

# Material-Relational Following of an Artist-Curator Relationship in Movement

## A Reflection of my Relationship with the Artist Regitze Karlsen

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Volume 9, numéro 1, 2024

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1113658ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.18432/ari29798>

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Éditeur(s)

University of Alberta

ISSN

2371-3771 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Friis, J. A. (2024). Material-Relational Following of an Artist-Curator Relationship in Movement: A Reflection of my Relationship with the Artist Regitze Karlsen. *Art/Research International*, 9(1), 1–21.  
<https://doi.org/10.18432/ari29798>

Résumé de l'article

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## MATERIAL-RELATIONAL FOLLOWING OF AN ARTIST-CURATOR RELATIONSHIP IN MOVEMENT: A REFLECTION OF MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ARTIST REGITZE KARLSEN

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**Abstract:** In this article, I explore insights gained in the investigation of a personal artist-curator relationship using Katve-Kaisa Kontturi's methodology of material-relational *following*. In my role as a curator, I track my relationship with Danish artist Regitze Karlsen as it unfolded from 2017 until 2023; from my first meeting with the artist and her work, through collaborative work on an exhibition, and a studio visit afterwards. I show how the method of following provides in-movement knowledge of the artist-curator relation, which makes it possible to conceive of the *art-work* as an expanded process of ideas, sites, materials, and affects between artworkers. Moving between sections of lived experiences and theoretical reflections, I conclude that the curatorial modes of *being hooked*, *curiosity*, and *concern*, were essential for my following of Regitze's and my artist-curator relation.

**Keywords:** material-relational following; curating; ecology; Anthropocene; affect theory; Regitze Karlsen

This is a story about compost soil, sand, and gravel. About materials and connection. About following the connections between landscapes, materials, practices, an artist, and a curator in their unfolding collaboration throughout years of work, conversation, and mutual inspiration. Regitze Karlsen is a Danish artist who works with natural materials such as soil, gravel, wood, and stone. Her artworks are based on geological research, and she is interested in how we can relate to our own time and to geological time simultaneously through examining organic processes and energy fields that exist in everyday materials. When I first encountered Karlsen's artworks of soil six years ago, I felt a shockwave of inspiration flow through me. I met her sculptures in my work as a curator for the site-specific art program at Roskilde Festival, a music festival outside of Copenhagen. Meeting these sculptures produced a shift in my way of understanding compost and soil materials. Her way of balancing figurative and abstract approaches to form, spoke to my own nascent thoughts of engaging art and ideas on the liveliness of matter, to pay tribute to the stuff of the earth that is taken for granted in our everyday lives. This encounter was the first step of an ongoing artist-curator relation that this article sets out to explore.

I *follow* my journey with Karlsen analyzed through my own perspective as a curator in this relation. In *Ways of Following* (2018), Finnish art historian Katve-Kaisa Kontturi described *following* as a way to “embrace the ‘work’ of art, its material, affective, and relational doings that push it beyond the representational function” (p.10). Kontturi emphasized that concepts and methodologies need to be constantly reinvented and applied anew in the concrete material-relational encounters that emerge through following. This is what keeps one open to the movements of the processes of *art-work*:

To embrace newness, or the vitality of the world, means that readymade concepts or methodologies are not directly applicable, rather, they should be re-singularised in each new relation: we never know how materialities move and affect and therefore should not approach them as being one and the same. As the emphasis is on (co-)emergences, broad modalities of attention to what is occurring are proposed instead of clearly defined methodologies. Following is one such attention or relation ‘orientator’ (p. 15)

Kontturri's concept of following is inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1980/1987) notion of the same name. “They argue that a fixed viewpoint reproduces the observed phenomenon from its own, limited perspective,” (Kontturri, 2018, p. 12) and therefore propose following as a method that better grasps the everchanging “singularities of matter and is attentive to its connections and movements” (p. 12).

The focus on relations and becoming has been taken up again in *new materialism*, an interdisciplinary field of inquiry emerging around the millennium as part of what may be termed the ontological or material turn. New materialism seeks to rework received notions of matter as a uniform, inert substance, foregrounding how matter is an active force that is co-

productive in creating social worlds, expressions, and experiences (Sencindiver, 2019). As Kontturi writes, the “new” in new materialism does not refer to its radical break from decades of theory in the humanities, but a continuation of it. Its newness points to how contemporary technologies and eco-crises produce new ways of being affected by matter that need to be attended to (Kontturi, 2018)<sup>1</sup>. As such, the method of following is situated in a framework of new materialist theory that highlights the liveliness and connectedness of all matter and the relations between human and more-than-human organisms.

