**On the Political Dimension of Artistic** Practices: A conversation with Elín Hafsteinsdóttir / Ni Måste Namaste: The tree, The warrior, The humble warrior, The downward facing dog, The child / A Fantasy of Consensus / Towards a Vision of Intra-National **Omonoia: Notes from a cancelled** lecture / A Clockwork Mouse / In These Times / Give Me More Triggers: The Therapeutic Turn in the Popular Culture Industry / Images of 'Real' Men at Work: Masculine Rituals and Hyperauthentic Masculinity / **Circumstantial Evidence of Publicness:** The means of her embodiment / **Chosts in Our Time / A Landscape of Absence: Reflections on participatory** installation during a pandemic / At This Point / ----- Forwarded message ------ Subject: The need for context

## At This Point

With contributions from: Alexander Stevenson, Alexandra Papademetriou, Beate Persdotter Løken, Elín Hafsteinsdóttir, Gloria López Cleries, James Duffy, Johanna Oskarsson, Kasra Seyed Alikhani, Kolbrún Inga Söring, Manos Bazanis, Reyhaneh Mirjahani, Una Sigtryggsdóttir and Åke Sjöberg.

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In 2017 a working group was established, at what was then the Valand Academy and is now the HDK-Valand Academy – Art and Design at the University of Gothenburg, to undertake a review of the Masters in Fine Arts Programme<sup>1</sup>. The intention was to refine the programme to focus on critical fine art practices that engage with challenges in society. However, this would not necessarily be defined to be exclusionary to the role that aesthetics may play; or perceive artists exclusively as potential designers of solutions, or for their practices to be made even more vulnerable to co-optation resulting in instrumentalisation, or easily assimilated into the conditions they sought to critique.

Concomitantly, dominant and conventional definitions and pre-figurations of what an artist does, how they do it; and the ways in which their work (as labour and as artwork) interfaces and contributes within the public sphere were expanding in ways that would demand a re-articulation of art educational models that remained centred on the privileging of self-expression, especially in Western art. We were alert to developments in artistic practices that challenged, sought to bypass, or for which the hegemonic scaffolding of many of art's systems, including within art education itself were, under critique.

As educators we had already been discussing diversifications in artistic practices and witnessing artists and arts workers for whom the development of methods to re-purpose pre-determined and conventional roles were important to their identification of and critical interrogation of societal challenges. Developments were also happening within curating, exhibitionary, institutional and anti-institutional practices in ways that sought closer

<sup>1.</sup> The working group consisted of educators who were already engaged in the teaching of the then current MFA in Fine Arts Programme: Jason E. Bowman, MC Coble, Dr. Daniel Jewesbury, Professor Leslie Johnson and Maddie Leach.

alignment with artistic practices and societal and political concerns with discursivity, dissensus and decolonisation being some key tenets. There was also a desire to build upon and develop intercessions with the experience and specialisms of the team itself and other areas of research and study being undertaken in our own academy, as well as more broadly within our university and beyond.

Many questions were raised and examined in this period of development. Nevertheless, we reached sufficient agreements but honoured our principle that not every aspect of what we were to do should be over-predicted before students arrived as they were to be key co-operators in the programme's development. We also sought to uphold an understanding that multiple perspectives on the analysis of problems would be essential to how we would propel a new iteration of the MFA in Fine Arts programme.

In 2018 we opened this new iteration of the programme for applications. Students would learn to develop artistic enquiries to question publicness and its intercessions with the role of the artist in society. These would interface with the identification of the particular challenge that each student was concerned by; and their development of critical, artistic and contextual methods by which to approach those concerns.

The first cohort of students accepted into the programme and anticipated to graduate in 2020 was: Camilla Johansson Bäcklund, Gloria López Cleries, James Duffy, Sixten Sanne Göransson, Beate Persdotter Løken, Reyhaneh Mirjahani, Johanna Oskarsson, Alexandra Papademetriou, Kasra Seyed Alikhani, Kolbrún Inga Söring, Una Sigtryggsdóttir, Åke Sjöberg, and Alexander Stevenson. Two other students who had initially joined the programme took study breaks. With this first set of students we encountered a group whose endeavours have consistently contoured the programme, in action, throughout its first two years; including, at times, locating glitches in our initial designs of its framework, content, and pedagogical models. With marked generosity this group worked individually, with educators and each other, to define the terms of engagement for advancing each of their own practices with the world within which we live. Through multiple cycles of incremental questioning and analysis and interpretation of experiments each student constructed and articulated diverse methodologies through which to unfold and substantiate their individual enquiries.

