

University of Pécs  
Doctoral School of Arts

**"We're stuck here, and we love living here"**

The encounter of the personal and social in the space of home

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DLA Dissertation Theses

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My doctoral research is an interdisciplinary research, in which I interpret the identity formation process in the relations of the home by means of the fine arts and sociology. I frame the space of the home as an autobiographical story that is constantly evolving over time (*Brown, 2007*). In this process, personal meanings and social structures meet (*Löw, 2016; Miller, 2010*) and create a wholly unique context that is bound to the life history (*Hurdley, 2006*), and which, like a gallery space, transforms and constantly recreated the meaning of it's objects, maintaining a coherent life story (*Brown, 2007; Giddens 1991*).

The dissertation is divided essentially into two parts. In the first half, standing at the intersection of fine arts and sociology, I build the theoretical framework for the research. In the second half, I present the process and results of my own interview research. As I see the projects as interdisciplinary research for which few concrete references are available, I have focused more on its exploratory nature, not aiming to test hypotheses based on existing theories. The roots of this approach in the social sciences are most closely linked to grounded theory, also its constructivist offshoot (*Horváth and Mitev, 2015*), which basically gives priority to data over prior theories and concepts, pursuing an inductive cognitive process. In addition, the relevant literature on arts-based research, which I will attempt to review in this thesis, also draws attention to the unpredictability that is inherent in the nature of the artistic activity and the consequent need for strong methodological reflection (*Slager, 2004; Maharaj, 2004; Hannula, 2004; McNiff, 2019*).

The interviews for my own research were conducted during my doctoral years, between the summers of 2018 and 2023. I visited the research participants in their homes and conducted semi-structured interviews with them, which I then processed in drawing. I treat drawing as a way of understanding and analysis, assuming that drawing as a method has the specificity to produce unique knowledge (*Kentridge, 2014*). Berger's interpretation of the drawing process is that of an identification process (2007), and Taussig stresses the dialogic nature of the same (2011). In this interpretation, drawing is an attempt to connect personally with the life stories shared with me in relation to the home.

As I had few references at my disposal for this interdisciplinary approach, I developed the theoretical framework during the artistic process, reflecting primarily to the problems and themes that surface themselves during the activity of drawing and research. Building on this approach, I will review the visual art discourses related to the home (*Lauzon, 2017; Racz, 2015; Reed, 2002*) and then turn to the presentation of artworks and projects that relate to the concept of the home as defined above. As an artistic interpretation of home as context, I will analyse Colin Painter's project *At Home with Art*, while as a personal reflection on home as a life story,

I will review installation works of Michael Landy (Semi-Detached) and Song Dong (Waste Not).

After reviewing these aspects of the home, I then consider the discourses related to the problems that arise in the process of drawing during this dissertation. The question of the representation of the 'Other', its ethical dimensions, and the tension between the need for objectivity that is traditionally associated with research and the subjectivity of drawing have been central concerns of the creative process. Enwezor's criterion is fidelity to the intersubjective situation between the documented and the documenter, rather than the objective need for truth (2004), while Hito Steyerl and Maria Lind emphasise the same from the perspective of the recipient, the space created by the art-work, into which the viewer of the work can enter and become part of this relationship between the creator and the other (2008). It is important to make a comment at this point, which draws attention to the specificity of artistic research in relation to other fields. In art-based research, the meaning making process does not end with the activity of the creator/researcher, but continues in the recipient during the presentation, for example, during an exhibition (*Kentridge, 2014*).

Keeping the above in mind, I will focus in this dissertation on creative practices and art projects that use drawing as tool to reflect on interviews and fieldwork experiences, and thus in some way address the above issues themselves. I am going to touch upon the work of Joe Sacco and Victoria Lomasko, labelled as 'graphic journalism', and related projects of Greyson Perry and Marc Bauer. As a possible response to the representation of the 'Other', I take into consideration how fiction can add value to the meaning making, and in this context I will address the work of Walid Raad.

