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Karhumaa, Arja

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# Thinking with *Ungenessis*: The Situated Knowledge of a Text Designer

Arja Karhumaa

## *Résumé*

Cet article est une description d' *Epägenesis*, un exemple de recherche-création par un typographe qui explore l'interconnection du design et du langage. Le projet consiste en un texte expérimental qui part d'une sélection de dix-sept fragments choisis dans diverses pratiques textuelles non-littéraires. À l'aide d'*Epägenesis*, j'analyse les aspects matériels du langage écrit d'une manière holistique. Plus particulièrement, j'entrecroise trois perspectives : les méthodes artistiques de l'écriture conceptuelle, les types d'analyse utilisés dans les recherches multimodales et ma propre pratique de typographe. Le présent article offre un aperçu de mes techniques et de ma manière de faire, mais aussi de comment j'aborde la mise en pages du catalogue qui en résulte : *Epägenesis : Katalogi*. En guise d'exemple de cette approche holistique, je me penche sur la série *Gem* du catalogue, car dans cet ensemble un modèle d'analyse utilisé dans les recherches multimodales est subverti pour en faire un moyen de création et devenir un modèle d'écriture conceptuelle. La série *Gem* met en avant l'accent que je mets sur la notion de « savoir situé » (théorisé par Donna Haraway, 1988). Ce faisant, l'article élabore un cadre où le typographe émerge comme une présence essentiellement hybride et qui désigne le savoir et le savoir-faire incorporés comme un nœud significatif des nouveaux réseaux matériels qui créent, emploient et modifient la langue.

## *Abstract*

This essay is a description of *Epägenesis*, a piece of artistic research conducted by a graphic designer to explore how design and language are connected. The project consists of experimental writing based on seventeen found text documents, gathered from everyday textual practices. Through *Epägenesis*, I examine the material aspects of written language in a holistic manner, weaving together artistic methods of conceptual writing, models of analysis used in multimodal research, and my practice as a designer of texts. The present essay gives an outline of my process and procedures of writing, and of designing the resulting catalogue publication, *Epägenesis : Katalogi*. As an example of the holistic approach in this project, the essay describes the *Gem* series of the catalogue. It is where a model of analysis used in multimodal research is subverted as a means of production—as a model for conceptual writing. The *Gem* series foregrounds the attention given to text by the designer. Applying Donna Haraway's (1988) notion of situated knowledges, this essay maps out a terrain where the designer appears as an inherently hybrid presence, and embodied skill and knowledge is seen as a significant node in emergent material networks where written language is created, used, and transformed.

## *Keywords*

graphic design; conceptual writing; found text; materiality; situated knowledges; *Epägenesis*

## Introduction to *Epägenesis*

Artistic research unfolds through methods, skills, and gestures, all of which are inherent to artistic practice. This essay describes my design and writing project *Epägenesis*, through which I explore the relationship between graphic design and language. *Epägenesis* emerged from my artistic research conducted as a graphic design practitioner. I examine the material aspects of written language from within my own practice, aiming to articulate the skills, gestures, and thinking involved in that practice.

To explore the relationship between language, writing, and design, I apply methods of practice used outside the conventional design field, namely in conceptual and procedural writing. This removes my design practice from its more typical functional surroundings, providing an autonomous domain that allows me to experiment independently. *Epägenesis* is a collection of experiments with found text in my native Finnish language, and they are published in the form of a book, *Epägenesis : Katalogi* (Karhumaa 2016) (see Figure 1).



Fig. 1. *Epägenesis : Katalogi*.

Through *Epägenesis*, I investigate possible parallels and juxtapositions between writing and design; between literature and typography; and between practice and theory. Therefore, my artistic research brings together diverse sites of knowledge – such as graphic design practice, conceptual and procedural writing, literary research, and multimodal analysis – and it negotiates between them. Rather than an exercise in a specific discipline, then, *Epägenesis* is a compass with which to situate my designerly knowledge (Cross 1982) in relation to other situated knowledges (Haraway 1988).