Despite not all of the initial group having been able to contribute to this publication it is, nevertheless, the first volume that arises from the new version of the MFA Fine Art programme at the HDK-Valand Academy. Its editorship and content has largely been managed by this group amidst the global Covid-19 pandemic which, at the time of writing, still invades and demands a significant questioning of what the public sphere is now. The publication is also subsequent to the challenge that met this group when the exhibition of their enquiries was also cancelled in April 2020. As with that situation they have met the challenge of manifesting this publication with the authenticity that has carried all of us, educators and students alike, through this first full cycle of the programme.

The legacy of these students and their period of studies is manifested not only in this book but also in the future of a programme that they have shaped in ways that will be foundational to students and educators in the programme's future. To both them – and my equally patient, occasionally frustrated, thoughtful, alert, critical and generous teaching and research colleagues – profuse thanks are offered.

Jason E. Bowman MFA in Fine Arts Programme Manager

Introduction



At This Point marks the end of our participation in a twoyear MFA in Fine Art, dedicated to artistic research at the HDK-Valand Academy of Art and Design, University of Gothenburg.

This publication presents fragments of the artistic research projects developed during these two years: some on-going, some completed, and some fundamentally altered by the circumstances surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. The thirteen contributions in this publication are, in their many shapes and forms, results of rigorous artistic research projects which appear here in snippets, trailers, examples, sneak peeks.

At This Point was first conceived not as a book but as an exhibition and public programme<sup>1</sup>, thus we have aimed to maintain the sense of artistic exploration and pluralistic discourse we had originally planned for the cancelled exhibition at Göteborgs Konsthall. The publication begins and ends with transcribed discussions - the first on the social and political purpose of artistic practices, and the last on negotiation, understanding and interpretation in collective thinking and working. These two texts and the questions raised therein frame the remaining contributions which cover a wide range of topics and aspire to contribute to a large variety of discourses: political science, colonial imaginaries, nationalism, gentrification, masculine identity, the capitalocene, affective capitalism and the therapeutic turn, the construction of masculinity, hegemonic understandings of gender, temporality, memory, sensation and physical presence, collective thinking; as well as employ a variety of methods of knowledge-making, such as autotheory, over-identification, and dramaturgy. These subjects are not confined to individual texts, but rather recur throughout the publication as the research projects have influenced each other over the two years.

<sup>1.</sup> Göteborgs Konsthall, *Cancelled*: At *This Point - HDK-Valand Masters Exhibition* [website], March 2020, https://goteborgskonsthall.se/en/exhibitions/ at-this-point-hdk-valand, (accessed 24 September 2020).

As the title suggests, a shared sense of temporality is what, more than anything else, ties the contributions in this publication together. At *This Point* we have thirteen research projects examining issues currently affecting us, the contributors, and our communities. At *This Point* we, firmly rooted in the present, are re-evaluating the past to better understand the uncertain future. At *This Point*, these thirteen research projects, having been conceived and developed side-by-side over two years, become public together. At *This Point*, we attempt to introduce, interrupt, challenge, expand on and explore discussion and discourse. The research projects presented here may further develop in the months and even years to come, but At *This Point* we have captured them in the current, transitory moment.

We are thirteen people brought together through an MFA programme with a strong focus on criticality, especially regarding publicness and the *social role of the artist*. Over these two years the artistic research projects seen in these pages have been redesigned, reiterated, and rethought countless times through agonistic discourse. Whether these practices end up on or within the walls of galleries and other art institutions, manifest as workshops in libraries, as curatorial projects, as digital media works that engage with publics in the digital sphere, as transnational propaganda, as tool for consolidation, or as moral and ethical challenges, this publication is a moment of an ongoing process to meet our publics.

Now, a few words regarding the writing conventions in this book. We have chosen to not homogenise the spelling throughout the texts, instead preserving the language each author used, be it US English, UK English, or a combination of both. This is done to acknowledge the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of our authors and the polyphony of the perspectives they bring; and to bring attention to the ever-present reality of linguistic imperialism in art, in academia; and more broadly, in the way we conceptualise and discuss culture. On the topic of plurality of voices, we have allowed space for each author to express their personal view on the subject they have chosen. As such, the point of view presented in any text does not necessarily reflect that of any of the other authors or editors. Additionally, we have chosen to capitalise certain words such as North and West, or White and Black, when they refer to cultural and social constructions – unless the author has chosen otherwise.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge those whose work has been invaluable to this project: Jason E. Bowman for his supervision and advice throughout; Kjell Caminha for the design; Alexander Stevenson for his editorial help; our collaborators, Elín Hafsteinsdóttir and Manos Bazanis; the University of Gothenburg for the material support, and the Mary von Sydow foundation for a grant to support the publication.

