a series of different models to collect all these stories and technologies into a very heterogeneous but coherent work: catalogues, lists, inventories, registers etc. Grönberg and Magnusson, in short, have used models which usually relate to kinds of uncomplicated information-handling systems



in order to bring together a considerable amount of material from various genres and disciplines, material which does not have anything in common other than some more or less immediate connection to Telefonplan as a geographical and historical place. In this way, Grönberg and Magnusson have created a work which defies categorisation and in which documents and transcripts are not less literary than fragments and novels, register photographs and name lists are not less poetic than the atmospheric snapshot and the lyrical love poem, and in which the 'artistic' cannot thus in any clear way be differentiated from the 'non-artistic'. *Omkopplingar* thus forms a kind of unclassifiable record of both the actual and possible stories of Telefonplan, a record which precisely because of its indefinability and openness gives readers new ways to relate to this place and its social and historical context.

A number of examples could be given in order to show that it is precisely the absence of definition of art which enables it to be a serious, critical discipline. The 'dissensual emptiness' of art has been and will continue to be an asset. It is because of this that art has been able to become the non-place where the established order of a culture may be questioned, re-worked and changed.

Are there any equivalents today of the conservative 'consensual' critics of bygone eras? If there are, I do not believe that they are to be found in the obvious places. These days, religious fundamentalists who close down exhibitions in the USA and self-declared cultural guardians who are 'shocked' by Tracey Emin's provocations are nothing more than curious anachronisms (which does not make them less worrying – but they do not say anything about our historical moment). These days, such equivalents are rather to be found among players on the cultural scene who, following a special kind of logic, say they are on the side of the progressives and defend the world of art in a society in rapid change, at the same time as introducing a series of demands and rules through the back door which put things back in their proper place.

An occurrence of 'the return of the consensual' is to be found among the journalists, critics, chroniclers and culture politicians who in the name of a certain kind of 'popularism' accuse all artistic and theoretical production of 'elitism'. The idea seems to be that artists and writers deliberately make their works incomprehensible and fill them with obscure academic references and puzzling expressions which exclude the 'ordinary' observer or reader. The question is who is

excluding whom and who it is that has condescending ideas about the abilities of observers and readers? To say that art is 'elitist' is to say that 'ordinary people' cannot understand it, that 'ordinary people' do not have the capacity to assimilate complex artistic or theoretical expressions. This is the same as saying that these 'ordinary people' ought to have art adjusted to their actual nature, art appropriate to their unvarying abilities. In other words: the same as saying that everything is to be in its right place, and that an 'ordinary people' cannot themselves decide what they want to try to understand. One asks who is most 'elitist': the artist or theoretician who assumes that everybody has the ability to understand everything and the right to choose what they want to try to understand, or the 'popular' critics who decide in advance who 'ordinary people' are and what their abilities and wills are? Is 'elitism' not just a convenient excuse to dismiss challenging artistic and theoretical expression and to reapply definitions to art, artists and observers? The American poet and literary theorist Charles Bernstein expresses this eloquently: "Elitism" is the keyword in a cultural lobotomy process which offers the same prospects for the nation's cultural life as a lobotomy offers the creative potential of the individual."<sup>6</sup>

Another place where 'the return of the consensual' might occur is among those who want to perceive the artist as a creative entrepreneur. The idea here seems to be that artists have to adjust to a new market with new requirements for independence and flexibility. Artists should therefore convert themselves into entrepreneurs who sell their specific 'skills', i.e. their 'artistic creativity', as a 'service'. A not too distant future may be imagined in which all artists have been reduced to creativity consultants whose task is to inject life into a business culture lacking *Geist*. But to criticise the reduction of all culture to business culture is not the same as condemning 'the tyranny of the market' or 'the commodification of works of art' or the like. Works of art have always been sold on various markets, to various kinds of clients, collectors etc. There is no reason to suddenly demonise this. What is worrying here is that if art is to be turned into a 'skill' or a 'service', it must be given a definition, given a place which would put an end to its 'dissensual emptiness'. In order for art to become a desirable service, it must be possible to describe it in positive terms. Few companies will be interested in a consultant who is a specialist in a discipline whose only distinguishing characteristic is its lack of definition. And it is probably not too wild a guess that when positive terms are sought to describe art, there will be

