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Ūí Ūí presents

OUI + OUI

64 / 2026 • MACON HOLT 2/2

Oui oui on ukkosenjohdatin, joka kysyy: mikä innostaa, kuka muovaa tätä hetkeä, ja millä on merkitystä tulevaisuudessa. Oui oui zoomaa siihen, mikä tekee elämästä elämisen arvoista.

Välittikö ystävä kirjeen sulle?

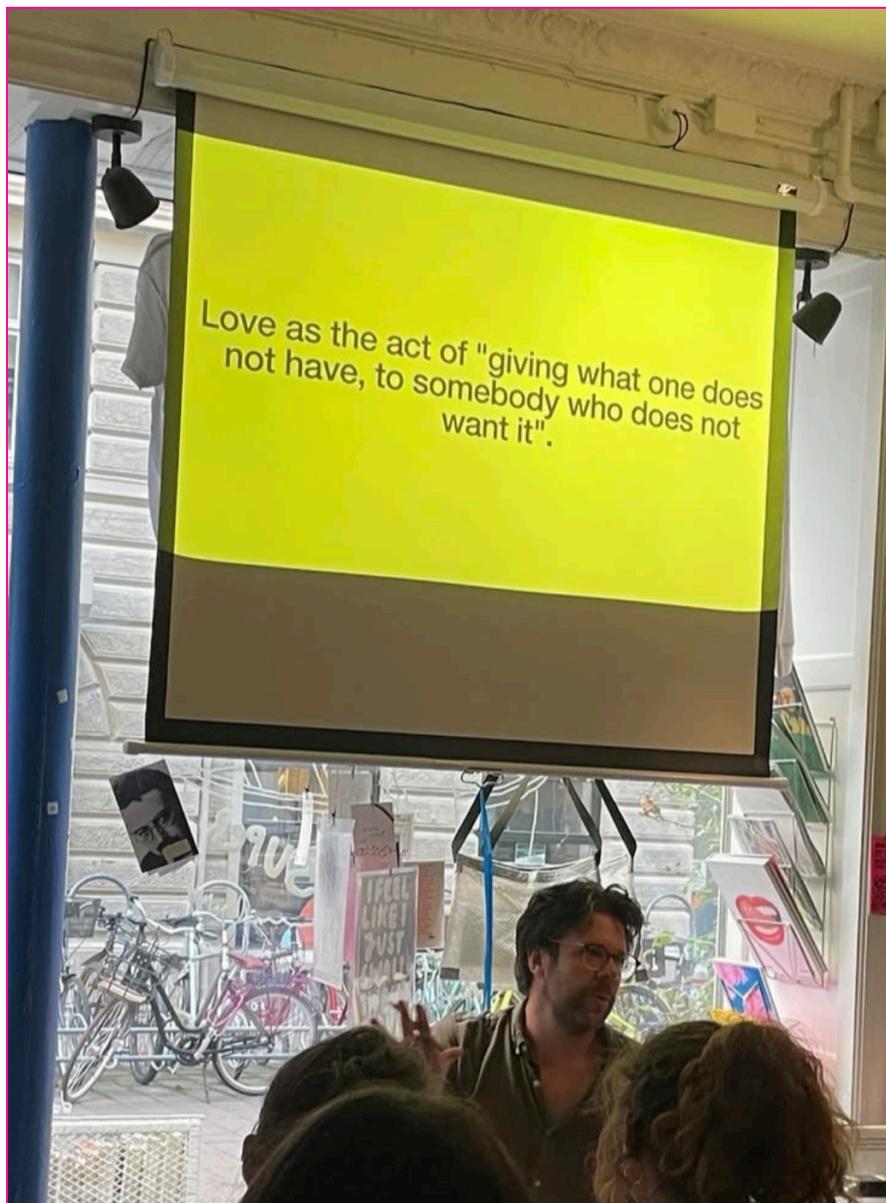
Liity Oui oui -tilaajaksi [täällä](#).



