

TAhTO doctoral programme in artistic research

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Related web sites and documents:

- TAhTO new homepages www.artisticresearch.fi/tahto
- TAhTO pages at TeaK http://www.teak.fi/Doctoral_programme_in_artistic_research
- TAhTO Action Plan
- TAhTO Student Rights and Responsibilities

1. Background

TAhTO doctoral programme in artistic research started in January 2012.

During 2012 there were 9 doctoral students within TAhTO. Each of them has a profile on the TAhTO web pages at www.artisticresearch.fi/tahto. They represent the following organizing academies and schools:

The Finnish Academy of Fine Arts (KuvA)

Academy of Theatre Helsinki (TeaK)

Sibelius Academy (SibA)

(merged January 1st, 2013 to form the University of the Arts Helsinki);

and

Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture (Aalto ARTS)

Doctoral students were invited to submit applications for the nine doctoral researchers posts in the spring 2011. The TAhTO board was appointed to select the interviewees and to make the final choice among the 43 applicants in August 2011.

The themes TAhTO focuses on are *methodology and practices in artistic research*; *art, aesthetics and society*; and *new artistic agency*. They are discussed in depth in the Action Plan. The themes run through all seminars throughout the programme.

2. Objectives of the doctoral programme

This is a short overview of the goals and objectives of the TAhTO doctoral programme, a more detailed description can be found in the Action Plan.

The overall objectives for the programme period 2012-2015 are to enrich the common research culture in the Finnish art universities; to strengthen the status of artistic research in Finland; to amplify its

social significance and create international networks. The more practical objectives are to address and explore the themes; to make plans for a shared future of the doctoral students to achieve the overall goals; to develop methodologies, practices and academic pedagogies as well as assessment criteria for artistic research; to enhance expertise in the interaction between art and society; and to support of graduation of the doctoral students within the period of four years of financing. The TAhTO doctoral programme has set out in the beginning of 2012 to explore the means to achieve these objectives and goals.

During the four-year period the doctoral students will become familiar with each other and the research projects of each other. This progress is seen as a prerequisite for an emerging functional research community. The process is strengthened by discussions, feedback and the opening possibility to relate one's research to that which is universal or mutual within the group.

Conclusion: Have the doctoral students made progress in their artistic research projects during 2012? Out of eight doctoral students having delivered the annual report, six students report to have progressed according to the research plan. Two doctoral students report lack of time as a major reason for not being satisfied with their own progress. Reasons for lack of time have to do with activities outside the doctoral programme but based on the reports it is evident that functioning within TAhTO as a student representative is a time-consuming task.

3. Activities during 2012

The six TAhTO seminars in 2013 followed the structure drawn by the TAhTO board in the planning phase. Each seminar consists of three days, of which one is reserved for the doctoral students internal discussions, and two are open to the TAhTO board members, and sometimes other doctoral students also. The work seminars open the terms and they are usually organized outside the premises of the academies to ensure commitment and room for frictionless concentration. Each academy is responsible for the seminars during one term, and in 2012 it was TeaK's turn to organise the spring term and KuvA planned the autumn term. The team behind the activities consist of the doctoral students and the board members of the organizing academy.

The themes for 2012 were *new artistic agency* during the spring and *methodologies and practices in artistic research* in the autumn term.

3.1 Work seminars

The first seminars each term are work seminars, where the current theme is discussed within the TAhTO group of doctoral students and board members. Each doctoral student can identify the area in one's research where the theme is best manifested, and choose a way and the means to problematize or present the point to the others. In the first work seminars in January the doctoral students presented their research projects to the TAhTO group. All updated research plans were sent to the TAhTO board members for background information and for comments. In the seminar the doctoral students also drafted the wish list that was later discussed by the TAhTO board in one of its meetings. In the second work seminar in August the doctoral students offered the board members group presentations reflecting the theme *methodologies and practices in artistic research*, and key concepts in methodology were discussed.

3.2 Theme seminars

Each theme seminar has a goal of deepening the understanding of the current theme, and the doctoral students have an option to discuss and decide on the contents of the theme seminar based on the needs of the students. For the first spring term in 2012 the board members suggested that the programme would invite Katrien Vuylsteke Vanfleteren from the University of Ghent in Belgium to talk about her understanding of what constitutes *artistic agency*, and the doctoral students gave themselves a group work to interview each other in pairs on the subject, and to present the problematics on the subject in any way appropriate to the interviewee, video, play, music or speech. As the autumn term dealt with *methodologies and practices in artistic research*, the doctoral students opted for visiting artists to present their methodologies, as well as one-to-one discussions with the artists. The artists invited were Gail Pickering from Goldsmiths College in London, and İnci Eviner from the University of Ankara, and Jeremiah Day from VU Amsterdam and MaHKU Utrecht.

3.3 Open seminars

The open seminars conclude the work of the term on a specific theme. In May 2012 the event was organized to resemble a conference environment, and the speakers were the TAhtO group, both doctoral students and board members, with the invited guests Mick Wilson from GradCam and Ylva Gislén from Kungliga forskarskolan. Gavin Butt was unable to travel at the time but he sent over his film, which was shown at Suvilahti as part of the evening programme. The group was also invited in Antidote 4 at the Cable Factory for a private round in the exhibition.