I wish to use Kontturi’s method of following, but in a slightly different way: as a curator<sup>2</sup>. My way of using following therefore implies my own curatorial work, and my relations with Karlsen and other cultural workers in the process of creating an exhibition. As such, I understand Kontturi’s concept of artwork as both a new materialist perspective on artwork as an object in constant movement, and as the interactions between the people that make art, its discourses, and its sites. I draw on the theoretical framework of new materialism in concordance with a practice-led approach (Haseman, 2006) to research production in a performative paradigm (Østern et al., 2021). In this paradigm, research is produced through and with art projects and exhibitions in the specific contexts where I have my practice. In the more specific context of curating, my method is influenced by *the curatorial* as an explorative and open-ended process of research (Martinon & Rogoff, 2013; see also Rogoff & von Bismarck, 2012; Sheikh, 2020). I use following as a method that explores my own work, and my relations with Karlsen’s work, wherefrom art and exhibitions sometimes arise, but which also includes a gathering of other insights, conversations, and affective experiences. They are experiences gained in the following of art-work in this expanded understanding of the word.

I wish to show how the methodology of following provides knowledge in movement with our relationship to art and how it is cultivated throughout the processes of art-work—in my case including curatorial work. To be able to go back to my experiences, I documented the processes of my curatorial work and life with photos, videos, recordings, and journaling. I take my analytical point of departure from my experiences in concrete situations of following, mediated by these documents. Through my reflections, I show how the method of following leads to analytical insights that are crucial to understanding aspects of contemporary curatorial practice that would not otherwise be noticed in a static analysis of, say, an exhibition or part of an artists’ oeuvre.

In the next sections, I present reflections on the following of three episodes of Karlsen’s and my professional relationship. The first section, *COMPOST*, recalls a period from 2017 when I first encountered Karlsen’s practice at the art program of Roskilde Festival. Here, I show how following provided an understanding of the sensuous and contextual dimensions that were at work when I attuned to Karlsen’s artworks for the first time. The second section, named *SAND*, is comprised of our correspondences between

2021-2023 as we developed Karlsen's participation in the exhibition *HABITAT II*, that I curated for Agder Art Centre in Kristiansand, Norway. In this section, I follow our shared curiosity in more-than-human phenomena which played a central role in our collaboration and the making of the final exhibition. The third section, *GRAVEL*, follows a studio visit in 2023 when we went on a trip to Karlsen's site-specific exhibition in a gravel pit in Sorø, Denmark. In this section, I explore how a shared sense of concern in the exchanges between Karlsen and me seeped through the art-work we engaged in together. I conclude that the insights into our artist-curator relation that following has provided can be understood as three significant curatorial modes; attunement, curiosity, and concern are all affective modes that this method has made me recognize as crucial in my own work. I argue that these modes could appropriately be included in Marzia Varutti's (2023) concept *affective curatorship*, a common denominator for trends and movements in curating related to the affective turn in the arts and humanities (Clough & Halley, 2007; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Pedwell & Seigworth, 2023).

## COMPOST

In the last decade, eco-aesthetics of all sorts have flourished in the contemporary art world, primarily as a response to climate crises, biodiversity loss, and the emerging concept of the Anthropocene<sup>3</sup> (Davis & Turpin, 2015; Weintraub, 2012). As part of this movement, I co-curated the site-specific outdoor art program for the "Art Zone" at Roskilde Festival in 2017 and 2018, with an ecological theme titled *Human / Non-human I and II*. Roskilde Festival is Northern Europe's biggest festival, taking place 30 km outside of Copenhagen. The festival is non-profit, and supports humanitarian, charitable, and cultural work. It began in 1971 with inspiration from Woodstock, and it has continued ever since with a primary focus on music. During the last 15 years, however, an expansive arts program has developed which comprises performance art, sculpture, installation, participatory projects, talks, and literary readings. Between 2015-2018 I worked on the curatorial team that is responsible for organising the arts program each year. The framework of the festival gives curatorial opportunities as well as challenges because of the site-specific outdoor environment, and the festival goers, many of whom are not necessarily interested in contemporary art.