The Finnish title *Epägenesis* can be translated as *Ungensis*, meaning “un-birth”, or perhaps “undoing”. It is an endeavour in conceptual and procedural writing that is based on found text, thus negotiating the borderlines between creation and appropriation, as well as between the perennial form and content. *Epägenesis* also sheds light on the role that design plays in the public sphere and everyday life – a role materialised as the most mundane textual practices. Hence, it appropriates found text documents from diverse sources familiar to Finnish everyday life, ignoring institutional barriers.

To begin with, I gathered seventeen paper documents of different origins, all of which were nonetheless present in my own immediate surroundings. I was interested in the fact that in everyday life, we encounter texts that are so ordinary to us that they seem transparent. My notion is that these kinds of texts suggest certain genres that are recognized on the basis of their visual configurations only. The source documents I collected based on this notion are listed below. Provided that reader has the local knowledge, I suggest that these found texts are recognizable on the basis of their visual form and spatial configuration, even before reading the actual words.

- 001 Death announcement
- 002 Classified ads
- 003 Recruitment ad
- 004 Printed spam email
- 005 Direct mail letter
- 006 Official letter
- 007 Health checkup form
- 008 Tax return form
- 009 Unemployment form
- 010 Pre-information form for screening for cervical cancer
- 011 Page of a novel (by Aleksis Kivi)
- 012 Page of a dictionary
- 013 Page of poetry (by Eino Leino)
- 014 Page of the Bible
- 015 Instructions from a medical package
- 016 Instructions of use
- 017 Supermarket receipt

This collection of seventeen source documents is the starting point, as well as the fixed vocabulary, of *Epägenesis*. In this process of conceptual and procedural writing, these original source texts become entirely appropriated and assume various new forms. In the final book *Epägenesis : Katalogi*, the source texts never occur in their original state, but always cited, rewritten, or redesigned. Paradoxically, then, something of their origin is newly revealed.

## **The writing process**

The initial step of my writing process was an inventory of the source documents. I combined all the words from all the documents in alphabetical order. I excluded names, numerals, and acronyms, resulting in a list of 1910 Finnish words. For such a simple list of individual words, the Finnish language is particularly expressive due to its various conjugations. For example, a single verb can indicate both grammatical subject and tense, and both nouns and verbs can express relations such as in, on, into, or without.

This core collection of 1910 words became the raw material of *Epägenesis*, a pool or a reserve from which create new texts can be created. This alphabetized word list can be found on the center spread of the catalogue (see Figure 2). I then proceeded to mine for collections of words according to various rules or procedures, in order to create new texts using only the given words. The publication *Epägenesis : Katalogi* presents all of these untitled textual experiments.

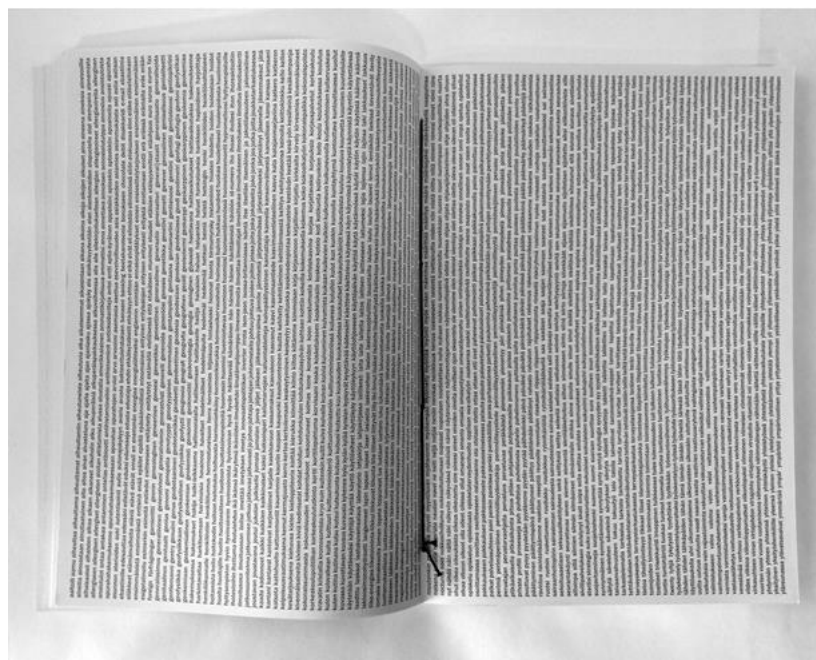


Fig. 2. The alphabetical list of words on the center spread of the catalogue.