Artistic agency discussed by Mick Wilson above and by Ylva Gislén below.



In her presentation "Choreographic process as an experience of interaction", Kirsi Törmi asked if *the monster of forced pace and hurry* has entered the art education and art world and if efficiency has come to be expected from the artist.



The artist guests Zöe Walker and Neil Bromwich talked about their work.

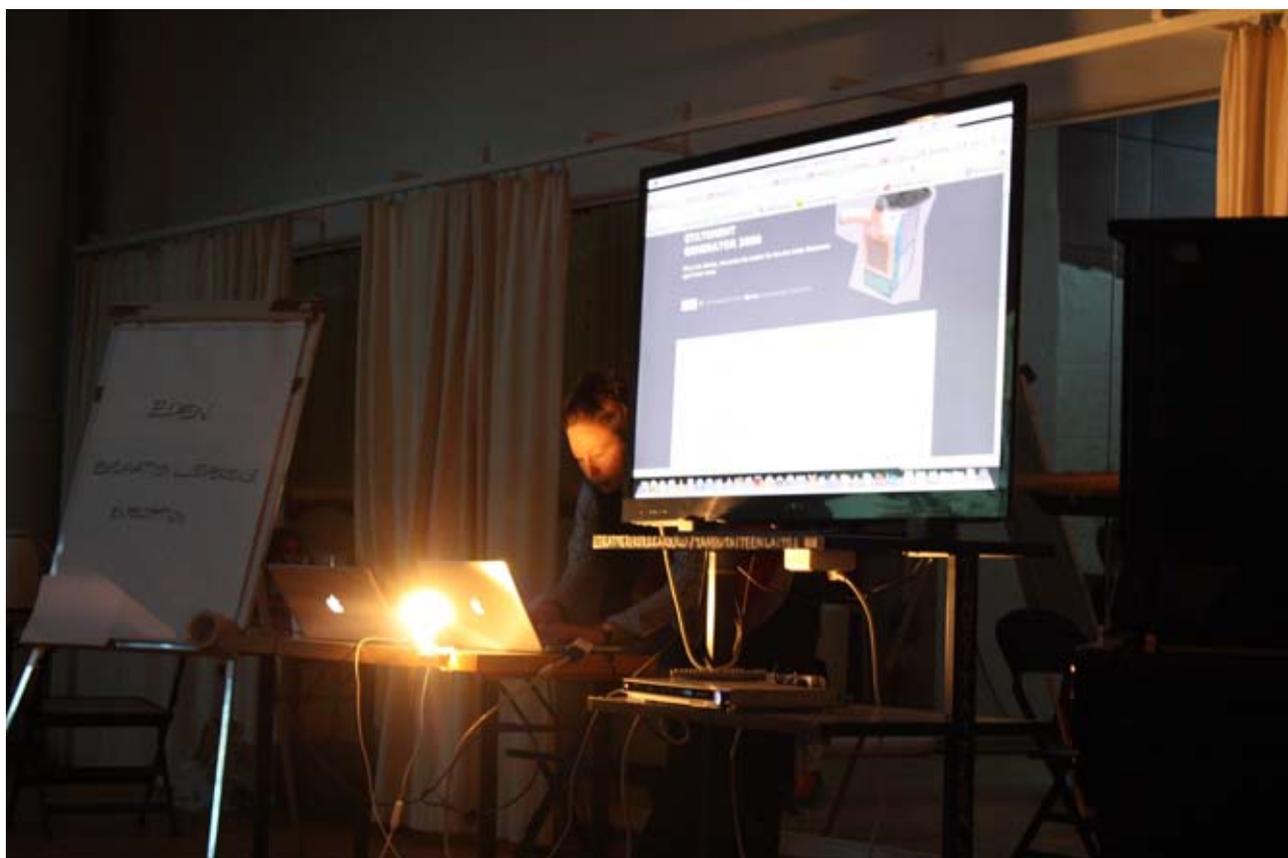
The open seminar in December 2012 opened the questions within *methodologies and practices in artistic research* by presentations of Mika Hannula explaining his point in the picture below, and Tero Vadén from the Aalto University.



A short introduction and programmes with some of the presentations of the open seminars during 2013 can be found at http://www.teak.fi/Open_seminars

The doctoral students presented their work in the open seminar and commented that the pauses were all too short for proper discussion after each presentation. There was more room for the final discussion after the seminar but the lesson to be learned is that the need to ask and comment comes right after the presentation. The questions and comments from the audience are of vital importance for the doctoral students.

In her presentation abstract *On Methodology: Generating Research 'Noise'*, Lauren O'Neal wrote "My work, and my approach to artistic research, can be described as episodic, irregular, and ephemeral. I do not have any one area of focus, or subject matter of concern, but my areas of interest include light, blindness, movement, desire, absurdity, repetition, fatigue, and, unsurprisingly, lists."



Lauren O'Neal is about to start her multimedia presentation.