a reversion to obsolete notions of ‘creativity’, ‘innovation’ and ‘imagination’. In other words, there is the risk of a new consensus being set up. What would then come to an end is nothing less than art as such, i.e. art as a critical possibility: a non-place where one may question, shake up and play with the established order of a culture, with its definitions of what may be said and what may be shown.

*Kim West*

1) Cf T. J. Clark, *Image of the People. Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), p 133ff.

2) Cf Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (Stockholm: SITE Editions/Propexus, 2006), especially “Aesthetics as Politics” and “Politics, Identification, Subjectivation”. See also *Artforum* 3/2007, which has a large special section on Rancière’s thinking (in Swedish).

3) See Clark, *Image of the People*, e.g. p 156ff; see also Clark’s *The Absolute Bourgeois. Artists and Politics in France 1848–1851* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), especially the chapter on Millet.

4) A classic argument in this regard is in Peter Bürger’s *Theorie der Avantgarde* from 1974 (English translation by Michael Shaw: *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), e.g.: “*The intention of the avant-garde may be defined as the attempt to direct toward the practical the aesthetic experience (which rebels against the praxis of life) that Aestheticism developed. What most strongly conflicts with the means-ends rationality of bourgeois society is to become life’s organizing principle*”. (p 34)

5) It would be possible here, of course, to refer to a huge number of sources, but two excellent texts are Marjorie Perloff’s ‘The Invention of Collage’, in *The Futurist Moment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986; some of this is translated into Swedish in OEI 15/16/17, 2003) and Frederick J. Schwartz’s *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture Before the First World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

6) Charles Bernstein, ‘The Revenge of the Poet-Critic’, translated by Jesper Olsson, in OEI 4/5, 2000/2001, p 24.

# FAIL AGAIN. FAIL BETTER.\*

by Ronald Jones

\* Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*, 1984

What is the most consistent outcome of interdisciplinarity? Failure. Research tells us that interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary practices are subject to failure rates higher than the conventional monodisciplinary or multidisciplinary practices. This makes failure more likely in interdisciplinary practice but could it be an advantage? Here are two: success has fewer lessons to teach than failure, and failure is important to the experimental process. Whether it is in government, a business school or an art and design school, institutions are naturally *risk-averse* to failure. That's why breakthrough innovations are so extraordinarily difficult to produce. Most institutions strive to become Performance Cultures by rewarding efficiency and predictable results. To see failure as an advantage requires a Learning Culture optimized for efficiency and speed, cultivating exploration and accepting high exposure to risk, while being able to adapt failures into success. When it struck an iceberg, the "unsinkable" Titanic did more to advance ship design than had it been a mere success. We must be capable of shaping cultures that are open both to the possibility of failure and to the need to learn from failure when it occurs. We must have sufficient imagination to imagine the unimaginable.

Innovations arising from monodisciplinary or multidisciplinary practices, where disciplines are highly aligned, far outnumber those from interdisciplinary teams where disciplines are highly diversified. But this is only one-half the story. While research tells us that interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary practices are subject to high failure rates, Lee Fleming's research, published in the *Harvard Business Review* tells us that when success arrives it is of "an unusually high value," and that "breakthrough" innovations are the exclusive domain of interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary practices.

In this light, failure must be seen as both inevitable and an advantage. At the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies we recognize that to create innovation and produce new

knowledge we must first understand how to better manage risk through the analysis of "productive failures". We seek to close the gap between "Performance Cultures" and "Learning Cultures".

In the end it's a question of your risk-tolerance for failure.

