

Using Someone Else's Bathwater: A Practice of Coming After.



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Metode

Neither works of art nor scholarship are made within a vacuum or created from a blank canvas, architect and theorist Jane Rendell argues. Instead, she says, the work exists ‘in a space that has already been occupied by others.’¹ She writes this after an invitation to respond to the work of the artist Anne Tallentire, resulting in a visual essay published in the Journal *Field* in 2017. Prompted to respond, engage, and create, Rendell’s essay consists of a series of citations, descriptions, and references to a variety of works and spaces. Then, the second part of the essay allows her time to reflect. Because what does it mean to cite one another? Academic scholarship includes conventions for citing the research of others, using Chicago, Harvard, or APA 7 reference style. Universities teach these systems to their students. If they fail to let the reader know whose research their arguments are building upon, they fail and are called out for plagiarism. Beyond these legal concerns, Rendell instead argues that the conversation around who gets cited or not can open up for a larger societal debate. Citational practices can tell us a lot about whose voices are heard in society.

Who is read by whom? Who gets to write?

One marginalized group whose voices are not often heard is people who live with disabilities. A 2023 report by the Norwegian Arts Council gloomily concludes that we lack representation of disabled people in the Norwegian Art Scene, and another report by the National Association of Norwegian Architects shows how the architectural field is not doing any better.² While the UK and USA have vibrant, progressive, and radical disability arts movements, and have had since the 1970s, the term disability arts does not even exist in the Norwegian language. So, if we want to approach disabled bodies, looking abroad could be fruitful. My own understanding of related questions grew in conversation with the British artist and poet Abi Palmer.

In her book *Sanatorium* (2021), Palmer travels to an opulent, private spa in Budapest, which puts her experience from an NHS rehabilitation programme, as well as her everyday struggles in the home, into perspective. She asks what it means to be disabled today, and what spaces we encounter in our search for wellbeing. Is pleasure something we deserve? How do we make sense of pain? And what does it mean to be in water, either in a luxurious and expensive pool,

¹ Jane Rendell, Rendell, J., (2017) “From, in and with Anne Tallentire”, *field*: 7(1), 13–38. 28.

² Tone Pernille Østern, Terje Olse, Elen Øyen, Lise Lien and Lene Christin Holum. «Tilgjengelig kunsterskap?» (Oslo: Kulturdirektoratet, 2023); Ida Haugen-Poljac, Tali Mørch, Håvard Lundberg and Cecilie Astrupgård, ved Analyse & Tall SA, «Mangfold og likestilling i arkitekt-bransjen». Oslo: Arkitektenes landsforbund, 2023.

Certain incentives are put in place in the wake of these findings. The Norwegian Arts Council launched *Forsøksordning for aspiranter med funksjonsnedsettelse*, in 2022, offering funding so institutions could hire more people with disabilities. Worth mentioning as well, is the work ROM for kunst og arkitektur, the publisher of *Metode*, has done with open calls for projects, and organizing Norway’s first summer school in art and architecture for young people with disabilities where I am involved. <https://rom.no/program/rom-ung/sommerskole>

a national healthcare system, or an inflatable – and at times mouldy – plastic bathtub?³

Being interested in the way people with chronic illness think, talk, and experience architecture, Palmer’s work influenced my own thinking and practice. Filming her in her bathtub was a way for me to move into the depths of my own artistic enquiry. I wanted to understand how people with chronic illness experience, talk and think about architecture, space, and place, based on my personal experience, but also leaping out to understand others. My filmmaking is a method, building upon ideas and techniques from the field of essay filmmaking, artistic research, practice-led architectural research and ethnography.⁴ Our shared film project epitomizes these overlapping trajectories and intersecting strands, as one person engages with the practice of another. To Rendell, citational practices, as well as re-enactments, are different forms of coming after, where italics, marks and brackets have critical potential.⁵ What happens, then, when a film is used as a prompt for those beyond the dialogue of Abi and myself?

Watch the film, we asked, and then go beyond: pick up on an idea, a theme, a feeling, or a sensation to delve into in your own unique way.



On being and Bathing (16mm film, 09.26, 2021) Anna Ulrikke Andersen and Abi Palmer. With the support of iPortunus EU.

³ Abi Palmer, *Sanatorium* (London: Penned in the Margins, 2020).

⁴ Anna Ulrikke Andersen, *Following Norberg-Schulz: An Architectural History through the Essay Film*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.; Iain Borden and Jane Rendell, eds, *Intersections: Architectural Histories and Critical Theories* (London: Routledge, 2000); Jos Boys, ed. *Disability, Space, Architecture: A Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017); Jos Boys, *Doing Disability Differently: An Alternative Handbook on Architecture, Dis/Ability and Designing for Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2014); Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, after Marker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Julian Klein, "What is Artistic Research?" in *Journal of Artistic Research, jar-online.net*. 23 April 2017; Scott Macdonald, *Avant-Doc: Intersections of Documentary and Avant-Garde Cinema* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Laura Rascaroli, *How the Essay Film Thinks* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017); Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: An Architecture of Art Criticism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010)

⁵ Rendell, "From, in and with Anne Tallentire", 28.