The open seminars are open to all doctoral students within artistic research and the number of them was approximately 15 in the seminar in May and 10 in the seminar in November.

Conclusion: The TAhTO doctoral students discussed the seminars in their meeting in December 14, and they state that more time is needed for reflection, feedback and discussion after the seminar. The doctoral students gathered together after the autumn open seminar and they noticed that it was highly beneficial for everybody to discuss the seminar in depth the following day. In the annual reports nearly all students mentioned that the seminars even if they demand a lot of work, have been useful and the discussions fruitful. The group has enjoyed the different approaches and the visiting artists and researchers have provided valuable insights to the group, as has been the various art forms that are present in the group. The TAhTO activities are mostly appreciated by the doctoral students, and in

cases where it is not the case, it is mostly the timing that causes discomfort: the current theme might not be the one that the research project is addressing at the specific time, or there is need for the doctoral student to concentrate fully on the research instead of participating and presenting in the seminar. On the other hand, the nature of artistic research and being part of the research community expect and demand that precisely at times, and the friction caused by TAhTO can be seen as a learning experience.

3.4 Nordic cooperation: the trip to Stockholm in December 2012

In December 2012 the TAhTO group visited Stockholm, where they participated in the Weaving Politics Symposium. During the visit the group had a chance to meet their Swedish colleagues. The visit was the first initiative in the Nordic cooperation slowly seeking form and shape. All doctoral students that participated in the trip reported that it had been very interesting and promising for future cooperation.

Conclusion: The TAhTO doctoral programme has succeeded in initiating and opening up possibilities for the doctoral students to interact with their peers and colleagues in the Nordic countries.

4. The TAhTO principles of operation and the TAhTO organization

4.1 Student involvement

For the doctoral students, and based on the annual reports, the most important benefit from TAhTO (financial matters excluded) is the group formation, the support structure and mirror provided by the TAhTO group. The doctoral students have gathered together outside and in conjunction with the seminars they spend a whole day together planning the future activities and collaborative projects. The fact that the doctoral students together with the TAhTO board members and with the help and ideas from the other doctoral students actually put together the programme and decide whom to invite to speak or to present in the seminars. Offering the doctoral students both power and responsibility is a powerful way to increase the level of motivation and involvement within the doctoral students.

Two representatives of the doctoral students also sit on the TAhTO board and they participate in the decision making process in nearly all matters. They also gather issues from their peer students, and inform them on any ongoing matters of special importance for the group.

There have been two changes in the TAhTO group during 2012: the coordinator at the onset of the programme, and one of the SibA doctoral students joined the group in the beginning of March.

4.2 Focus on the students: The wish list, reporting practices and information flow

The wish list of the doctoral students was created in February 2012 and it has since then been the tool for the coordinator towards a well functioning programme. The list included the following items: feedback, board members to comment the work of the doctoral students, Nordic cooperation, student representatives, translation support, course tray, information about future courses offered in the academies, dynamic writing, presentation techniques, external input (visiting artists). The wishes underlined have not been addressed yet but the list will be updated and discussed.

The doctoral students are now expected to provide three reports per calendar year, but during the year 2012 the practice was that before each seminar the doctoral students provided the TAhTO board

members an overview of what they had done since the previous seminar, but the seminars were too dense and a new system was introduced for 2013. Each student sent in the annual report covering 2012 at the end of January 2013.

The coordinator gathered comments during the board meetings, the student meetings and the seminars and presented the ideas for the board.

So far the information flow within the programme has been taken care of by emails and in person during the seminars. The intranet at TeaK proved difficult to access for other than those within TeaK already, and it was decided to build the TAhTO homepages. The TAhTO board decided to create a portal for the future needs of the artistic research community, and the domain www.artisticresearch.fi was reserved in the fall 2012 but at the turn of the year, the homepages were not yet ready to be published. The information flow during 2012 has not been adequate compared with the plans.

4.3 Financial support: travel grants and production grants

Each doctoral student can apply for a travel grant once a year and for a production grant typically once or twice during the programme period 2012-2015. The travel grants are to ensure that the doctoral students have financial means to present their work in international conferences. During 2012, two doctoral students received production and four travel grants. The doctoral students hand in short conference reports after the trip, and they will be published on the homepages later.

4.4 The TAhTO board, the TAhTO advisory board and the coordinator

Each TAhTO academy and institution has two representatives in the TAhTO board. The board is set out with the help of the coordinator to ensure that the TAhTO activities help in achieving the objectives and the goals in the long run. The members of the TAhTO board are listed on the TAhTO homepage. The coordinator post is a part time (50%) post, which has, especially in the first year of operation, made smooth information flow hard to achieve. The TAhTO board had 10 meetings during 2012, out of which 3 were email-meetings.

The advisory board had its first initial meeting during the open seminar in May 2012. The members of the advisory board are also listed on the TAhTO homepages.

The tasks of the advisory board include

- To support TAhTO in its activities and operation.
- To evaluate these activities and the operation.
- To make initiatives and give recommendations to improve the operation.
- To help with the recruiting of teachers and supervisors.
- To help with creating contacts.
- To provide a post-doc researcher perspective.