Oui oui'n ystävä:



Taiteen edistämiskeskus
Centret för konstfrämjande
Arts Promotion Centre Finland



MACON HOLT

Kulttuuriteoreetikko, kriitikko

Tänään jatkuu keskustelu kööpenhaminalaisen kriitikon ja kulttuurintutkimuksen lehtorin **Macon Holtin** kanssa. Macon järjestää Kööpenhaminan ykköskirjakaupassa **Superissa** *What the Fuck is Going on?* -nimisiä workshoppeja, joista viimeisimpään pääsin osallistumaan marraskuussa. Workshopien preseihin ja muistiinpanoihin voi perehtyä Maconin nettisivuilla [tästä](#).



Vinkki: Säännöstele kiinnostava keskustelu viikon ajalle, ellet nauti kaikkea kerralla.

III

Alienating worlds

PIETARI: I've been wondering what makes something avant-garde. Rosalía's new album is being presented as "the human album". [[LUX](#) was released three days before our talk.] It's still very pop, except every song has a symphonic orchestra. That doesn't sound that *out there*. So where's the line – what counts as genuinely new and innovative?

MACON: I haven't listened to it yet, but one way to think about it is this: you don't have to try to be 'new' by calling it 'the human album', because 'the human' isn't actually an old concept. The idea of what is 'human' only really took shape a couple hundred years ago.

Also, think about what an orchestra really is: an artificial agglomeration designed to produce a very specific outcome. On that level of abstraction, it's quite similar to AI-generated work: a structured assembly of procedures aimed at creating a particular kind of result.

Interesting.

It's almost meaningless at the level of attraction – but to counterpose that, someone whose work I think is very avant-garde is my former partner, [Marcela Lucatelli](#). She's a composer from Brazil, based here for 20 years.

She did a piece for orchestra, which was initially abandoned by the DR Symphony Orchestra because they couldn't figure it out. It wasn't like the score was outlandish, but the techniques required from each player were at the edge of comfort. For her, the whole point was: *I want the orchestra to attempt and fail, and it would be interesting to hear what comes out when you try something you can't quite do.*

This was completely outside the framework of what an orchestra thinks it's supposed to do, which is to execute. That's a very nice avant-garde gesture. She also did vocal performance in the same setting. If you just have conventional orchestra music written with a singer, that's just repeating what's happened before. She asks: *what is this object, and how can I break it?* To me, that's the most interesting thing in aesthetics – working at the limit of your ability.

It's one reason I find [Xiu Xiu](#) constantly interesting – the LA-based, queer, art-rock outfit. The vocalist pushes the edge of whether it's kind of silly, but there's also a lot of emotion, so it explores a space of almost failing in delivery. The sound sources include breaking things, noise, and then very

beautiful moments. The dark, funny lyrics are delivered with too much emotion, or performativity, so the whole thing breaks – and in a way, something in you breaks too.

More generally, me and my good friend, poet [Steven Zultanski](#), talk a lot about the exhaustion in art today: people just having “really good intentions”. Intentions themselves aren’t the problem – it’s when your work is mostly articulating a virtuous opposition to something bad, rather than presenting the bad thing and making me feel a void open up inside me.

For example, you walk into an art show about the history of colonial violence. You enter, agree with the point, leave, still agree. *Something was messed up, something should be done...* To their credit, some artists have done research, listing activist groups people could support or get involved with in the exhibition, which gives their work an aesthetic pass. But often, it’s just a nicely designed cube claiming to be about the Anthropocene. That’s not enough. Abstraction is fine, but do something with it. Make me feel something.

A concept isn’t enough.

You have to make it material. When I have been mentoring composers at the Rhythmic Music Academy, it’s a technical, nitty-gritty discussion: how did you make this happen? Whereas Marcela’s work always has a thing: in the chaos is the thing that you’re actually talking about. Whereas a lot of people think: *Okay, I’ve got some really good intentions, and that will disguise all of my sins of not actually working out how to talk about it.*

So you’re saying if you want chaos, it has to *feel* chaotic – it has to affect the viewer?