In the second half of the dissertation, I will continue with the processing and analysis of my own interviews. I conducted eight interviews with four participants (two interviews with each). The participants were selected randomly, without the intention to study a particular social group beforehand. Two of the four participants were married couples, and I interviewed them together in pairs. One of my interviewee is in her forties, still active and is a mother of two children, the others are retired. They all live in Budapest, three of them in Zugló and one in Óbuda.

I approached the interviews from different angles. On the one hand, I made medium and larger charcoal drawings in which, alongside and related to the problem of the representability of the "Other", issues of humour, storytelling and fiction played a central role. The applicability of humour arose both in relation to the contrasts in the narratives, and in relation to the humour and irony used by the participants themselves. In many of the narratives, humour was used as

a means of resolving the tension between home circumstances and personal needs, but as a creator I could not use it in an unlimited way, always having to consider its role in the story and the situation of the speech. The relationship between text and image and the question of the incorporability of the interview fragments arose in the context of visual narrative and storytelling. In this series of drawings, I have mostly presented the texts in the titles of the images, and only rarely have I tried to write directly into the image. The text elements were also important because at the same time, at the level of storytelling, it was usually necessary to combine two layers: the physical environment and appearance of the object on the one hand, and the meaning, story, anecdote attached to it on the other. The pictorial responses to this problem were already linked to the question of fiction, abstraction, in so far as I added plot and transformation to the objects depicted as still life. In my case, the main theoretical yield of the charcoal drawings was the aforementioned contrast at the level of space and the individual, whose relationship, their tension and their abrasion I wanted to explore further.

To continue, I applied two approaches. Firstly, I tried to find a link with the method of qualitative sociological analysis, which is basically based on the grouping and categorisation of similar elements. In this context, I made quick pencil sketches by listening back to the interviews and organized these sketches into different groups in order to build an analytical and interpretative framework. Making these sketches allowed me to intuitively move forward with the problem of image and text. I was able to link the sketches to the handwriting, and was able to integrate the handwritten texts, eg. interview excerpts well into them, unlike the more carefully formed charcoal drawings I had done previously. By grouping the sketches, I developed a large set of criteria, consisting of 3 main groups, 9 sub-categories and further sub-categories, organised around the concept of 'Fitting'. Fitting refers to the two-way, back-and-forth process that takes place between an individual and his or her home, mutually shaping both parties. In this dissertation I have abbreviated this system of groups, retaining the categories of Acceptance, Adaptation and Identification, I present the research participants using the categories they belong to, using my sketches and interview transcripts from them.

In the third drawing project described in this dissertation, I am interested in moving away from personal, portrait-like storytelling and more abstractly exploring the process of the fitting of space and individual. To this end, I created drawings of a geometric or conceptual nature, with the floor plan as a central motif. On the one hand, I was interested in the relationship between geometric space and the schematized human figure, and on the other hand, in the different contents that are made possible by identical spaces as frames. A related observation was when I modelled the relationship between space and the individual in small

drawings of the dwelling, where a cardboard cut-out served as a barrier for my hand to scribble and fill in. I observed that while at the beginning it was exciting to bump into the edge of the cardboard, I increasingly internalized its boundaries and began to draw within it, no longer bumping into it. It was an interesting parallel to the way one limits one's own movement, one's ideas of identity confronted with the space of the apartment.

In conclusion, the drawing process as a whole offers a different kind of experience than traditional social science methods of analysis. I consider the established results to be convertible and I believe that it could be a starting point for a sociological or similar interdisciplinary research. On the other hand, I think that the drawings provide the possibility of connecting with the stories told, of experiencing them on a very different level than it would be possible as a result of a traditional research. Thirdly, the two-way, mutually formative process between the individual and the space is made experienceable on a different level by drawings than by textual descriptions. I believe it is important for visual arts discourse that a sensitive tool such as drawing can be combined with fundamentally empathic activities such as interview research, and the concept of home and humanity of the social sciences can also prove fertilising for arts.

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