The process of *Epägenesis* is presented in four series, titled *Alfa*, *Beeta*, *Delta*, and – instead of *Gamma* – a piece called *Gem*. The first procedure, the *Alpha* series, presents an inventory of visual form. This is a simple exercise in reconfiguration. I separated all words from their respective original document layouts, and switched those layouts in pairs. As a simple result, for example, a text that was originally a death notice now looks like a supermarket receipt (see Figure 3). A very well-known Finnish poem about Finnish summer, *Nocturne* by Eino Leino (1905), now looks like a form to be filled in (see Figure 4). The contrast between the layout and its semantic content is striking in some cases, banal in others, but always present, between what the reader might expect and what the words actually convey.

**RAKKAAMME**  
 Marja Liisa Karhumaa o.s. Tolppanen  
 s. 12.2.1942 k. 24.12.2007

ANNA MINUN NAHDA SINUT	0.00
LIEKISSA	0.00
REVONTULEN	0.00
TUIKKEESSA TAHDEN	0.00
KANSSANI	0.00
KULKIEN NYT	0.00
JA AINA	0.00
IKAVOIDEN	0.00
SALLA JA JAAKKO	0.00
PERHEINEEN	0.00
JUSSI	0.00
SUKULAISET JA YSTAVAT	

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LÄMMIN SAHANMAEN	KIITOS
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Hoitokodin henkilökunnalle  
 \*\*\*\* \*\*  
 huolenpidosta

Siunaus toimitettu  
 läheisten  
 läsnä ollessa.

Fig. 3. A death notice designed as a supermarket receipt.

**Nocturne**  
Ruislinnun laulu korvissani  
Tähtkäpäiden päällä täysi kuu

**KESÄ-YÖN ON ONNI OMANANI,  
KASKISAVUUN LAAKSOT VERHOUU**  
en mä iloitse, en sure, huokaa

Mutta metsän tummuus	Mulle	Tuokaa
PUUNTO PILVEN	Johon päivä hukkuu	Siinto vaaran tuulisen, mi nukkuu
	Tuoksut vanamon	
JA VARJOT VEEN	<input type="checkbox"/> Niistä sydämeni laulun teen.	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Miksi metsän tummuus	Sävelehen
	Kosk' on mustaa murhe ylpeäin.	
MIKSI JUOVA PÄIVÄN	Laskenehen	Koska monta uunta näin

**Miksi etäisien vuorten siinto? Koska sinne oli silmän kiinto:**  
 Miksi vanamoiden valjut lemut: koska päätyneet on päivän kemut  
 Mutta miksi varjot virran veen: kosk' on mieli mulla siimekseen  
 Sulle laulan, neiti kesäheinä: sydämeni suuri hiljaisuus  
 Uskontoni: soipa säveleinä  
 Tammenlehvä-seppel vehryt, uus

En mä enää aja virvatulta, onpa kädessäni onnen kulta; pienenty mun ympär' elon piiri; aika seisoo, nukkuu tuuliviiri; edessäni hämäräinen tie tuntemattomahan tupaan vie.

Eino Leino

Fig. 4. A poem by Eino Leino designed as a health care form.

After this initial *Alfa* process, the *Beeta* and *Delta* series followed. Here, the spatial configurations of the original documents were not only subverted, but left entirely behind. I gave myself the task of mining the collection of 1910 words with various rules and methods, ranging from the systematic to the intuitive. These resulted in new constellations of words defined for example by grammatical rules, phonetic similarity, thematic considerations, or their visual characteristics (see Figures 5, 6, and 7).

Finally, the *Gem* series focuses entirely on the visual layout of the original source texts. The alphabetical characters are simply covered with black boxes. Repetitive and unreadable, the semantically mute *Gem* series takes up half of the 280-page publication.