Titled *Being, Bathing and Beyond*, the seven contributing authors, scholars and/or artists look at the film and make their move in different directions. The six essays by Júlia Ayerbe, Jeremy Sharma, Pauline Shongov, Jakub Węgrzynowicz, Emma Nilsson and Lutz Koepnick are texts-based essays with and without visual elements. David Turner submitted a sound work. Aiming to make the volume accessible to as many people as possible, illustrations have alternative text, and the sound work is accompanied by both a written script and a written description of the audio.

To some, disability and representation plays a role. Emma Nilsson takes us to Le Corbusier's modernist masterpiece *Maison de Verre* (1928-32) in her keynote essay. Here, the tub, and with it, the bathing woman, becomes an example of how 'architecture inevitably reproduces and reinforces the prevailing notion of the other'. To her, bathrooms and those who are typically depicted using them reproduce certain ideas and ideals that she is keen to challenge. But as she moves on to a different and more contemporary example, *Maison à Bordeaux*, a building built specifically for a disabled body, she is adamant in reminding us that 'The liberation of one repressed body does not automatically re-articulate other (repressed) bodies, not even the ones carried by the same individual.' Addressing the architectural reality Palmer faces as she attempts to make her bathroom fit her needs, Nilsson underscores some of the complexities involved in designing for a variety of bodies, disabled or not.

These ideas are picked up and discussed further in Júlia Ayerbe's essay "The bathroom may be a space for utopia". Here we are presented with three bathrooms: the bathrooms of the disabled artists Frida Kahlo and Kennedy Healy, as well as Hitler's bathroom, photographed and used by photographer Lee Miller at the end of World War II. Her account reveals ableist assumptions made by art historians and scholars encountering these artists' work. Her essay is both critical and political, yet optimistic at its foundation: 'Entering the space, take off the weight of gravity, relax the muscles, and feel cured, even if it only lasts as long as bath time.'

But we must not forget that bathing and being in water always relies upon hard materials keeping the water in place. Pauline Shongov's essay is perhaps the strongest advocate for this material approach, as she begins her essay with a brick from a demolished bathhouse in Silven, Bulgaria. Her essay travels from one brick to another while meditating on what it might mean to approach such fragments of the past. From the reading rooms of local archives, where material about the bathhouse has been buried among other remnants of Bulgarian history, she asks: 'If we take as a point of departure something as simple as a brick, what forms of knowledge production may this propel us towards co-creating?' To her and her two

colleagues in the Off-site project, Maya Shopova and Borislav Angelov, materials from these sites are shared with invited artists, prompting exchange, dialogue, artistic practice, and research. Shongov's essay is as much a text about materials and fragments as it is a text that asks how we, methodologically, can approach these fragments in new, exciting, and collaborative ways. Amongst the contributions, her text is perhaps the strongest example of what might happen if we 'go beyond', and move from one maker to another, one reference to the next. In an elegant manner, this practice foreshadows the next planned volume of *Metode* where editors Kjersti Solbakken (curator of LIAF 24) and Ingrid Halland (editor-in-chief of *Metode*) will tackle what it might mean to be regenerating pasts for the not yet, art based local heritage, and knowledge that is transmitted across time and space.⁶

In the Norwegian context water and activism go hand in hand, both today and historically. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Alta conflict marked the Norwegian political debate. A large hydroelectric power plant was to be built in an area inhabited by the Sami population, and the resulting artificial lake would flood a village and radically alter the landscape. The plant was built, marking only the first of a series of violations of indigenous culture, lands, wind, and waters.⁷ In his essay "Post-comfort waterscapes: navigating pleasure and discomfort" Jakub Węgrzynowicz turns to Polish watery activism and the work of Cecylia Malik and the feminist collective *River Sisters*. Their work addresses climate change, crisis, and lack of care, raising awareness of the damaging effects of dams in Poland. But Węgrzynowicz moves further, looking both at the practice of mermaiding and his grandparents' careful use of water and resources, to 'understand what the titular waterscapes could mean, both in the scale of the riverbeds and of our homes'. His writing aims to reimagine what these spaces could be, acknowledging our part in a larger ecology.

'To bathe or not to bathe in water is a question of power, inequity, and politics as never before' Lutz Koepnick writes in his keynote essay "On Water's Edge". Here, he continues with further examples of artists and their work exploring the problems of climate change, activism, and politics, from Antarctica to Aralsk. But watching Palmer immerse herself in water on film, accompanied by the sound of water and meditative piano music, opens up for a broader understanding of immersion. 'To be immersed into something is to experience

⁶ *Metode* vol. 3 is titled *Currents: Regenerating pasts for the not yet*. The volume will be edited by Kjersti Solbakken and Ingrid Halland, in collaboration with Lofoten International Art Festival 2024. Stay tuned for the open call.