Here is a prediction I am willing to make: we presently

lack the imagination to conceive of another methodology – other than interdisciplinarity – capable of producing such a high level of creativity. The crucial implication is that because of that lack of imagination: future innovations will be driven by interdisciplinarity.

Are there advantages in failing to be innovative? Universities that lag behind the frontiers of curricular transformation enjoy the advantage of being able

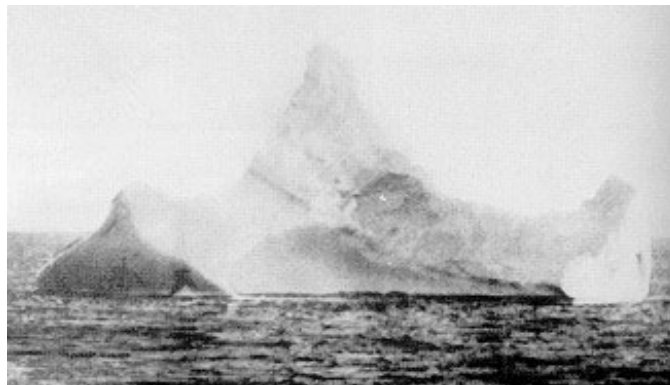
to imitate success elsewhere without assuming the risk of innovation. If they don't, then the risk is reserved for their students.

*Ronald Jones, PhD*

*Professor Interdisciplinary studies (IS)*

*IS offers theoretical and skill courses*

*to all Konstfack students.*



*Isberget som på latituden 41-46 N, longitud 50-14 W sänkte RMS Titanic den 14 april 1912.*

# TIMELINE: KONSTFACKS VIDEOTEK

## *Artists Film and Video Collection*

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*A project initiated by Marysia Lewandowska, artist and professor Konstfack.*

*Advisory Group: Anita Malmqvist, artist and senior lecturer Konstfack; Peter Hagdahl, artist, director*

*Mejanlabs, professor KKH; Johanna Billing, artist, Stockholm; Carles Guerra, artist and curator Barcelona; Liselotte Winka and Per Nordgren, Konstfacks bibliotek.*

### COLLECTION

The project of developing a film and video collection has been initiated in recognition of the position the moving image occupies in a broader cultural domain. In the current climate where emphasis often falls on the image production and consumption, it is crucial to be able to link current developments in art practice to the historical material and discourses surrounding it. This kind of knowledge seems to gain relevance in the educational environment, contributing to an understanding of the present set of ideas through interrogating the past. The collection is divided into three sections: Historical, Contemporary and Students Works.

A large part of the collection has been built up through artists' donations. You can browse a searchable online catalogue offering descriptions of films and links to artists' web pages. This facility extends possible uses of the collected material beyond the school, making its content available to curators, researchers, writers and a wider community.

### LECTURES

This year we have launched a series of six lectures by international artists whose work is featured in the collection. They discussed structural relationships, methodologies, economies and discourses of film seen as a critical document. Each lecture was followed by a screening of their work represented in Timeline.

### VIDEO LOUNGE

By devising a dedicated space for the collection within Konstfacks bibliotek, it was important to provide a more appropriate atmosphere for long hours of solitary viewing. We now have a clubroom with loungers and low light, where all the tapes and DVDs are easily accessible and available for viewing. There is no possibility of lending the material out of the library premises.