It was in this context that I encountered Regitze Karlsen's practice for the first time, not primarily as a curator but as a spectator. Together with one of my colleagues, I have written in depth about our curatorial strategies around creating an Anthropocene sensibility at the festival by understanding the festival as a liminal space with unique possibilities and limits for engendering ecological awareness through art (Friis & Schyum 2022). Therefore, I will not go into additional detail here about our over-all curatorial approach to the art program's ecological theme in 2017 and 2018. I do, however, wish to give some background

as to how Roskilde Festival's specific landscape became part of Karlsen's artwork for the program.

Every year after the festival, the area is buried in trash, and it takes well into the autumn to clean the entire area, returning it to the same condition as it was before the festival began. In addition to the fact that the extreme waste and the long clean-up time was an issue we wanted to address, it also expressed a cyclical process of destruction and regeneration that interested us. In planning the festival, the curator team and several of the artists took the compost motif as a starting point. Here, we primarily drew inspiration from biologist and feminist philosopher Donna Haraway (2016), who uses a metaphor of compost that connects all living organisms through our common condition: that we will end up as compost through different types of decomposition processes. There is a feminist perspective in Haraway's metaphor about equality between people and also between people and other organisms. With the aim of creating an experience of connectedness to the more-than-human at the festival, compost as metaphor and as actual material was central to Regitze Karlsen's artistic contribution to the art program.

For Art Zone 2017, Regitze produced 15 sculptures from compost soil, which she collected from an area right next to the festival. The soil consisted of compost from the festivals of previous years; the remains were evident in the form of various plastic mugs, beer cans, and other waste that had not entirely decomposed so were embedded in the soil. The title of the artwork, *55.615 12.082*, was based on the exact GPS location of the compost facility, to emphasise the direct connection between Karlsen's material and the festival site. She built the skeleton of the sculptures out of wood, and then attached layers of compost soil to a canvas fabric which was hung on the wooden skeleton.

**Figure 1 & 2**

Part of the sculpture group comprising Karlsen's artwork 55.615 12.082



*Notes:* Exhibited on the festival site of Roskilde Festival 2017. Photos: Regitze Karlsen.

When I first encountered Karlsen's sculptures, I only had a vague idea of who she was as an artist. She was still studying at Jutland Art Academy from where she would graduate a year later. The curator team had chosen her among several younger Danish artists that we found interesting, and that we wished to support in their practice by exposing them to a larger audience. I was surprised and intrigued by the 3-metre-tall sculptures when they began to spread out over the Art Zone, later blending with people, sitting installations, waste, food, plants, grass, and other artworks when the festival began. In the days leading up to the opening of the festival, it was interesting to follow the 15 sculptures around the site as they were constructed. It was as if these soil figures had a presence that would only gradually become apparent to someone spending their time in the area, but they had a profound effect on their surroundings nonetheless.

The compost sculptures had slightly anthropomorphic traits that mimicked ancient sculptures such as Venus de Milo. At the same time, they were abstract enough to put

emphasis on the soil material and not solely the figuration. In that way, I began to see Karlsen's creation as a unique combination of compost soil material and the human figure of traditional marble statues. When reflecting on the sculptures, it soon became apparent to me that 55.615 12.082 was elevating the compost to something more esteemed with their more-than-human height. The soil that the festival goers walk on is taken for granted and considered highly unremarkable; therefore, its solidification and slight figuration in Karlsen's sculptures was an epiphany for me. In the context of the festival, I had been thinking about how to aesthetically elevate more-than-human materials that are taken for granted and thereby raise awareness around them. This artwork seemed to propose a possible answer.

The sculptures had a slightly eerie aura, which made them reminiscent of ghosts, something I talked with colleagues and visitors about throughout the festival. Karlsen herself told me, in one of our first conversations, that she wanted to create "the ghost of compost," to give a reflection on the long-term impact on the earth that the festival has, even after everything has been cleaned from the area. Through her use of a ubiquitous material such as soil in a sculptural context, my awareness of the material was raised in a sensuous way that I seldom had experienced before. Touching Regitze's sculptures, their tactile surface gave me a feeling of being one with their material. They changed and eroded a little each time they were encountered physically—some of the sculpture was literally carried away with each touch—they also changed slightly by more-than-human phenomena such as rain.