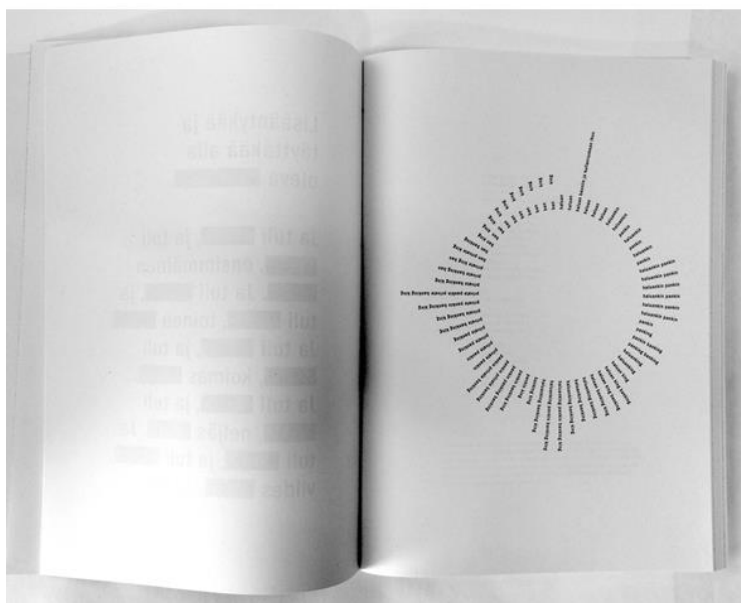


Fig. 5. Example of textual experiments with spatial arrangement (*Beeta* series).

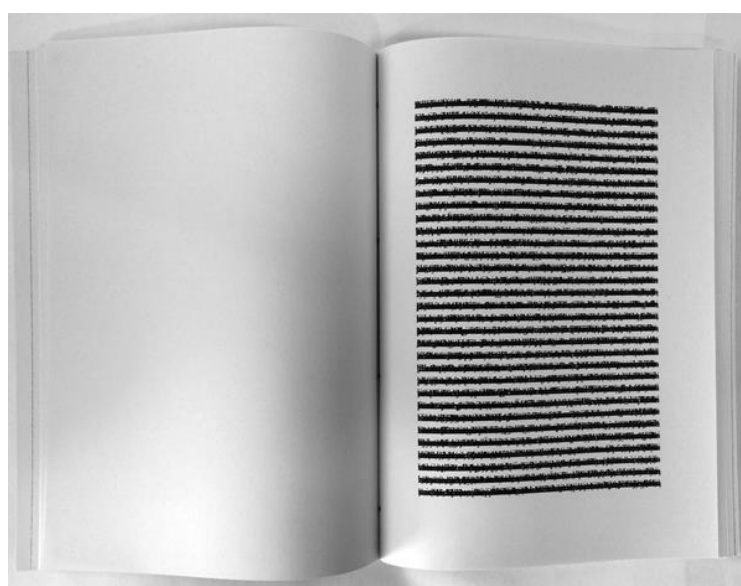


Fig. 6. Example of textual experiments with legibility (*Delta* series).

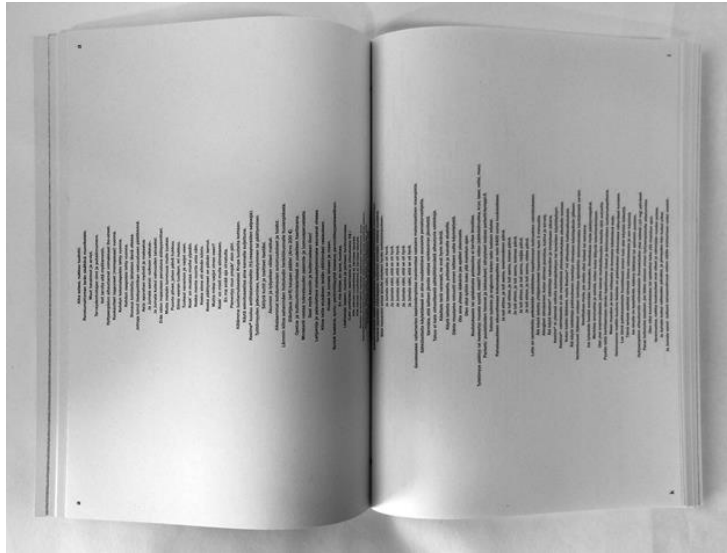


Fig. 7. Example of textual experiments:  
sentences from source documents arranged by word count (*Delta* series).