⁷ It is worth mentioning the ongoing Fosen conflict, where the Supreme Court ruled that the development of wind turbines on traditional Sami land, violates the human rights of this indigenous group. <https://www.nhri.no/en/report/human-rights-protection-against-interference-in-traditional-sami-areas/4-human-rights-protection-against-interference-the-supreme-court/>

a certain dissolution of the body's or mind's limits, a process of entanglement between us and what is not us that suspends existing demands for autonomy, agency, and self-determination'. Immersion could be a practice – a method perhaps – well attuned to experience reverberation and resonance: between body and matter, or one body to the next. Although often understood as being private, bathrooms and bathing are social practices, forming social relations, as argued by both Barbara Penner and Christie Pearson in their respective books *Bathrooms* (2020) and *The Architecture of Bathing: Body Landscape Art* (2020).⁸ Bathing creates connections between people.

David Turners allows us, as listeners, to immerse ourselves in his work titled *He Draws Himself a Bath*. We are faced with splish, splash, and bubbling. Yet, Turner's work offers more than immersion into a physical, sensuous space; it brings us close and upfront with what it might mean to have a relationship to other human beings. Firstly, he talks about his father. How his father takes baths and what they mean to him as he grieves the death of his late spouse. His work also brings up social relations at a larger scale: how one group in society taking baths might differ from others. Lucien Freud's paintings can help us understand these bodies, Turner suggests, inviting the painter in to offer nuance and depth to the issues at hand.

Also, Jeremy Sharma, a painter himself, references a painting: a work by Pierre Bonnard. Here, this reference is located 'between' two films: the essay takes us from a film, through a painting, through to another film. Allowing us to take part in his encounter with these works, this essay opens up different perspectives on bathrooms – still or moving. But his text(s) also bear evidence of *Metode's* format for collaborative and open peer-review, where authors develop their work through three intensive workshops. Through this process and conversations with the others, his thinking changes. He writes: 'In my second draft of writing, I am tasked to confront maybe this weak paragraph that tries to tie things up too soon, too neatly or correctly. How to conclude?'

... how do I conclude? I ask myself.

In Rendell's visual essay in *Fields*, the text never seems to end. As the writing comes to a conclusion, she does not end. Instead, she begins a new paragraph by explaining how the first drafts, when read and critiqued by Tallentire, sparked further debate. Then, the two anonymous reviewers offer their input, raising awareness to new questions. Then, Tallentire takes another look, which leads to another set of thoughts. The process is not so dissimilar to the development of essays for *Metode*. These approaches are removed from the double-blind peer-review system, meant to be an objective and rigorous system of quality and

⁸ Barbara Penner, *Bathrooms*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2010); Christie Pearson. *The Architecture of Bathing: Body Landscape Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020).

approval, but which fail to create dialogue or resonate between baths. I think about this Volume of *Metode* as a series of baths, where we soak ourselves in waters where others have been before. What are the consequences?

‘We create our texts out of the sea of former texts that surround us, the sea of language we live in. And we understand the texts of others within than sea,’⁹ Charles Bazerman writes in his book *What Writing Does and How it Does It* (2004).¹⁰ There are still many issues that are not resolved with this volume. As we float around in a pool of texts by others, there will always be blind spots. These blind spots can be theoretical: as we continually reference each other, making links and citations, we might also create an echo chamber. Working on this volume did challenge our views on what being in water might mean, and some perspectives were overlooked. Sometimes due to ignorance, other times due to the lack of knowledge of a field. Methodologically, each text opens up for certain questions but forgets others. As Bazerman’s quote is a suitable choice for rounding off an introductory note on water and writing, the sea itself is vast. While it is easy to get an overview of a pond, the sea is unpredictable, unsettled, and immense. For me, this assertion is relevant as I consider my own university teaching. Furthering the scope of view, what tools will we need in the future to make students think critically in their approach to issues related to disability, gender, class, technologies, climate change, ecology, and beyond? How can I encourage students to immerse themselves into their own writing practice, as well as the work of others, creating citations as they go along?

⁹ Charles Bazerman, *What Writing Does and How it Does It* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2004) 83-84.

¹⁰ I did not find this quote myself but was introduced to Bazerman in preparation for a course on how to support student writing as part of my university’s teaching in higher education training, which landed in the same week as my deadline for this introduction. The course was taught by Ingrid Stock, at NTNU, module UNIPED: Skrivning og læring: Hvordan støtte studentenes skriveutvikling (2024 VÅR).

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