

# Open Call: Working together \_The Swedish Research Council's Symposium on Artistic Research

## ***A conversation about working conversations, submitted by:***

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Conversation is “a game where we learn to give into the movement required by questions worth exploring”  
(David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*)

Our proposal takes up *conversation as a method of working together*. It addresses the issue of working language - or more precisely, of working with and through languages. When researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds collaborate, shared terminology harboring different meanings pose significant hurdles. Undertaking team projects as “in conversation” can help divergent discourses to converge, revealing potential common grounds. Conversation unfolds as a continuous process transferring concepts, translating cross disciplines, transiting practice and research. It involves more than just talking. Ideas communicated by images, figures or gestures fuel vocal exchanges and often also depend on writing activities as documentation, reflection, speculation. Adopting “critical conversation” as a research method means more than having just an ordinary conversation. Yet, at the same time, there is something important in the conversation being, simply, ordinary.

This symposium conversation will open to scrutiny a 3-pronged research framework originally outlined by Diedrich, Kahn and Lindholm in a co-authored paper from 2015, describing a process developed through “Collaborations”, a method based in “Conversations”, and a mindset deploying “Speculations” and design thinking. As its authors continue to collaborate their ideas on design research as a particular form/mode of artistic research, and the necessarily synthetic condition of design/artistic research, continue to evolve. During the AR symposium, a fourth interlocutor will join; Henrietta Palmer, researcher and architect, Chalmers University of Technology.

We are four researchers with design backgrounds, all deeply committed to collaborative and transdisciplinary work. Lisa Diedrich, Andrea Kahn and Gunilla Lindholm have worked together in the

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academy since 2011, testing design research tools and methods in the field of landscape architecture. One lives in Lund, Sweden, one in Berlin, Germany and one in New York City, USA. In addition to her academic work, Andrea Kahn is founder of designCONTENT, a professional consultancy offering strategic process, facilitation and communication design services. Henrietta Palmer, researcher and architect at Chalmers University, and former Deputy Scientific Director of Mistra Urban Futures, artistic professor at Chalmers and professor at Royal University of Arts, Stockholm, lives in Stockholm; with Kahn and Diedrich, she participates in a developing transdisciplinary project on strategic synthesis.

By virtue of our shared interests in our own research design, together we lay claim to partial knowledge in multiple arenas related to the study and making of constructed environments: architecture, landscape architecture, landscape planning, urban design, and urban planning. Individually, we arrive from many origin points, having received architecture and planning, philosophy, literature, musicology and journalism educations in Sweden, France, Germany, and the United States, over a forty-year span. Collectively we harbour a passion for examining how our formation informs our pedagogies, practices and research. We rely on each other for critical otherness as we reflect upon our values, mind-sets, and habitudes. Ours is a practice of shedding light upon, and imagining alternatives to, our own practices.

As designer-researchers, we consider the investigative undertaking as a cooperative, exploratory process; a non-linear iterative journey that includes serendipity and unpredictability. We embrace unexpected discoveries in an open-minded and open-ended way, convinced that this method invites linking and building on each other's experiences. Three of us have collaborated for nearly a decade as SLU Landscape colleagues (developing PhD and Master courses, researching, co-writing, creating conferences, establishing a collaboration-capacity building initiative at our department); three of us (Diedrich, Palmer and Kahn) have intersected intermittently since 2017, through Urban Futures research platforms at our respective institutions.

In our collaboration experiences we mine the power of language to help us work through associations, hints, and deviations, discoveries made together by one in the other one's utterances, continuously, to construct thought, or text, or knowledge, where only fragments and limited insights existed before. We constantly unpack (our travel bags and our travelling ideas), translate (from and to English, German, Swedish, French), making every effort to be precise about intentions. Conversation sharpens thought. It

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helps to distinguish, for example, between “design” as profession (what designers do), “design” as mode of operation (rules, prohibitions and permissions), “design” as means of knowledge (research practice) and “design” as strategic action and artistic expression. In conversation, we ask over and over again: What do *we* mean by “design practice”? How does *our* practice work? We traverse. We converse. We disagree. We speak our minds. We animate differences to clarify shared intentions. We interpret each other’s work and words.

We plan to facilitate this discussion as an example of critical conversation as research method, exploring the question: *What do we mean by “design practice”?* Inviting participants to follow the question where ever it might go will bring us close to playfulness, but playfulness with its own discipline and rules. After a brief (10 minute) opening exchange between Kahn, Diedrich and Lindholm on “conversation as method”, moderated by Palmer, each participant will be asked to follow this rule: Reflect on a prompt statement, and pose one question (3 minutes/person). This initial round of provocations (Kahn will serve as procedural facilitator/timekeeper) will seed discussion for the remainder of the session. Playing around; dancing around thoughts, the way designers dance around a problem; the conversation should resemble a ping pong game between the already and the as-yet known, where past language, schemes, and routines serve as a backboard (a blackboard?) to bounce off new ideas, visions and techniques formulated in process. With this iterative see-saw-seen again routine of articulation and reflection, we aim to work together with our fellow interlocutors to illuminate the synthetic (fabricated/productive) nature of how design researchers ‘work’.

ZOOM will record/capture the conversation as it happens, in real/digital time.

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