You must risk entering a space of not having control – that’s what chaos actually means. Chaos isn’t no order. It’s an order so complex it defies simple categorisation or simple reduction.

And you have to experience the narrative you impose on the object.

Or articulate it somehow.

What does that mean practically?

If you want to do something new with an orchestra, take them somewhere uncomfortable. If you want to show colonialism, implicate your audience, who are probably implicated. Actually, really implicate them. Make them feel they’re part of the system, not outside observers. Take the risk of alienating them.

Another artist I admire, Danish artist called [Mette Riise](#), works a lot around climate and sustainability. She makes mockumentaries about her trying to make art that would address the climate crisis: *I’m an idiot. Why did you come to the white cube to solve the climate crisis? This is such a corrupt kind of institution, which is entirely funded by a bunch of companies that are*

profiting from it, and that's what's paying my rent. And I do not understand how to actually get into this, and probably you don't either. And that's not disempowering; it asks us to look elsewhere.

Is all her art like that?

The last few pieces are. Her earlier work explores corporate culture humorously. One of her bigger projects is how to make yourself an artist brand: PowerPoint presentations, stupid diagrams, leaning into comedy and performance.

I also just showed someone a British sketch show from 2000 – *Jam* by **Chris Morris**. It's super dark. The guy who made it was like, what if I made **Aphex Twin** songs into sketch comedy? All these early 2000s video effects make it uncanny – bleakly funny.

That's the standard I judge contemporary art by: the commitment to a set of decisions that will alienate many people – including me – but opens up a space, breaks something in reality or meaning-making systems through a variety of means. If a six-episode TV show in the 2000s could do it, I think a state-funded artist in Denmark should be able to as well. But there are a lot of social pressures that resist it.

If the ideal art is alienating...

For me it is. But maybe it's a symptom of my own privilege. I can afford to feel alienated. It's interesting to think about what the category "art" even is. I've talked about this a lot with Marcela. The whole "art and music" or "art music" idea is a strangely Western concept. Whereas in a Brazilian context, you're just playing your guitar on the street in the evening, with people around, drinking, having a good time.

Is art a way of experiencing and shifting reality? Or is art this thing that comments on reality? And certainly for me, if you're in that commentary space then you better alienate me.

What is the other one?

The other one is more like a living practice for engaging with reality. Early examples of music, for instance: people used it as maps. You'd sing a song that took a certain amount of time and described landmarks in the lyrics – then you'd know it takes that long to get to this tree.

Or women washing large cloths in northern Scotland: too cold to dry, so they'd gather around a table, singing together, slapping the cloths to get the water off. The time it took to sing the song measured how long it took for the cloths to dry enough. It's a way of relating to space and time.

Amazing. I did not know that.

Eventually, we get to this later idea that music or art somehow transcends. That it's like some sort of voice of God. Today, it's often the voice of capital. It's like capital's self-critique – which is really useful to capital. Capital loves critique because it improves itself on its own terms.

There's this other space where art can operate. In materialist terms, someone like [the internet culture writer] [Joshua Citarella](#) talks about the artist as moving between social positions in society. I spoke with the artist [Lea Anić](#) last week who works with stone and construction sites. She's from Croatia and had spent a lot of time talking to workers on construction sites – then suddenly she was talking to geologists. Moving between social classes, disciplines, and lived experience becomes part of studying the making of stones.

I'm always interested in what **Grimes** is doing – not because her music is especially innovative sonically. But because of how she navigates spaces. She's good at being in a bunch of spaces with tech overlords, understanding their dreams, and making work that shows us their dreams.

Never thought of Grimes like that.

I wrote [a piece on Passive/Aggressive](#) a few years ago about her album *Miss Anthropocene*. People don't want to listen to Grimes now because of **Elon Musk**, but it's really great access to this messianic, union-busting billionaire's dreams. So, when he's thinking about the climate crisis, this album that was about personifying the climate crisis is just like... I saw a real ambivalence about human survival from people with power and resources – right in front of us.