My sensuous encounters with the sculptures of 55.615 12.082, as followed above, could be conceptualized with Rita Felski's (2020) notion of being *hooked*. Felski argues that interactions with works of art co-produces lasting bonds that are nonetheless contingent. Furthermore, she distinguishes between three attachment devices, where the first one, *attunement*, is most relevant here. Attunement consists of those often pre-linguistic "affinities, inclinations, stirrings that fall below the threshold of consciousness", a response that is "impossible to ignore yet often hard to categorize." (p. xi). Other researchers have conceptualized attunement in an ecological context, most notably Timothy Morton (2019), whose understanding of attunement can contribute to the concept of a more-than-human dimension, relevant for my experiences with Regitze's soil sculptures. The experience of being hooked and really attuning to a work of art, however, as happened with me with Karlsen's work, is best described by Felski's version of the concept.

I recognized the sense of being attuned by something indescribable at the borderland of consciousness when first engaging with the sculptures of 55.615 12.082. Through following, however, since my first encounter with Regitze Karlsen's practice, I have gained a clearer understanding of what attached me to the compost soil sculptures in the first place. Touching the sculptures, learning about their materials and their connection to the festival site, and following my associations to other figures in the history of art have shaped a sense of what initially was an affective inclination not yet verbalized. Ultimately, following my



attachment to 55.615 12.082 created a conscious experience of compost soil—as a metaphor in the work and as the work’s material—that inspired thoughts in me of how to use this material in an ecological and sustainable curatorial framework. My following of Regitze and her art began with my encounter with the sculptures of 55.615 12.082 at Roskilde festival 2017. Thereafter, I would follow her practice from a distance for a couple of years, keeping the relation intact, and knowing that I had the intention to work with her in the future.

## SAND

*It is late Summer in 2021 as I sit in a kitchen on a Zoom call with Regitze. I have invited her to talk more about her project four years ago at Roskilde Festival, our current sources of inspiration, and a possible future collaboration. I have just begun a two-year exhibition project with Agder Art Centre in Kristiansand, Southern Norway. The project concerns two Summer exhibitions of contemporary art focusing on ecology and sustainability, and I have had Karlsen’s sculptures in my mind for a while since embarking on this project. Not only are the sculptures in line with my wish to use natural and sustainable materials in the exhibition, but they are also appropriate for the ecological framework that I wish to use in the project.*

I was curious to see how she would react to the theme I had chosen for the exhibition, entitled *HABITAT*. The theme responded to a set of issues put forth by Bruno Latour in his work *Down to Earth; Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (2018). In the book, Latour pleaded that we must create a new collective feeling of being connected to the earth we live on, without at the same time closing ourselves off from the world around us. With the exhibitions at Agder Art Centre, I wished to create artistic imaginaries of connectedness to our surroundings, in the vein of Latour’s thinking (Friis, 2024). My hope was that an ecological awareness could be created through artistic engagement with the theme of coming down to earth and creating more-than-human connections to the places we live. Therefore, the theme of habitat and inhabitation needed to be closely connected to Kristiansand, where the exhibition was to take place.

Karlsen was excited when I told her about the hyper-local focus of *HABITAT* in connection to Kristiansand. The possibility of exploring a sense of belonging to a specific place through the exhibition was appealing to her, and at the same time it could possibly carve out new aspects of her practice. When I suggested that she participate in the first exhibition in the Summer of 2022, however, she hesitated. “I would really like to come and see and experience the 2022 exhibition, and do some research on the spot, maybe participate in some talks or something. It would be so nice if there were time and space for it. And then I think it might be really good to join in 2023,” she told me. I was happily surprised

by her commitment to the project, in line with creating an actual connection to Kristiansand over a longer timeframe.

Regitze and her family spent a week in Kristiansand in the Summer of 2022, participating in the opening of the first *HABITAT* exhibition. She explored the city and nature around Southern Norway and returned to Denmark to develop a concept for the artwork for the next year. Meanwhile, I created a distinct theme for the second edition of the exhibition. It was to explore the landscape as a foundation; the many more-than-human materials from the ground that the city is made of and that subtly affect us. This choice was inspired in part by Regitze's practice and a conversation I had with her beforehand. As she said in one of our conversations:

People have understood the value of biodiversity, but the concept of geodiversity, on which all biodiversity depends, still often slips out of our perspective in public discourse. Although it can be difficult to listen to and understand a bird, we understand that it 'talks', it can scare us away and give signals we can read; it is even more difficult to understand a stone, a grain of sand. A landscape. What does that rock want? How does it want to communicate with me? What does it want me to understand?