Editors: Reyhaneh Mirjahani Alexandra Papademetriou Kasra Seyed Alikhani Kolbrún Inga Söring

December 2020

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On the Political Dimension of Artistic Practices: A conversation with Elín Hafsteinsdóttir

Gloria López Cleries Reyhaneh Mirjahani Alexandra Papademetriou



This contribution is a continuation of a collaboration that was started for the cancelled exhibition, At *This Point*. The event<sup>1</sup>we had intended was to examine our artistic projects from the exhibition through the lens of political science. Starting with a group tour, we were to experience the artworks together before engaging in a collective discussion on the points of intersection between the theoretical context and artistic practices.

In an exercise to reformulate and continue this discussion, we invited Dr. Elín Hafsteinsdóttir to have this conversation online. This contribution is a transcription of part of this conversation, and presents a speculative discussion on the potential of artistic production and art exhibitions to facilitate agonistic discourse.

Elín is the author of The Art of Making Democratic Trouble – Four Art Events and Radical Democratic Theory<sup>2</sup>, in which she explores the potential of artistic production and art exhibitions to facilitate agonistic discourse – make trouble – and shape democratic subjects.

**Reyhaneh:** I will pose this question within the framework of the conversation around the role of the artist as an instigator, mediator, educator or as a researcher, and the political agency that emerges from this role. Which one of these roles could be said to work better in creating a real impact rather than just representing or symbolically talking about something, while being 'trapped' in an art institution, in the art bubble? Is it depoliticizing, in a way, when we talk about things in this art bubble, especially when it comes to political challenges and crises?

1 The Political Dimension of Artistic Practices: A conversation with Elín Hafsteinsdóttir. Programmed date: 25 April 2020 at 13:00, at Göteborgs Konsthall. 2 E. Hafsteinsdóttir, The Art of Making Democratic Trouble: Four Art Events and Radical Democratic Theory, Ph.D. diss., Stockholm University, 2015. **Elín:** That is an interesting and complex question, and of course it depends, I would say, on our perspective. What is your original standing point? Where do you come from? What are the concepts that you use? In a way, what is politics? What is the political and what can artists then do within that framework? So, from a liberal perspective you have this focus on the individual, what the individual can do, the agency of the individual artist, on individual freedom of expression. I come from a different theoretical perspective in that I use more post-structuralist theory, and I've been mainly looking at radical democratic theory with names like Chantal Mouffe and Aletta Norval, and others.

From the perspective of an artist, from what I can imagine, you can have intentions, you can have hopes for your artworks, but you cannot control where the artwork will go. If you are trying to go against a very rigid hegemonic discourse, then it's very likely that nothing will happen in the end. You talk about real impact! It is really difficult to have real impact. Having real impact will probably be the result of you somehow attaching yourself to other collective identities: becoming part of something that is already happening, or is beginning to happen, together with other struggles and other articulated claims and demands. And, then that is still not a guarantee that something will happen. Because, for example, the concept of dislocation: when something disrupts the hegemonic order there will be a response, as in trying to get things back to normal.

Most of the time the hegemonic order succeeds, but through that process it will have been shown that the order is contestable. Also, the artist has this unique possibility to articulate new subjectivities, new horizons, activating fantasies and thinking of futures to come: how could we be different? And, that can lead to new practices, new ways of articulating claims and demands. For an artist alone to have a real impact? I think that is just too much to ask of the individual artist. I think often that the artwork takes a secondary role to the individual when it comes to political debates, for example, when it comes out into society. But, then I also know the potential and the necessity of this sphere of society: the cultural sphere, the artistic sphere, where those activating new subjectivities, new ways of seeing things can be expressed – creating those moments of 'AHA! You can also see it like this'.

But, that is something different to, for example, being an educator. Because it is much more difficult to say: 'I want to explain this and I want you (the audience) to see this', that often does not happen. You also mentioned the researcher, a term from a science discourse. Doing experiments, conducting enquiries: a lot of those concepts have moved into the artworld. Artistic work and theoretical work are becoming increasingly intertwined. We use a lot of the same concepts, we have a lot of the same questions, but then we approach them differently. I think that is necessary for us to do, and to then meet each other is something very fruitful and enriching for political articulation to happen.

You also talked about the art bubble and of course we all live in different bubbles: there is also the scientific bubble. We all have those and sometimes we manage to break out of them. But, we also produce, hopefully, effects that go beyond our bubbles, that we cannot necessarily see or predict. And, I don't think we should be afraid of that: I find it sometimes limiting to say that 'oh, you are just doing that in your art bubble and what are you doing for the real world?' or, 'are you having a real impact?' Maybe not right now but who knows?