If ideal art is alienating – as it is for me as well – but culture and the significance of art are fading, it does seem tricky, doesn't it?

Alienating in the sense of...?

Demanding something from you.

Oh yeah – causing a shock to thought, somehow scrambling the code. There's obviously lots of caveats to this, because people are in very different situations or positions, and how much torment they can tolerate depends on whatever they're living through. When it comes to people creating art from a position of relative privilege, for an audience that is also relatively privileged, I would want the art to cause the system of symbols and meaning in this world to make less sense – to fall apart in some way. That's what makes it alienating: the audience comes to understand themselves in relationship to that collapse. When the system starts falling apart, you have to confront yourself in relation to it.

There's no utopian solution here; it's not simple. But art can open something up. It gives a moment in which something else can emerge, a new order can appear, a new way to see yourself in relation to other things can happen. And there are many ways for people to resist this happening. For example, an audience can perform disinterest, telling themselves, *“Okay, I am not affected by this art.”*

I've started feeling like the majority of people don't value art or culture.

Yes. There's a German author **Henrike Kohpeiß** whose book *Bourgeois Coldness* is about how detachment protects against the forces shaping the world. The documentarian **Adam Curtis** captured a similar idea in his short documentary *Oh Dearism* – it's about when things seem too complex.

This is why a large historical art project on colonialism isn't very effective, even though it's very correct, because you go through all that and are like, "Oh dear." You distance yourself; you become bourgeois, and you're saved by the fact that it's far too much to process.

But if something makes the stakes immediate, pressing, or very much inside you, it becomes harder to mount that defense. Relentless art practices are interesting to me – ones that just keep hammering at that ego defense and see what happens.

Yes, cut the fluff.

Be very conscious of the decisions you're making. Not minimalism, but clarity: know what you want to do, your verb choices, your intention. What do you want to make happen with your work?

A really good pop song is a perfect encapsulation of that. I'm interested in pop songs as Trojan horses – immediate, catchy, carrying big messages. At best, the effect is deceptive, it sneaks up on you. What do you think is the point of music?

The point of all arts, I realised, is very similar to what [the comic book writer] **Alan Moore** says about what magic is. Music is very good at directly manipulating time.

Your favorite moment of a pop song is always a time range. It's never a precise moment. You have to have change and transformation. And it makes sense only in the context of the whole piece. Or not – maybe you come in and out at different moments, like in a DJ set.

Think of – if you want to get nerdy, like *Dungeons-and-Dragons-y* – music as time magic. Sound in general is this, but music is the magical art of manipulating time. Alan Moore says magic spells are words you say. The magician is the person who uses words to change how you think about reality.

That is beautiful.

A musician is a time-space magician. A word person is a reality-organising magician. The painter manipulates sight and light. Film and other arts do similar magic on reality. This is what I think, but I haven't developed it – [philosopher] **Federico Campagna** writes about magic and techniques as paradigms for understanding reality in *Technic and Magic*. ■



IV

Friction & Micro-worlds

What's exciting you right now culturally, in November 2025?

The last bit of mainstream culture that excites me is **Paul Thomas Anderson's** [*One Battle After Another*](#). It's a brilliant film. It articulates the drivers of emancipatory politics, and it's done out of love – which sounds simple and sappy, but it's not just the fulfilment of the historical materialist dialectic. That's a great analytic for understanding how things might move, but why you would care is something else.

You get this very nice juxtaposition of... it's not love on the [political] right, it's a weird kind of protectionism... But the film constantly breaks genre, and yet it's so damn entertaining. Its script is ridiculous, and that ridiculousness makes it feel more real. It's great.

I read all the rave reviews from the U.S. before seeing it, and they led me to expect a vision of how we should move forward. Instead, it was doing something else.

It's a very different kind of Black liberation politics idea: one battle after another. It's the struggle you join. You don't necessarily get to win; you just don't stop, and you don't let them stop you. It's a different articulation of something, I think. The film came out at this moment which I feel is an inflection point – this is the start of the end of something.