As my research is an exercise in mapping materialities, it is also important to describe the design of *Epägenesis : Katalogi* itself. The book foregrounds the physical elements of the book-as-object by challenging the conventions of its medium. Rather than a bound codex, it is simply a set of folded A3 size papers held together by a hand-stitched binding. As a result, the fore-edge of the book bulges uncharacteristically, which could be interpreted as a mistake either in the design of the book or in its production (see Figure 1).

As *Epägenesis : Katalogi* is made foremost for research rather than for the literary institution, it willfully rejects the cohesion and the consistency expected of, for example, a published collection of poetry. Instead, *Epägenesis* insists on the superfluous, even the redundant. It depicts my method of research in the form of an overflowing – literally bulging – archive of disjunctures and glitches in both content and rhythm.

The catalogue also subverts some of the normative ways of constructing and reading a book. It has no covers, and thus no ceremonial shift of material in proceeding from the outside to the inside, from packaging to content. Instead, it is designed to evoke a sense of incompleteness and temporality – to be regarded less like a closed entity, more like a continuous flow of information throughout, revealing processes of writing that flicker between intuitive experimentation and systematic method.

## Thinking with other knowledges

What motivates *Epägenesis* is my own experience and situated knowledge as a practitioner of graphic design, particularly regarding text and typography. On my professional path as a designer, I was always drawn more towards words than to images and visuals. Furthermore, by practising design, one develops a sense of words as images, rather than spoken or abstract entities. Being a designer means being particularly sensitive to the material aspects of written language in addition to the semantic content of any message.



What might those material aspects then entail? In my quest for a holistic understanding of the materialities at work in textual practices, I turned to fields of research that have shown similar interests. Historically, textual practices have been conditioned by analogue methods, tools, and technologies of production. However, as the “age of print” is dissolving, these methods, tools, and technologies are giving way to what might seem like limitless potential in the digital realm. As a result, a general interest in specifying the materialities of language is growing, especially in two domains that give me companions to think with; the domains of both literature and multimodal scholarship host concepts and theories relevant for my enquiry.

Several literary anthologies of contemporary conceptual and procedural writing published in recent years (Dworkin and Goldsmith 2011; Bergvall et al. 2012; Ikonen 2018) seem to suggest that the question of materiality is becoming a central concern. During the process of *Epägenesis*, I identified touchpoints between my text design and Perloff’s (2010) concept of the *unoriginal*: “it is possible to write ‘poetry’ that is entirely ‘unoriginal’ and nevertheless qualifies as poetry” (ibid., 12). In writing *Epägenesis*, my concern is not in claiming this writing as poetry, but rather examining the unoriginal itself. Perloff maps the “uncreative” writing of Kenneth Goldsmith, Leevi Lehto and Caroline Bergvall, among others, into the historical landscape introduced by concretist, citational, and Oulipian practices of writing. These practices insist “that the verbal cannot be separated from its material representation and vice versa” (ibid., 14). This is also the premise of all design – that, consequently, might make text design practice inseparable from writing.

Multimodal research, in turn, focuses on a more rigorously analytical approach to the material aspects of written language, based on the notion of semiotic modes. Here, a complex multimodal document is equally described as inherently dependent on its material representation:

a carrier of meaning that draws on visual, spatial and verbal presentational modes in combination and in co-operation. This kind of meaning is locatable neither within traditional linguistic views of text *nor* within traditional views of the image. (Bateman 2008, 7.)

Multimodal research, as understood here, is particularly interested in documents combining various semiotic modes, such as text and image. It is worth noting, however, that even written language on its own might be considered multimodal, since it already consists of several visual and image-like qualities such as a multiplicity of typographic choices and spatial arrangement.

Literary and multimodal scholarship have also found common ground. For example, Gibbons (2012a, 2012b, 2013) has applied theory and methods from the multimodal framework to experimental literature. In literary studies, the notions of materiality and multimodality are most often applied to literature that is dubbed “experimental” – that is, literature that defies convention in their visual and material form. However, in *Epägenesis*, I aim to make visible how even the most conventional texts are, in fact, multimodal, and “material”.

During the *Epägenesis* process, thinking with literary and multimodal scholarship has informed my practice. However, I understand that the task of these fields has largely been to focus on text artefacts. Often this is done at the cost of recognizing the processes, choices, and constraints at work in the accomplishment of the artefact. In other words, the body of text is recognized *without* the body of a designer. Through *Epägenesis*,

I aim to make a contribution to this multidisciplinary landscape by foregrounding the situated knowledge embodied in the designer and their practice.