When I first sat down to think about a site-specific theme, I found it interesting that the word "sand" is included in "Kristiansand," and I started to do some research about the city. It surprised me that the whole city centre was built almost entirely on sand, and that this substrate made the infrastructure more vulnerable. Kristiansand is the fifth biggest city of Norway, it is based in the southernmost part of the country, and its city centre—the part that is built on sand—is facing Skagerrak Sea, close to the North Sea. The city centre is called Kvadraturen (the quadrature) because of its rectangular street pattern which dates to the time of its foundation. The ocean surrounds the Quadrature from three sides, and a beach fills one side of the city centre. This beach is the heart of Kristiansand, and people from the whole country visit in the summer since this region has the mildest weather. Through this research, I came to understand that sand is central to Kristiansand as a more-than-human material that gives identity to the city in different ways. When coming up with the theme for the exhibition, therefore, I connected a new materialist focus on sand to Regitze's practice and to the specific site in the middle of the Quadrature where the exhibition was to take place.

After Regitze returned to Denmark, we waited until around the turn of the year, when I could reassure her that we would have the funding for her to participate in the exhibition. She wrote to me in Winter 2023 to update me on her contribution:

My work is called 'When the mountains wink at me, my eyes fill with sand.' It is a sculpture group built on a concrete base, with a skeleton made of wood and chicken wire, and over this, towels are wrapped around the construction. The towels are

dipped in concrete, glue, and other binders so that they become hard as shells—on the outside various stones and sand are poured over them. I bought the towels in local thrift shops in Kristiansand last Summer and in my own local thrift shop in Sorø. Furthermore, I have collected stones and sand in Kristiansand and Sorø for the work. I want to use towels to emphasize the intimate connection between the landscape and the body. Here, culture and nature cannot be separated. Furthermore, the work is carried out in as sustainable and local materials as possible.

I was excited about her idea to use beach towels from thrift shops as layers on the sculptures, instead of—but simultaneously in conversation with—the compost soil that the sculptures at Roskilde Festival had been comprised of. In a sense, I thought, the towels, which probably had been used by humans since they were bought in a thrift shop, were also a type of compost that brought with them traces of bodies and sand. The beach towels acted as a sort of membrane between body and landscape. I was quite impressed with Regitze's incorporation of the theme, both the connection to Kristiansand and to the underground as it is expressed through sand, as well as her taking seriously the challenge of sustainability.

### Figure 3

*Artist and Curator*



*Notes:* Artist and curator in conversation through Zoom, August 2021, and gathered the day before exhibition opening in Kristiansand, with the sculpture group in the background, July 2023. Photos: Joachim Friis and Lily Bjørk.

When the sculptures finally arrived in Kristiansand, they appeared as a mix of small mountains and bodies; a mountain that has collected bodies, or bodies transforming into a mountain. Regitze and I talked about how the artworks sculpturally explore questions about the landscapes we absorb and are a part of, both locally and globally—through towel materials, stone, and sand.

Following our collaboration on *HABITAT II*, the dialectical learning processes of art-work become apparent. Before even meeting Regitze in person, my attunement to her sculptures in *55.615 12.082* planted a seed in my imagination for a project utilizing art's potential for exploring materials of the earth in novel ways. Later, I became inspired by many other sources, such as Latour's *Down to Earth* (2018), but Regitze's compost soil sculptures were always in the back of my mind. Later, when we began preparing her contribution to the exhibition, my ideas of creating material and imaginary connections to the site of Kristiansand and its foundation on sand merged with her ideas of towels as a membrane between sand and body. Exchanging ideas and inspirations consciously and unconsciously through artworks, curatorial frameworks, sites, and materials was indispensable for the process and the result. Amongst many other factors, the outcome of Regitze's contribution to *HABITAT II* could be understood as the result of a dialectical experience of learning and exploring between us in our roles as artist and curator.