You feel so?

Maybe it's already started ending, I'm not sure yet. We're getting to a point where the contradictions that have emerged post-2008 are increasingly intolerable, and spreading in their intolerability. We're starting to feel the consequences of that. A lot of this also has to do with the disintegrating material basis for the reproduction of capitalism's own project. It doesn't mean it won't win; it just means it's going to have to change tactics.

Like in [economist] **Yanis Varoufakis'** book [*Technofeudalism*](#) – whatever we think about the terminology – he notes this move to renting everything, which I think is significant. I think there's going to be a lot of change, quicker than we think. Not necessarily always in comfortable directions. Am I going to be the bleakest person you talk to?

So, is the vision you propose bleak?

The vision I propose is... ambivalent. I don't see any reason why it couldn't be better, apart from precedent. But it can go lots of different ways. I think this move into no one being able to directly access things by owning them – whether it's software like InDesign, bikes, apartments, or access to entertainment – is going to be quite alienating. Alienating... I'm using that term as an ambivalent term. You don't know what comes after as you try to rearrange where you are. But there's also opportunity in it.

I think one of the things I'm very excited by is the enduring popular support for Palestine. And the expressions of art around that. Some parts of it are super cringe – like people putting watermelon symbols on their dating app profiles. It's understandable as a filter, but at the same time it's also fashion; you're trying to fashion something.

You try to communicate that you are safe.

Definitely. And certainly I would only like to meet people who are safe. That's complicated.

The performative male discussion is similarly about performing safety.

Yes – but it's kind of nice, in some ways, that men feel the need to perform safety. It's like, *okay, good, you understand this particular strange setup*. You're making it clear. And hopefully, it's true.

How I see this as a signal: a lot of mainstream news organizations constantly refer to a genocide as a war and present it in a very limited way. Meanwhile, tech billionaires have handed us devices that stream death to our screens every day at a scale that can't be described as unimportant.

I interpret the enduring demonstrations, resistance, flotillas, people getting arrested for stupid laws in England, as resulting from experiencing that dissonance – that distrust of the current organization of the world. If they weren't at the same time telling us it's nothing to worry about, while also giving us devices that show it's something to seriously worry about, there wouldn't have been this enduring movement.

I think the gap between the official narrative and the narrative we can actually access has been productive for a kind of consciousness-raising about the imperialist state, in a way that opens up new kinds of solidarities between people. It may or may not work, but...

The disparity of those two mediums leads to the distrust of the traditional mediums.

It's already in the toilet, though.

But the alternative is... TikTok.

Yeah, there's not a good route through. But I think we too quickly dismiss those who distrust the mediums. We got in the habit of that through COVID – people who were skeptical of vaccines were assumed to be cranky, without taking the time to think that I'm really angry at this person not wanting to get vaccinated because I want my fucking normal life back.

And fair enough – you want your normal life back. I don't know that this person has good evidence for their choice, but I can sympathize with anxiety about putting something relatively quickly developed into your body. That's the kind of space of understanding we need to open up.

Yeah, nuance.

Exactly. Things like your newsletter, or what I'm doing, are about getting people to develop those skills too, to embrace complexity. And I think it always kind of freaks me out how trusting people are of government here [in Copenhagen].

It's a great way to blame yourself for all the problems you encounter. Recently, I've been dealing with a lot of Spanish bureaucracy, and it's nightmarish. You know what's nice about that? I don't feel like it's my fault. When stuff works well, the only person left to blame is you. That's very alienating, too.

True – that's a critique of good design.

Oh man, I've got so many critiques of good design. My dating app of choice is Feeld because it's so shittily designed – also because of the audience it's working with. [*Feeld is for people interested in ethical non-monogamy, polyamory, casual sex, kink, swinging, and other alternative relationship models and sexual preferences.*] Bad design keeps people who don't need that community away.