## Mapping materialities

It is worth noting that, even if interest in examining materialities is getting more common, the notion of materiality itself has various definitions depending on context. In its first, most general sense, it refers to the physical and the tangible. It needs to be acknowledged that this also entails the digital, which merely employs a different kind of physicality than the stable objects we can touch, such as the book.

With their embodied practice and in their tangible crafts, design spheres take physicality for granted. Designerly knowledge resides in objects, and, consequently, designers are immersed in material culture (Cross 1982). According to Cross, designers are particularly skilled “in ‘reading’ the world of goods, in translating back from concrete objects to abstract requirements, through their design codes” (ibid., 225).

One might question the relevance of objects and goods in the context of language. However, from a graphic design perspective, the materiality of physical objects relates effortlessly to the choice of writing tools, as well as the choice of medium, the resulting artefact that follows the design process: a codex, a website, a poster, to name but a few. Since designers are especially sensitive to differences between media, as well as being skilled in employing them, designerly knowledge always entails what McLuhan and Fiore (1967) famously observed: the medium is (also) the message.

For designers educated and experienced in practices of typography and layout, text is intrinsically visual, and historically, the book is its quintessential medium – a medium against which most textual practices are still measured and reflected. For example, when addressing the criteria of legibility or readability of any text, what is commonly referred to is actually the set of textual conventions used in the codex. Regardless of the multiplicity of forms and configurations where written language now manifests itself, the basic measure of readability is still a page of continuous text – the page of a book (Kinross 2011).

The persistence of the historical conventions of the codex shows that textual practices are intrinsically connected to media and technology. These include not only conventions of visual representation, but also of the structures of language use itself: for example, titles, paragraphs, and footnote references have all developed according to the conditions of the codex. Again, from the designer’s perspective, the materiality of written language can thus also be seen as visual design choices regarding typography such as the choice of fonts, the definition of micro level paragraph settings, and spatial arrangements such as macro level layout or diagrams.

This initial mapping of materialities might be aligned with Joensuu’s (2012) research, which outlines four dimensions of materiality in the context of language (ibid., 24–29). First, it can refer to the visual and typographic contribution to meaning in text. Second, it can refer to the materiality of the language system itself, and to the literal or the non-referential aspects of text. Third, materiality can refer to the functions and conditions set by a chosen medium; and, finally, to broader ontological questions regarding the existence of texts and their nature as closed entities

Materiality seems to be an elusive concept, which, almost by definition, is impossible to pin down. To understand this paradox, Hayles's distinction between materiality and physicality seems useful:

Materiality is unlike physicality in being an emergent property. It cannot be specified in advance, as though it existed ontologically as a discrete entity. Requiring acts of human attentive focus on physical properties, materiality is a human-technical hybrid. (Hayles 2012, 91.)

In other words, materiality is never one thing only, but forever a state of becoming, and forever a combination of human and non-human. In *Epägenesis*, texts are not regarded as static objects to be analysed and interpreted. Instead, I investigate texts as they emerge, as these “human-technical” gestures where writing and design converge. Through my gestures and processes of writing *Epägenesis*, I become aware of how my choices in text design consist of not only the constraints of genres and visual conventions, but also a network of tools and technologies of both writing and design. Furthermore, the functions as well as the potentials of various media are at play, with all their histories always present.

In this artistic research, the methods of conceptual writing direct attention to the materiality of text. They foreground text as potential, and as dense networks of both human and non-human entities. Here, even my own design practice ties in with what Hayles (2012) calls “technogenesis”, i.e. a reciprocal relationship between the human body and machine. *Epägenesis* is where I become aware of how my embodied practice is situated in these material networks.

So how to locate my designerly knowledge within these networks? Following Donna Haraway (1988), the act of visualizing written language in *Epägenesis* can be seen as skilled practice and situated knowledge. The notion of situated knowledges, as defined by Haraway, was conceived to challenge established notions of the objectivity of knowledge. According to Haraway, the historical narratives of science make claims to objectivity inscribed by “a gaze from nowhere” (1988, 581). Her optical metaphor is especially relevant in practices of visual representation, as she calls for “a critical practice for recognizing our own ‘semiotic technologies’ for making meanings” (ibid., 579).