You mentioned the institution, the art institution. There has been a big discussion about how can you have critical

art within the big institutions? Can you have activist art in those institutions? Some say, 'Yes, you have to'. You cannot just avoid these big institutions when many of them are publicly funded and offer a greater potential for artists than simply the market. I personally think along the lines of Chantal Mouffe that you can also resist within those, you can change things – although maybe sometimes not to the degree we hope for.

**Gloria**: When talking about cultural institutions, obviously there is this false idea of neutrality. For example, I'm thinking about the white cube as a neutral space. But if we display something in that space, with the intention to create an agonistic experience in that framework, is that context not depoliticizing the work itself? The context is so important for the artwork to happen. We can predict the audience that attends the museum in Gothenburg, we already know that we are not expecting people that come from the countryside or the periphery. Museums are already working with specific publics and plan their exhibitions accordingly. Wouldn't placing a work in the institutional space and out of its intended context alter the way it's perceived?

**E**: Absolutely! And you have a strong point there, but I think it also depends on the artwork itself. Some artworks can work within those spaces and are even trying to create some kind of friction with those structures, the building, the expected audience; but other projects need to leave those spaces to be able to work. Sometimes you have art projects that are totally dependent on the institutions to work because they are like a response, they are trying to say something to those institutions and then something can happen, hopefully. And, as you say, the audience that goes to these institutions is a limited group within society.

And what is the alternative? Do we have enough alternatives to these institutions? And if we need to use these institutions, how can we use them subversively? How can we invite and include more people? Can we use other channels as well to open up these spaces? And, that is, of course, a political issue, on behalf of the institutions as well. It is not enough to invite the occasional groups from school or something like that and say, 'Okay now we are done'. That is clearly not enough. We need to make more demands on the institutions themselves.

Alexandra: I am also wondering if by putting ourselves in the margins, we stay in the margins as well. I'm thinking of events from my previous practice, where we were talking about political issues and issues that affected Greek society as a whole: but because we already positioned ourselves as outsiders, we were not really engaged with. Whereas, had we done these same events in a public institution, they would have been more political because we would have been using public money and we would be placed within mainstream discourse. And, even though I think we had a freedom we would not have had in an institution; I am now wondering 'who actually saw these things?' It is this dilemma always.

**E**: And we need both, I'm thinking. We desperately need people that are outside the institutions and give an alternative to the institutions. There is also the example of people that gain access to institutions and they try to open them up and give the spotlight to others.

**R**: But, what the question is for me, which is both about the institutional and independent spaces, is about the coexistence of the contexts. Specifically, through a poststructuralist lens, I wonder how we can avoid depoliticizing when we are bringing contexts together. For example, Alexandra's project is about cultural-political issues in the Balkans, but it is presented in the Swedish context. It is the same with my work, talking about political issues from other contexts. Our work would be read again differently in the USA for example. Are we depoliticizing an issue? Alternatively, I am wondering what is the relationship between these examples and depoliticizing and politicizing an issue when there are different contexts between the artist, artwork and the location?

**G**: I'm thinking about the *aestheticization* of a political action that happens within an art project and how this aestheticization can depoliticize, removing the subject of the project from its original context.

**E**: I think I understand your question and I think there is no specific and sure way to prevent depoliticizing. And I think that friction between the context and the work can also create something within the audience. It has been pointed out by many theorists that an artwork is intelligible, understandable, and then there is that uncanny feature, something strange, something that we cannot really get a grip on. And you need that part, that is what will have the most potential to have some effect. It has to be understandable and relatable enough for you to let it in: I think about Linda Zerilli who talks about the *trojan horse* in that sense.

When you talk about this difference in contexts, you also talk about discourses, systems of meanings, and these frictions might have a potential to be exactly that change. Somebody lacking knowledge about the Balkans, for example, might still grasp something about nationalism, might start thinking about their own context of nationalism. You want the audience to go and be able to form their own images, interpretations, readings of the artwork. That is also as the more you have read, researched, the more thoughts you have, there is a certain path that you would like them to take, but they would not necessarily take. But some will, because there are different people.

R: We also had this conversation during these two years about what we expect or what we want the public to experience. Obviously there is no answer for that, there are different methods we can take to predict the possibilities. If there are different possible interpretations of the artwork, maybe the artist should at least be aware of them all. But maybe the most important part is to not cross the red line of depoliticizing or aestheticizing a political issue.