Good design would make it frictionless, and when it's frictionless, anyone's allowed. There is no first obstacle to getting into it. You're allowed to be there without thinking about what you're doing. When there's some friction, to get to the other side, you have to know why you're there.

That relates to alienating art.

Yes! If there's something for me to overcome, I know why I'm doing it. There's satisfaction in working through something. A lack of friction lets you be very careless, because there's no cost, no energy spent along the way.

I have this weird thought that frictionlessness leads to fascism.

That's actually a good intuition. There's a two-book series by **Klaus Theweleit** called [*Male Fantasies*](#). His theory of fascism is that it's terrified of the mucky ambiguities of being a person. That's why it's all steel, clean lines.

A man opens up and it's like, *"What's my hatred of women?"* Because there's friction – you have to deal with your own desires and lusts, and as a hetero man, you have to deal with someone who has a different way of dealing with emotions than the patriarchally defined man who just suppresses.

[Theweleit] illustrates this quite beautifully in the opening of the book, where he gathers memoirs from former Weimar soldiers. They give an account of their life, all involving marrying a wife, and not a single one of them was named. It's a kind of smooth running of things.

Also, **Marc Augé** in *Non-Places* talks about airports and malls as being non-places. They remove the specificity of a particular place; like this freezer [beside us], all the things that say we're in a Middle Eastern run kebab place, and instead it becomes anonymously the same. As I understand the argument, it makes it easier for capitalism to move through it. My design rant is that there should be much more friction if you want specific things to happen.

I bet most people don't want that.

They don't know what they want. They know they don't want friction, but they don't know what that lack of friction serves.

Anything worth doing, you encounter friction. Anything you *actually* want to do has friction. If you're unsure, you don't want friction. That's why you try to make good design frictionless – you're trying to get people to want what you're offering, and they don't know if they want it yet.

That's interesting. I was signed to Universal Music, and when I talked about the promotional pictures I wanted, I wanted them to feel alienating. They were like, "What are you talking about?"

"But that's the opposite of promotion."

Yeah. I wanted the photos to feel a bit unsettling – probably because of the friction, in hindsight – so the audience would understand why they were there. Also, what you said explains why alternative music needs worlds built and visuals in the first place.

One of my students – a percussionist – once did a solo set with a drum kit, improvising around a figure. And through it, he had this grin on his face as he was finding these rhythmic spaces. The first thing I said after seeing the concert to him was that the way the music works, the way he performs it, shows me that the world this music is for is not the one it's in. He's implying a space in which this is the kind of thing you listen to when you listen to music – and it's not exactly this world. That's basically the whole idea of sonic fiction.

I came across that term! How would you define sonic fiction?

You have to do some work to define it. How does music and its arts construct a different part of reality we could call a world? How does it reconstruct reality into another world? Understanding music that way is the clearest way. I understand Universal, trying to make money from the very, very real world, would say, *“That’s not how it’s done.”* But you’re basically saying you want to be distinctive. There’s a reversion to sameness when it sells – but the same doesn’t sell.

Exactly. Some radio stations claim they know what people want through extensive testing and data, but I’m drawn to the idea that audiences don’t really know what they want or need in advance.

That’s just the nature of desire. You don’t know. You kind of know, but you don’t know that you know.

Think of things less as objects and more as actions. What happens when you play songs on the radio people haven’t heard, and it becomes a big thing? It changes social relationships. The right people start thinking it’s good, then others want to be involved. It’s not just the music itself – though I can’t fully map out the whole process. What I do know is this: when someone trusted presents it to others, those others see it as important, and more people follow. They experience the impact of the music through how it’s presented, shared, and communicated.

It builds a world of its own.

Yes, and it’s one reason why, without concrete community spaces and restrictions on how many records you can actually own or buy, subcultures disappear. Now everyone can listen to everything. There are fewer affordable urban spaces for communities to make specific things. Then, you don't get these clusters of the same thing. ■



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Saat tämän viestin, koska olet tilannut Oui oui -uutiskirjeen.

Oui oui kartoittaa nykyhetkeä ja hahmottaa tulevaa.

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