Haraway calls for an objectivity that is feminist, partial, and embodied. Rather than focusing on gender, Haraway's feminism “loves another science: the sciences and politics of interpretation, translation, stuttering, and the partly understood” (ibid, 589). In essence, it is a call to identify the knowledge situated in bodies and other entities that have previously remained unseen.

By focusing her metaphor on the optical, Haraway invites us to examine our apparatuses of visual representation, and to question how representation builds knowledge. Writing *Epägenesis* is an attempt to disentangle visual and verbal representation from embodied and technological practices, if only to find it impossible. Considering my own situated knowledge allows me to understand only partially, from within my practice – and to connect to other understandings, equally partial, in order to discover identification and holistic insight. Whenever knowledge is acknowledged as situated and partial, according to Bolt (2014, 9), one is able to connect to vast networks that acknowledge to whom, how, and where else that knowledge could be used.

## From GeM to *Gem*

In creating *Epägenesis*, I apply methods common to conceptual and procedural writing. With its focus on appropriation, the domain of conceptual poetry is parallel to the location from which design is working. Furthermore, the methods of Oulipo, in their definition of writing as a set of procedures and constraints, strike a chord with the processes of design.

In addition to methods of literary creation, I employ a model of analysis with a more scientific approach, developed in multimodal research: The GeM (Genre in Multimodality) model. The GeM model was developed and applied in the field of multimodal research, most notably by Bateman (2008) and Hiippala (2013; 2016).

The *Gem* series documented in *Epägenesis : Katalogi* is an interpretation of the GeM model of analysis in multimodal research (Bateman 2008), modelling the visual structure of textual artefacts. According to Bateman (ibid.), the original purpose of the GeM model is to analyse the visual and rhetorical structure of document layouts for the specifics of their genre. The model has been developed to replace interpretative methods of analysis regarding multimodal documents with reproducible ones. The GeM model characterizes the structure of multimodal artefacts in four layers: the base layer, the layout layer, the rhetorical layer, and the navigational layer.

In multimodal research, the GeM model was developed to work systematically and mathematically for the purpose of reproducible accuracy. Working laterally with conceptual writing and multimodal research, I identified parallels between this model of analysis and experimental literature such as conceptual and procedural writing. I was especially interested in the visual result of the analysis of the “layout layer”, the purpose of which is to trace the spatial configurations of text on a page.

Eager to investigate the points of contact between text design and conceptual and procedural writing, I decided to apply the GeM model to my writing in *Epägenesis* – not as an analytical model, but rather as a procedure for production. Employing and subverting the GeM model for productive purposes gave me an opportunity to investigate how my embodied design practice might be altered by this kind of a scientific model: what could be beneficial to my sense of text, but also what might be redundant, even destructive?

Produced by following the GeM model, the *Gem* series published in *Epägenesis : Katalogi* presents all the seventeen original source documents in their original shape, size, and layout. However, all writing has been replaced with black rectangles, covering every word, and, in contrast, revealing the visual and spatial configurations of the text, namely, the “layout layer”. In each of the texts, the GeM model has been applied in three different stages: word, sentence, and paragraph. I have covered all the characters with black boxes, resulting in something that can barely be called text (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Word, sentence, and paragraph stages of the “layout layer” of the first page of the Bible in the Gem series

However, these resulting configurations are not exactly images, either. Instead they hover in between: the shapes and arrangements nevertheless suggesting a linear, temporal reading. They persevere as reminders of the words, of the genres, and of the ideas they used to carry. All that is left now is the superfluous matter of the language that was once there, and even in the absence of that language, the matter still persists in its potential for meaning.

In fact, the texts in the *Gem* series start resembling the illegible, impenetrable texts that Dworkin (2003) has discussed extensively. They suddenly connect with Man Ray’s *Lautgedicht* (1924) or Emilio Isgrò’s *Infatuazione* (1972), and his other *cancellature* (deletions). They might also remind us of messages of forbidden content censored by authoritative powers. Even in their wordlessness, or because of it, the textual networks, connections, and potentials of these documents abound.