In this process, curiosity played an important role. Irit Rogoff (2012) has proposed a strategy called "the curious eye" (p. 18) that relates to visual experiences in a way that is personal, intuitive, and unassuming, detaching from "the good eye" (p. 18) of connoisseurship. This curiosity implies a disturbance that brings the visual encounter outside the realm of the known, to things not yet quite understood or articulated. This mode of curiosity has been front and centre in my ongoing relation with Regitze and her work. As Trine Friis Sørensen proposed in her article "A Precarious Construct" (2019), the curator's relationship to the artist is generally based on a curious research attitude. Sørensen uses Michel Foucault's writing to strengthen the etymological association between curiosity, care<sup>4</sup>, and concern, binding this association to the figure of the curator. She quotes Foucault as saying:

[Curiosity] evokes 'concern'; it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up the familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things, a fervour to grasp what is happening and what passes; a casualness in regard to the traditional hierarchies of the important and the essential. (Foucault, 1980/1996, p. 305)

Even though Foucault is not speaking of curating as such, Sørensen shows that his concept of curiosity resonates with curatorial practice because it is attentive to the coincidental, to the things in society and our surroundings that are taken for granted,

inducing a will to challenge hierarchies of importance. Meanwhile, in the context of my following, I would argue that the curiosity at play in curatorial work is also occurring in relation to the artists involved. At its core, the curatorial framework of the exhibition was a call to the invited artists to direct their curiosity to the more-than-human in ways that challenge the hierarchies of human societies. But, between curator and artist, curiosity was also unfolding. Our curiosity was predominantly wired toward the more-than-human, to matter such as the concrete of buildings, to rock, soil, sand, and textile.

In our collaboration, I inspired Regitze to investigate the sand of Kristiansand, motivated by my curiosity around the city's name and its foundation on sand, perceiving sand as a more-than-human force in a new materialist framework. Regitze took this challenge upon herself and directed her curiosity towards the beach towels of Kristiansand, combining an interest in the foundation of the city with one of its main attractions to tourists: its sandy and sunny beach, rare by Norwegian standards. By following our collaboration on the exhibition, it became clear that curiosity towards the more-than-human was a central mode of our work, working dialectically through mutual inspiration across time.

## GRAVEL

*After the end of HABITAT II, Regitze invites me to a studio visit in Sorø, an hour's drive from Copenhagen. Here, she is showing the exhibition About Connecting Grounds in a former gravel pit. Regitze and her husband pick me up from the train station and we drive out to the gravel pit in sunny September weather. Meanwhile, Regitze tells me about the gravel pit and her work there that started back in 2020. Sorø is characterized by the geology that formed in the last ice age, which left behind big amounts of raw materials, from fine sand and clay to gravel and stones of all sizes. Today's construction of large infrastructural facilities creates a high demand for those materials and this leaves its mark on the extracted areas. Therefore, gravel extraction is a significant part of the identity and appearance of Sorø and the nearby regions.*

Regitze lives in Sorø with her family, and the locals know her art practice. The owners of the former gravel pit contacted her and proposed that she work artistically with the landscape. It was important for the owners to create a biodiverse landscape after all the gravel had been extracted. Former gravel pits contain soil that is poor in nutrients, and this is ideal for biodiverse forms of life to grow. Now, the former gravel pit is a new landscape with a hilly terrain, a valley, and a small lake. Multiple species and plants have begun to flourish there, such as hill clove and broad-leaved marsh orchid. This is where Regitze has exhibited her art for the past four years, regularly inviting new artists to exhibit with her. In 2023, *About Connecting Grounds* comprised contributions from six artists.

When we arrived at the former gravel pit, I could not help but be taken in by the landscape; the way that the extraction has formed the valley is quite stunning. But as Regitze showed me around, she reminded me that there is a strong ambivalence present in this landscape:

In the gravel pit and the new landscape created here, the absence of materials, what has been removed, is so noticeable. But at the same time, a new presence within the landscape is also evident, as you have experienced. In the absence, in the deep hole that has been left behind, there is still a strong presence.

We talked about how the gravel pit is a unique place and potential marker of the Anthropocene; it is a site where the extraction of natural materials take place so that humans can increase and expand their settlement. Regitze pointed out how, in many places around Denmark, there simply will not be any more gravel in a few years because of the immense extraction. At the same time, new growths of rare flora and fauna thrive better here than in many other places, and this fact is an incentive to continue the extraction. There is therefore a strong ambivalence and complexity to this landscape. Regitze told me that her main wish with this outdoor exhibition was to have people spend time in the gravel pit and sense the extraction that we normally only get to experience indirectly through the concrete that surrounds us in cities.