E: I can understand that from an artistic point of view. I think it's interesting with the red line, when nothing is depoliticized. In my research I looked at four art events when depoliticizing processes occurred in all four. There were also responses in the media that acknowledged the political articulations that existed in the artworks - but they were often not credited to the artist. They would depoliticize the artists as political agents, often using their gender, race, social status. But, they still were, at the same time, taking credit for raising that political issue themselves. 'Yes, we have to look at this political issue, but it's just a shame that it was a student' or 'this young woman', really, in a way, belittling the artist. I think it's difficult to avoid depoliticization totally because, at least from my theoretical perspective, that is precisely what the hegemonic structure is trying to do. No changes, no disruption.

A: I am wondering now, whether this depoliticization seems

to be almost inherent actually to lots of making-public of artworks, whether it is actually necessary for these works to be made in the first place – in the sense that artists, I feel, often occupy the jester's position in society. There is a certain freedom in action and speech precisely because the artist is not taken seriously, or the artist is seen, at least partially, as an entertainer. I wonder if being depoliticized is what allows artists to have a platform and do something political.

I am also wondering about the potential a work might have to instigate discourse and to be radical, in the sense of radical democracy and the way you have used it in your doctoral thesis: how can we conceive a work that is radical? Is there, *could* there be such a thing as a work that is radical? Or a work that is more entrenched, maybe, in agonistic procedure, discourse?

**E**: I think your first question relates to that uncanniness that we talked about earlier and which can be very powerful. I think a successful way has been to *connect* with others, so as to create a collective 'we' with other political movements or with others that have raised awareness around a certain question.

Bauer and Krauss' project on the tradition of Zwarte Piet in the Netherlands<sup>3</sup>, I think succeeded in trying to construct spaces for a discussion that already existed in the Netherlands but mainly within small groups – looking back and including what was done before while actively using the institution that they were in. The artwork of Zanele Muholi, a South African photographer is another good example. She has been documenting her own life and also her community in South Africa of Black lesbian women mainly. These images would have not existed otherwise, despite

3. E. Hafsteinsdóttir, The Art of Making Democratic Trouble: Four Art Events and Radical Democratic Theory, Ph.D. diss., Stockholm University, 2015, p. 65.

the hypervisibility of these women in South African society and the violence they face. But, creating an archive with these photographs: there is an action *with* the community and that is definitely making something political, going from the particular to the universal and creating, trying to construct a political 'we'. Any kind of political mobilisation needs mobilising collective 'we's', and mobilising also needs critical approaches *with* institutions and structures. You can do that in many different ways within different spheres of society.

But, I found it a very tricky question because I think it absolutely should not be up to a political scientist or any other to say, 'Okay artists, this is how you should do radical or critical artwork'. That question felt like a trap! [laughter]

A: But you answered beautifully! It was not meant to be a trap, I promise.

**G**: I'm just going to follow Alexandra's question with another question we've had – we were wondering, if a project is not documented at all, can it still create this type of discourse? Can it function in the same way as a project that *has* been documented, or had this impact on the media? Because there are a lot of practices in terms of performative actions that happen just on a micro level without any type of documentation. So, we were wondering how important is the documentation of a project in this process of expanding this agonistic situation?

Because it seems to me that in the projects that you describe, the documentation of the artworks themselves was super important. Maybe we can say that the documentation itself is part of the artistic project as well, it's an expansion and continuation. And you've beautifully explained that, how the artwork doesn't finish when the action, the event, has ended. It's like the artwork continues existing even though it's finished, it's the reaction and the attention that appear which completes the work and I think this is super interesting.

E: If you want this continuation of the artwork, then the documentation is important. I can also see for example with Bauer and Krauss, there was this protest march that was supposed to happen – but then they got so many threats they had to cancel it. But then the cancelled march became a part of the artwork, even though it didn't happen. And the conversation continued beyond that.

But also, with the event of Anna Odell, *Unknown, woman* 2009-346701, then there was this incredible pressure on her to explain herself and she didn't want that, because the initial enactment, the artwork, wasn't finished, she wanted to finalise it before talking about it. Then there was an immense pressure on her that she should go out into the media and explain herself.

But, I wouldn't want to say that documentation *needs* to exist. There is of course value in other kinds of artwork that 'just' happen, and maybe exactly that point of fluency and non-permanency of things can also be an important point: that nothing is permanent, everything is changeable and *will* change, and any kind of documentation or the representation will shift and there will be new interpretations.