The semantically mute *Gem* series takes up half of the catalogue. I wanted the repetitiveness of reading this series in the catalogue to resemble the repetitive process of making them. It is where one stops to trace the gestures and techniques that this unconventional textual practice has required of me. The repetition accentuates the choices that need to be made regarding the visual qualities of the words, as well as their spatial configurations. In the process of painstakingly covering the words one by one, I, the designer, have been present. It was I who performed these strange movements on the surface of the text. A meaningless, repetitive job like this in any other research would have been assigned to a machine, but the *Gem* series foregrounds the dedication the designer affords the minute details and material structures of written language. The same kind of attention is given to the “content” as well as the genre and medium specific elements such as page numbers, codes or captions. I call this attention the designer’s sense of text.

The *Gem* series is a subversive design gesture, since it does nothing of what design is expected to do, i.e. to render text readable, legible, and transparent. Furthermore, it is a subversive research gesture, because it applies a model for analysis (GeM) as a model of artistic production. The process of literally placing a black box on top of every word, sentence and paragraph, using software that was never designed for this, bears very little function. Instead, it has provided a place for thinking. Granting time and space for this mute repetition, *Gem* allows me to recognise that matter matters, and that the situated knowledge and attention of the designer are essential parts of the material networks that contribute to textual meaning.

## Conclusion

In *Epägenesis*, I weave together artistic methods drawn from conceptual writing, models of analysis used in multimodal research, and my own practice as a designer of texts. I approach my artistic research in much the same way I approach a design task: bringing together seemingly disparate domains of knowledge, applying the means and methods at hand, acknowledging genres and conventions, and using materials, technologies and media purposefully. This is how I keep the research close to my own practice, and how I avoid losing sight of my situated knowledge as a text designer.

In my experience, theoretical research into textual materialities might not be able to reach everything that the situated knowledge and the skilled practice of text design entails. One of the reasons for this, I argue, is that the position of the designer is intrinsically “in-between”. Working between text and image, content and form, culture and commerce, everyday life and art, designers themselves often struggle in defining and redefining their position. The tacit, material, and always-mediated position of a designer means that they do not hold an independent status within any of the established and purified institutions of the modern world: society, culture, markets, or scientific disciplines. Design might also be too close to everyday practices in general to be granted such a status, and regarded as “arhetorical, subservient to verbal language, and unconnected to larger cultural and aesthetic domains and therefore not a credible arena of inquiry” (Kostelnick and Hassett 2003, 231).

In thinking with *Epägenesis*, I engage with the various materialities of written language through my source texts, my conceptual writing gestures, and my design practice. In the end, I found quite the opposite of the quote above to be true: the design of texts is intrinsically connected not only to larger cultural and aesthetic domains, but also to our everyday practices in the public sphere, and furthermore, to dense networks of other practices, conventions, tools, technologies, and media.

In my artistic research, following Haraway (1988), the act of designing text is considered as skilled practice and situated knowledge. If it is indeed situated in between, then that might be just the place for material, emergent, “human-technical hybrids” (Hayles 2012, 91). My writing gestures in *Epägenesis* clear space for the acknowledgement of this hybrid position. Rather than doing this in order to give status to designer bodies, it is to open up the possibility of making this situated knowledge available to other entities doing their work in textual networks.

The production of text is always deliberate and designed. It is a formal process that forces the language – and with it, the writer or designer – to submit to various demands and constraints, where the abstract and the material cannot be separated. Consequently, the situated knowledge of a text designer is but one element in a network of situated knowledges, of various hybrid presences, wherever language is restlessly created, mediated, used, redefined, and transformed. If we accept Hayles’s (2012) definition of materiality as an emergent property, then the material aspects of written language might all be arrived at particularly through design practice – those “acts of human attentive focus on physical properties” (ibid., 91).

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**Arja Karhumaa** is a graphic designer, a text artist, and Assistant Professor in Visual Communication Design at Aalto University. Her ongoing practice based doctoral thesis examines the material aspects of written language, the situated knowledge of a text designer, and the politics of legibility. The methodical part of the thesis is *Epägenesis : Katalogi* (2016), a catalogue/publication of conceptual and procedural writing based on found text from everyday life.

Email: [arja.karhumaa@aalto.fi](mailto:arja.karhumaa@aalto.fi)