# Master Exhibition

TELEFONPLAN/KONSTFACK & HÖGLAGRET 15 – 27 MAJ

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## Bachelor Exhibitions

GDI: FÄRGFABRIKEN MAY 12 – 27

ID: TELEFONPLAN/TELLUSGÅNGEN MAY 15 – 27

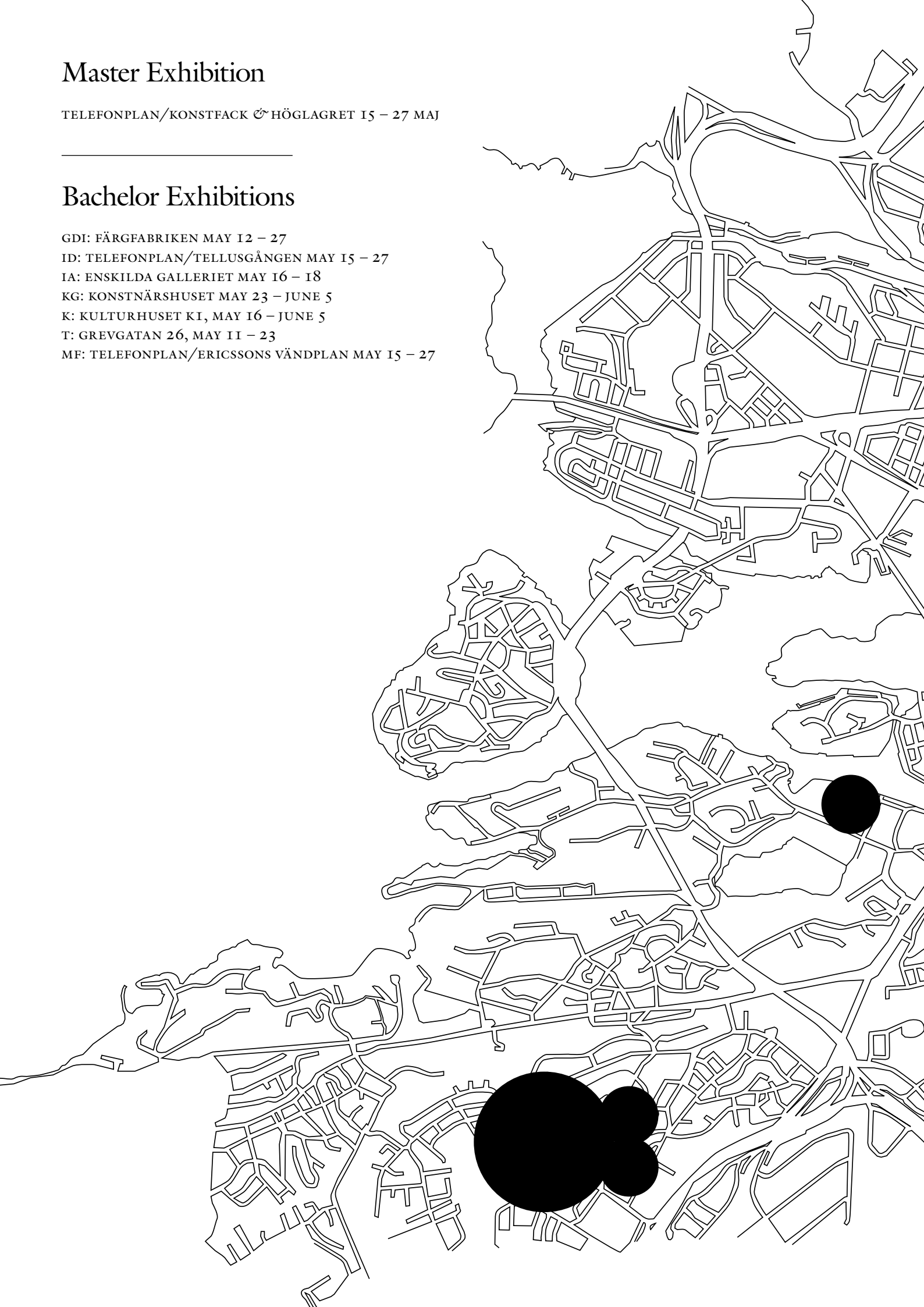
IA: ENSKILDA GALLERIET MAY 16 – 18

KG: KONSTNÄRSHUSET MAY 23 – JUNE 5

K: KULTURHUSET KI, MAY 16 – JUNE 5

T: GREVGATAN 26, MAY 11 – 23

MF: TELEFONPLAN/ERICSSONS VÄNDPLAN MAY 15 – 27





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