The ambivalence of the gravel pit and its reminder of extraction and limited resources turn our conversation towards complex issues of sustainability in the artworld. There is an intricate dilemma between the global and the local for art workers in the context of the climate crisis. Regitze told me that the sustainable dimension of her art-work seeps through every aspect of her practice, from the materials she uses and the research she does, to the way she transports herself and acts in the world, privately as well as professionally. Meanwhile, it is a constant predicament how to act when wanting to be a sustainably aware artist that is taking seriously the practical consequences of her beliefs. Since the themes of ecology and sustainability are ubiquitous now, they can easily become a token for success in the art world rather than being a part of the decisions in terms of transport, production, and materials. On the other hand, there is always a boundary of sustainability beyond which one must act unsustainably to continue one's practice. This is also the case for the curator, for example in the dilemma between focusing on local artists for favouring sustainability and local community and collaborating internationally for strengthening inspiration and cross-cultural community—which, in the end, is less sustainable in terms of carbon dioxide-emissions. We agreed that setting the barrier for this “boundary” of (un)sustainability really is the important question, and one that is constantly up for redefinition as the state of the planet is changing.

**Figure 4***Dig Where You Stand (2023)*

*Notes:* Karlsen's artwork *Dig Where You Stand (2023)*, at the exhibition *About Connecting Grounds 2023*, in a former gravel pit near Sorø.

For most of our conversation, we had been sitting in Regitze's installation for the exhibition called *Dig Where You Stand (2023)*. There, we were visually surrounded by gravel above us; the installation was a huge tent on which enlarged images of gravel had been printed. Through a QR-code it was possible to listen to a 24-hour sound work recorded in an active gravel pit close by, in which could be heard how the sounds of the gravel pit change day and night. In this way, the trace of the gravel pit became sensible through sound. It was apparent that the landscape we were in had transformed from an active extraction site to a sort of silent grave (in Danish a gravel pit is literally called a "gravel grave"). While sitting in Regitze's installation, I commented on how the material of the tent with the images of the gravel created a light and almost airy sense of the otherwise heavy and dirty material. The sound work's ghostly sense of tracing noises that once were, pointed to something that had disappeared and was haunting the place. In this sense, the artwork—despite the very different materials—was connected to her sculptures at Roskilde Festival that sought to be

“ghosts of compost.” As we walked back toward the car and drove to Regitze’s studio, we continued our musings on earthly matters of soil, sand, and gravel, and the landscapes that are created by them.

Through my following of our trip to the gravel pit, it became apparent that Regitze and I embraced the vitality of the surroundings together and attended to a shared interpretation of Regitze’s artwork, its material, form, and relation to the site. Among other things, her installation, and the gravel pit overall, could be understood as a non-site in the vein of Robert Smithson. Smithson began exploring industrial areas in New Jersey in 1967 and installed bits of gravel, rocks, and salt from this area in gallery spaces, contained in boxes or galvanized steel (Kastner & Walls, 1998). In Regitze’s case, however, the site/non-site dichotomy was not between the outdoor space and the gallery space, but between two outdoor sites: the former gravel pit and the gravel pit that was still in use. Through placing sensuous references to gravel in the former gravel pit—in the shape of enlarged pictures of gravel and the sounds from a functioning gravel pit—she created an outdoor non-site that referred to, and was “haunted” by, another outdoor site.

This shared exploration of the (non-)site and its artworks—specifically the reference to the “haunting of the gravel” that the non-site prompted—made us heavily aware of our shared concern about the environment and about (non)sustainable art production in particular. Both Regitze’s and my own practices revolve around working with sustainable and recycled materials, and we are both interested in art that takes up themes of ecology and the Anthropocene. This is reflected in our common priorities and concerns in terms of materials, themes, and ways of working.

Concern is also included in Sørensen’s account of what the curator-artist relationship involves. She uses Bruno Latour’s (2004) concepts of “matters-of-concern,” (para. 19) and “things” (para. 23), understood as both “a thing” (i.e., an assembly or gathering concerning non-factual and uncertain matters of concern), as well as those matters themselves. In Sørensen’s account, however, concern is related to analytical acts of curating:

What I would like to do here is to consider the commission as an analytical gesture along the lines of Latour’s thing . . . To assemble is, according to Latour, the task of the critic, a task that, in the case of the commission, would belong to the curator. I assemble by selecting and commissioning Dahlberg and Olsson to engage with a matter of concern . . . that we, in turn, engage with in multifarious ways. (Sørensen, 2019, pp. 90-91)

While I agree that the analytical gesture of concern is crucial to the curator’s work, in my experience of following, concern was also connected to the artist-curator relationship as an inter-personal affective exchange. What I gathered from following Regitze and my trip to



the gravel pit, was a shared sense of concern between us that reached towards something outside of the artwork itself, towards issues of climate change, extraction of resources, and intricate predicaments for artworkers following from (un)sustainability. In short, whereas Sørensen's understanding of concern translates more as an analytical gesture, the way I have come to understand concern as a curatorial mode in relation to my following of Regitze's work is as a shared affective response to states of the world and their matters of concern.

