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*Dialogue Notes*

A commentary on *Division Dialogues*

Erik Åberg

Documented Artistic Research Project (Doctoral Thesis)

2021–2026

Stockholm University of the Arts

First printing, April 2026

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Layout

Erik Åberg

Typefaces

Albra Text, Albra Grotesk

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## Abstract

The Documented Artistic Research Project *Division Dialogues: On the Components and Practice of Juggling* explores a methodology emerging from juggling practice. The point of departure is the identification and naming of a method common in the field of juggling, termed reduct-construct. The project investigates how this method can be translated across domains: first into sculptural object-making, and subsequently into archival work. In this process, juggling techniques, sculptural components, and historical documents are all approached as materials that can be broken down into elements and recombined into new constellations. The research positions historiography as a creative, generative practice, one in which history becomes a resource for experimentation, artistic inquiry, and the articulation of new perspectives.

Through the research process, we follow how a practice evolves as its underlying sensibilities are identified and extended into artistic domains beyond juggling. The project engages with historical figures and their appearances in newspapers, while also opening onto broader existential questions. In this way, the work demonstrates how artistic practice, when reflected upon and translated across contexts, can generate new forms of knowledge and modes of expression.

## Keywords

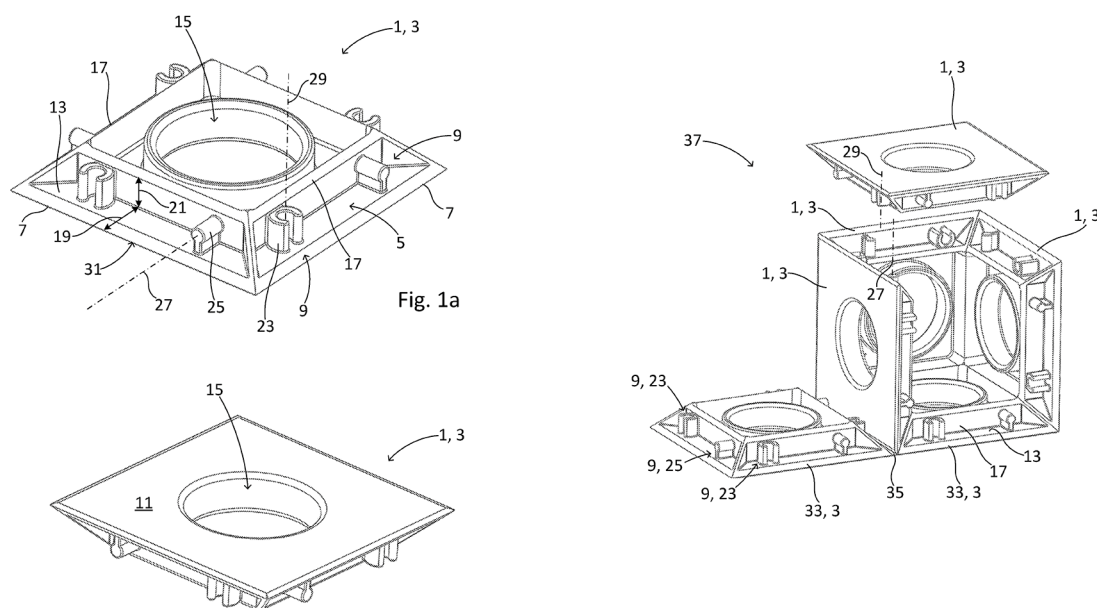
Juggling, Contemporary Circus, Circus History, Archives, Historiography, Reduct-construct, Object-making, Sculpture, Artistic Research, Artistic Method, Generative Systems, Practice-based Research