R: I was thinking about what you just explained about the silence of an artist; what comes to my mind is that if we add ethics to this situation, then it might be very difficult, to define if the artist has a right to be quiet or not,

especially in the examples you gave. But, what if there is a community in danger, not as in physical danger but there is something unethical happening – then, does the artist still, just because she's an artist, have the right to be quiet? Or even, if it is not an artist but whoever; then the explanation, not as an excuse but as a clarification, this statement, maybe should be the obligation of the person. This is what makes it complicated, in a way.

**E**: This is also an interesting question: should artists always have to explain their work and explain what they have been doing? And who is, then, to take the responsibility? Is it the institution that should take that debate on, as, for example, in Odell's case?

I did another, short research project for a governmental agency where I interviewed museums, galleries, publishing companies and others that were organizing events for literature and art, about the security issues and threats against artists. Because artists are often very alone, also when these media storms arise. And then, coming back to the institutions, it can be a strength or it can be a security to have a strong institution in the back. But, also, it became so clear; all these financial structures, all these temporary assignments and freelance work, that make vulnerability for the artist.

And, you've been talking about wanting to experiment, you wanted to see what happens, but it can also become threatening. There are too many examples like that, where the artist is alone in a heated media storm, and it becomes a situation of self-censorship and you don't want to end up in that. But, I think it also depends on the artist and the artist's position: how much power do you have? If you really are at the top of the hierarchy, then I think you have a little bit more [responsibility, we] can ask more of that person when it comes to taking the bait or not engaging in the debate.

R: Now that we've talked about both politics and artistic practices, what is the evaluation of artistic work according to political science – do you think we have different criteria? Or, how are artistic practices understood through the perspective of political science?

E: It's a very big question. But it definitely depends on the perspective; I can say for example that in relation to my thesis, it's not that common to study art within political science. It is mainly studied in relation to freedom of expression, or as a part of political resistance. But I think this is maybe why the art sphere resonated so strongly with me, because of the post-structuralist theoretical perspective that I have: we have these structures and meanings and there is a constant struggle over meaning. How do we see the world, how do we talk about things? And all these things matter, they are actually at the core. And things can be changed, things can be different, so then the art becomes a central part of that; because if we can think of things differently, then we can also act politically on those new visions, new horizons, new imaginaries. So, within that theoretical perspective, having that possibility, that potential, is very important.

Ni Måste Namaste (You Must Namaste)

Prelude, Chapter 1: The tree

Kasra Seyed Alikhani



The following chapters are scripts used for the video work Ni Måste Namaste interwoven with reflections and excerpts from an essay. The script is based on impressions from various sites of city development. The essay deals with fantasies of health and illness and their relationship to a fear of the Other and a wish for sameness.

#### PRELUDE

An art nouveau style door with a sign that says 'Sudden Stillness'. A mug with the text 'Beat yesterday' holds a few toothbrushes. Julia is brushing her teeth and notices pink foam forming in her mouth just before she suddenly sneezes. A mix of blood and foam splatters on the mirror. We see a pair of keys on a brochure for the health club *Sudden Stillness* blocking the 'St' of 'Stillness' so it reads 'Sudden illness'. Julia quickly grabs her keys and is on her way.

## [Interior SUDDEN STILLNESS]

Julia is meditating with one eye open as people are entering her yoga class. It's a free trial week at Sudden Stillness, which means anyone can join her class, a terrifying week for Julia. Together with the thundering construction, right outside the windows, Julia's serenity is less convincing than usual. Julia's keen eye notices a deviating participant and follows him to the back of the class to make sure he's changed and will take off his socks. Remember to breathe, keep your arms where they want to be to help your balance. Try to listen...(noise from asphalt being emptied into a container right outside). Try to listen to your body, see if you can loosen your body some more. The right leg, the head. Let's stay here for a few breaths.

The participants are standing on one leg in the tree-position, as we exit through the window out onto the violent construction site. We land on a billboard announcing the new neighborhood in the making called 'Sudden Hills'.

#### CHAPTER 1: The Tree

### [Interior/Exterior BALCONY]

Faint music from a small crappy stereo. A and B opposite each other on the balcony. B is cutting her toenails and A is occupied with a pair of opera binoculars.

A Ask anyone, the golfer looks just like me.

> *B* You're paranoid.

> > A A pale copy.

The orchestra of construction noise makes way for a solo number by a jack-hammer nearby. A and B habitually put on their protective headphones.

> B You have to let it go! A (raises his glass) For your health!

> > В

Prosit.

A and B have no choice but to admire their new view, a large-scale billboard advertising the future neighborhood of Sudden Hills, replacing the neighborhood they once knew as their own. The city is getting embellished and invigorated for its upcoming 400<sup>th</sup>-year birthday. Neighborhoods such as theirs were highly prioritized in receiving this cosmetic treatment, a rash on the body politic for which Sudden Hills was the ointment. For now, the romantic landscape of Sudden Hills only exists on the billboard, a landscape promising silence, safety and exercise.