## Concluding Remarks

During this process of following, I have realized that the curatorial modes I tracked in Regitze's and my artist-curator relationship can adequately be understood through an affective lens. Affects play a central role, as they work in the processes of my following of our shared art-work over time: my being *hooked* on Regitze's compost soil sculptures, forming attachments and ideas that stretched throughout years of work; cultivating curiosity together in relation to specific more-than-human sites and materials that we share a passion about; resonating with each other's concerns toward the predicamental state of the environment, and the difficulty of acting sustainably in our local context in Scandinavia as well as in the artworld globally.

I would argue that the curatorial modes I have uncovered in my material-relational following is an important, albeit omitted, aspect of Marzia Varutti's recently coined concept *affective curatorship*. With this concept, Varutti seeks to create a unifying term for trends and movements in curating related to affects. In her definition, affective curatorship is a strategy for generating specific affects in exhibitions, be it as an affective awareness-raiser or as a way of creating participation among visitors. In the context of material-relational following, however, inspired by Kontturi's (2018) new materialist approach, affective curatorship is also a mode of investigating the human and non-human affective relations that the work of art, its discourse, materials, and sites consist of before they are presented to the public. In my definition of a sub-branch of this term, then, affective curatorship involves an acknowledgement of the fact that affects are always already a central ingredient of the artwork. In our work with artworks in-the-making there is a lot to be learned by unearthing the affectual states that our collaborations entail, before some of these affects—intended or not—reach visitors in an actual exhibition.

In summary, following my artist-curator-relationship to Regitze, I have opened a reflective space for what happens in curatorial practice, before and after the settled and fixed constellation of objects and site that we think of as the exhibition. The concept of art-work has helped illuminate this expanded sense of the work of art that moves beyond the finished object or experience in the exhibition, and encompasses myriad impressions and stories of

the materials and sites that we engage in as artworkers. In my inquiry, affective modes of hooked attachment and curiosity were the primary insights that my following gave me, and the materials and sites attended to were connected to an environmental concern shared between Regitze and me. This following could lead to different insights in other curatorial and artistic contexts. In future research, I wish for myself and others in the field to track and map more dynamics in curatorial work that are not immediately visible when giving a traditional presentation of the intentions of a given exhibition and its outcomes. I argue that much of the crucial understanding of curatorial work lies in the ambivalent and explorative stages, in relations and attachments to imaginaries and concerns. These explorations will make us able to better grasp what is going on in the work of curating, not just in relation to the isolated artworks and their intended effect on the audience, but to the artists, materials, sites, and imaginaries that we encounter on the way.

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## ENDNOTES

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1. Kontturi, 2018, pp. 204-205. See also *New Materialism: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* by Diane Coole and Samantha Frost (2010); *New Materialisms: Interviews and Cartographies* by Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (2012); and *Art, Pedagogy, Cultural Resistance: New Materialisms* by Anna Hickey-Moody and Tara Page (2015).
2. In one case, Kontturi is herself identified as the curator of an art project (see Kontturi, 2018, p. 171), but this position is only mentioned once in passing, and the curator-artist relation is not a central aspect of her inquiry.
3. A concept that implies that human activity is now the primary influence on climate and the environment (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000).
4. *Care* is probably the curatorial mode that has been most researched. The Latin derivation of curator, *curatus* means «to care for». The care that the curator practices has historically developed from being associated with a specific collection to spreading out into caring for artists, concepts, spaces, issues etc. Since it has already been heavily theorized, I will not delve deeper into this curatorial mode, but I take it as a precondition that the curator's role is one of caring and that the other curatorial modes I explore are deeply connected to care. (See also: *Curating with Care* (2023) by Elke Krasny & Lara Perry; "Support Acts: Curating, Caring and Social Reproduction" (2016) by Helena Reckitt; "Taking care: Feminist Curatorial Pasts, Presents, and Futures" (2016) by Victoria Horne, Jenny Richards, & Catherine Spencer; and "Who Cares? Understanding the Role of the Curator Today" (2007) by Stephen Rand & Heather Kouris)