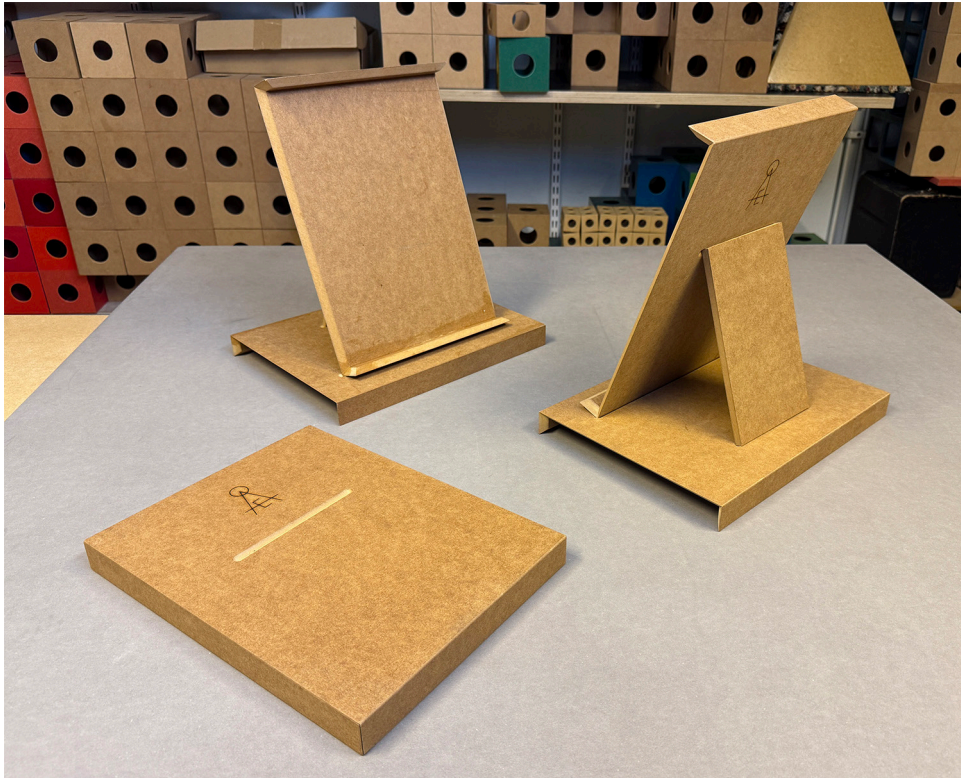
## Approaching the Material

The Documented Artistic Research Project *Division Dialogues* consists of the following components:

1. The book *Division Dialogues*, which explains the methodology and research development of the project
2. The book *Cleverer Than God*, a case study using quotations by and about Paul Cinquevalli
3. The film *Practice Excerpts*, which presents three parts of the practice
4. An archive box that can be turned into a display stand
5. The zine *Dialogue Notes*, which contains the abstract, keywords, and additional commentary on the project

Each component can function as a point of entry, without a prescribed order. This arrangement reflects the method reduct-construct, in which components are separated and recombined, allowing different paths through the material.





Archive box that can be reconfigured as a display stand.

## Notes on Larry Weeks

I truly enjoyed recalling and writing about my encounter with Larry Weeks.<sup>1</sup> A classic interview question is, “If you could bring back a person from history and talk to them, who would you choose?” When I found out that Larry was alive and got to meet him, it was as if one of those slots got filled. I had seen photos of Larry throughout his entire life in the documentation of juggler gatherings. There he is, juggling old peculiar clubs, wearing odd clothes, bulky gold rings, and a toupee. It was never entirely clear whether he appeared sleazy or charming. I had heard many stories about him, and seen him in photos next to people I have even more questions about, like Harry Lind, who made wooden clubs between the 1920s and 1960s,<sup>2</sup> and Francisco Alvarez, who wrote my favourite juggling history book.<sup>3</sup>

I heard several rumours about Larry. Far from everyone liked him, particularly regarding how he handled business. In our meeting, I did encounter that rougher, more abrasive side of him as well. I felt ambivalent, as it somehow complemented an interesting, eccentric person with a determined character, who pursued his own goals independent of social norms and expectations of status. I loved the vibe, the pinky rings, the peculiar patterned shirts and ties, and how it all paired with the abrasiveness.

We had such a great time. I taught him a little magic trick, how to levitate his business card. His eyes glittered, clearly delighted by the trick. Pointing to the card, which said “Larry Weeks WGJ,” he asked, “Do you know what WGJ stands for?” I didn’t. How could I? “World’s Greatest Juggler,” he smirked.

I’m sure quite a bit of money passed through Larry’s hands over the years. For someone else, that might mean moving to a nicer neighborhood, a fancier apartment, and buying a new car. Not Larry. He buys another apartment next door and fills it with even more obscure items and niche material. His priorities were clear: Houdini memorabilia, antique juggling equipment, and making money.

I want to make it perfectly clear to you, the reader: I loved every second of hanging out with Larry.

## Notes on *Cleverer Than God*

Regarding the book *Cleverer Than God*,<sup>4</sup> a further comment can be made about its title. Before settling on it, I considered more direct alternatives, something like “Cinquevalli’s Life in Quotes,” which would have clarified the content but would not have activated any ambiguity.

The decision to use *Cleverer Than God* came after I read an article describing a child in Cinquevalli’s audience asking this about him.<sup>5</sup> The phrase stood out for its disproportion and for its capacity to function independently of its original context. As soon as I saw it spelled out, I became aware of the possibility that it could invite a misreading, namely that it would be taken as a statement about the author rather than referring to the person the book concerns. Some readers could not resist making that association, even though, as with *The Lord of the Rings*, no one assumes the title refers to J.R.R. Tolkien himself.<sup>6</sup> In this respect, it sets a condition in which an inference is available, though not warranted. *Cleverer Than God* operates at two levels: as a quotation drawn from the archive, and as a case that shows how readers can go beyond what is actually stated and the conditions they are well aware of.

*Cleverer Than God* as a hardcover book, is available from [www.modernvaudevillepress.com](http://www.modernvaudevillepress.com)

ISBN: 978-1-958604-11-3

ISSN: 2002-603X

SKH Publication Series: X Position no. 26

Library of Congress: 2023924529

You can also find it in the Archive:

<http://uniarts.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:2056290>

ISBN: 978-91-88407-68-9

ISSN: 2002-603X

SKH Publication Series: X Position no. 43

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, *Division Dialogues*, Stockholm University of the Arts, 2026, 17–23.

<sup>2</sup> “Indian Club Man,” *Friends Magazine* (Detroit), October 1948, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Francisco Alvarez, *Juggling: Its History and Greatest Performers* (Albuquerque: self-published, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Erik Åberg, *Cleverer Than God* (Philadelphia: Modern Vaudeville Press, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> “Is He Cleverer Than God? A Natural Query,” *The Mail* (London), October 12, 1914, 2.

<sup>6</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954–55).