In the art museum next to the building where this story would first meet the public eye, there is a painting of a young man and a woman proudly admiring another idealized landscape in the painting Nordic Summer Evening. You can see it remotely too, through the social media channel of the museum. Pictured there is another young couple admiring the painting, clutched to one-another, in love with their mirror image, matching its palette. Spaces and bodies are extensions of each other and a sense of blending with the world can happen when you inhabit rooms that are reflections of your own shapes. But, the emergence of bodies that are read as misplaced, also breaks the spell of comfort of the once familiar room.

The doorbell rings and A leaves the balcony to answer. B sneaks a peak at the billboard through A's ridiculous opera-binoculars. A blond haired and blue eyed golfer can be spotted in the hills of Sudden Hills, barely noticeable in the background, but with an uncanny resemblance to A.

# A VOICE IN THE BACKGROUND

Puss, puss, puss, puss, Señor Wences, come kitty, come to momma! You ungrateful devil! You pain in the ass! Come darling!

We see a copy of a drawing of a cat under a headline reading, 'Have you seen my sweet Señor Wences?'. An elderly resident of Milstolpegatan has lost their cat in the vast construction site that surrounds the building.

B grinds her nails in a mortar and pours them in medical bottles with a high-end label reading 'Essential vigor'. A returns and says it was the nuisance response team asking them to turn the music down.

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A Fantasy of Consensus

**Alexander Stevenson** 



# Introduction

In my work as an artist *uncertainty* is very literally content making. The ways in which personal, professional, social and academic views differ creates space for hybrid interpretations and fantasies. Despite these fruitful cultural *gaps*, the modern interconnected global state proliferates the idea that everything is connected, can be understood, imagined or easily translated. It's this sense of *consensus* – or commonly held beliefs through interconnection – that this text observes and questions.

The period under discussion – after 1800 – represents the entire duration that humans have been aware of an actual continent of Antarctica – as far as records show. As such, the research produced whilst on the MFA Fine Art programme explored how that place is like a vast blank canvas for colonial fantasies and projected imaginaries. These two terms apply to the sum of cultural knowledge about, but mostly not from, a place. Popular and projected imaginaries come from the more accessible or *mass* cultural material produced about a place (literature, cinema, explorer journals, etc.) as well as the origin of this material, which can be global. Colonial – or imperial – fantasies are the resulting feedback loops that come from an unavoidably *colonial* process of *filling-in-the-gaps*.

It is important for me to acknowledge that as a White British male I bring bias to the subjects that follow. I have sought out a diverse range of authors and references to support this examination of the fantasy of consensus. Despite this, the sources are for the most part White and from Anglophonic parts of the world. Interestingly, this essay observes how projected imaginaries are constructed, often without the permission or authorship of indigenous peoples, and are projected back onto those places; and this is directly acknowledged by the majority of the authors I have referenced. Yet, this process may be doomed to be repeated by a lack of access to indigenous voices writing specifically about colonial fantasy and projected imaginaries in relation to the era of colonialism after 1800. This might simply be an issue of language, translation, and access for me as a researcher living in Europe, or it might relate to other systematic problems that perpetuate the preferencing of White European thinking in print, as a guide to imagining *Other* places.

# So to begin with, what is cultural consensus? Is there such a thing as an interconnected global imaginary?

Humanity appears to be living in an ever-more globalised world of transnational organisations, international agreements of all member states of the UN, and global media. It's easy to assume that all of humanity is on the same page; that scientific principles, or human rights are universally understood, if not agreed upon. In reality of course, these terms are conceptualised and applied differently in different parts of the world.

Culture in all forms is disseminated based on its popularity (or demagogical potential) and adaptability, what Charles Maier refers to as *vernacularization* and *indigenization* of ideas<sup>1</sup>. Applying some superficial statistics, we might say that if more than 59% of humans alive today are active users of the internet,<sup>2</sup> 85% of those are on social media, and 66% of those in turn are subscribers of Facebook,<sup>3</sup> then what

1. C. Maier, 'Leviathan 2.0', in E.S. Rosenberg (ed.), *A World Connecting, Massachusetts*, The Belknap Press, 2012, p. 347.

2. J. Clement, 'Global digital population as of July 2020' [website], Statista, 2020, https://www.statista. com/statistics/617136/digitalpopulation-worldwide/, (accessed 6 July 2020). 3. Global social media overview, Data reportal [website], 2020, https:// datareportal.com/social-media-users, (accessed 6 July 2020). is trending on Facebook must somehow be representative of the culture of a third of all humans? Of course this is a flawed argument, not least because Facebook is only the preferred social media platform in North America, Australia, North Africa and Europe. It cannot take into account demographic access to technology, or any other cultures and preferred social networks outside of those locations, or those who remain outside of the global human communications network altogether, like the Sentinelese<sup>4</sup>. But, it demonstrates the assumptive properties of projected imaginaries, and shows how gaps in statistics can be yet another location for fantasy and obscuration.

One might ask: how is regional variation applied to understanding global cultural phenomena like Facebook? Although I'm not going to go into the socio-psychology of these networks, I am interested to observe where they may have originated. What socio-political shifts were taking place during the colonial era that would have affected a person's ability to comprehend global cultural motifs and changes of that time? In his book, A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth Century England, Steven Shapin suggests something as simplistic as 'mundane reason' might have provided a semblance of trust in colonial era cultural exchanges<sup>5</sup>. Embedded reason and common sense offered presuppositions at the meeting point of colonised, coloniser, and the wider world. It might have permitted both consensus and social dissensus to occur concomitantly. According to David Turnbull, for homogenisation to occur under empire leading to oppressive knowledge being rendered 'truthlike'

4. S. Michael, 'Sentinel Island's 'peace-loving' tribe had centuries of reasons to fear missionary', *The Guardian*, 30 Nov 2018, https://www.theguardian. com/global-development/2018/nov/30/ sentinelese-tribe-who-killed-americanare-peace-loving-say-anthropologists, (accessed 6 July 2020). 5. S. Shapin, A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth Century England, University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 36. to colonised groups, colonised societies would – usually under duress – take part in the production, transmission and utilisation of new knowledges<sup>6</sup>. Of course, these ideas do not diminish that all empires relied at their core on the use of violence or at least the threat of it, to coerce societies to adapt.

An important point here is the identity of cultures in relation to the local and the global in the colonial era after 1800. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton talk about a race towards nationhood that was somehow undeniable, irreversible, and inevitable under empire<sup>7</sup>. Empires fought each other over sovereignty, strategic advantage, resources, but also cultural influence – what could be seen as control of the dominant global imaginary. The insistence of national identities and borders, imposed and resisted during the colonial period, had a profound impact on cultural and political organisation, on national imaginaries and imperial fantasies. The creation of the identities of nation states, and the spaces in between – mutually comprehensible, and grey areas – may be critical in understanding the formation of the global imaginary, and in turn what is *commonly believed*<sup>8</sup>.

In addition to socio-political strategies, we might consider the effect of empires spatially, as a kind of *cartographic imagination* that was central to re-imagining *the global* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, challenging and reforming global cultural formations<sup>9</sup>. Technologies such as world maps had a powerful effect on the spatial imagination

6. D. Turnbull, Masons, Tricksters and Cartographers, London, Routledge, 2000, p. 20.

7. T. Ballantyne and A. Burton, 'Empires and the Reach of the Global', in E.S. Rosenberg (ed.), A World Connecting, Massachusetts, The Belknap Press, 2012, p. 285. 8. Of course, non-state identities also prevailed internationally during this era: discussions of class, religion, gender politics and morality all ran rampant across wide, sometimes global expanses. They echoed in and around empires and the emergence of the nation states, contributing to globally-subscribed imaginaries.

9. T. Ballantyne and A. Burton, pp. 347-351.

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of cultures that had their geographies and histories rewritten. It uprooted colonised groups, forcing journeys of minds and bodies into altered, or entirely new and unforeseen locations<sup>10</sup>.

Imagination projecting into *other* spaces is as old as human imagination itself, but something occurred during the colonial period after 1800 that inferred a narrative matching up to the fantasy of an *age of reason*.

# The Great Exhibitions

The imperial era promised order and progress – often violently – towards 'rationalised expressions of globalism'. It was a time of mass media communication and entertainment offering spectacle, and the evolution of 'emotional knowledges' later styled as *popular culture*<sup>11</sup>.

An obsession among imperial subjects was collections that represented global human cultural diversity, both as science and as entertainment. But, processing and ordering these material collections invariably transcended geographical specificity and even inferred universal commonalities – such as religious faith – even as they sought differences and the 'exotic'. Imperial museums and societies were essential knowledge-producing institutions in rationalizing ever-newly encountered margins. These forms of collection and exhibition were at once full of fantasy and bureaucracy.

The Great Exhibition of 1851<sup>12</sup> was an exemplar of the many World Fairs showcasing imperial globalism and *relatable universalism*. In her essay 'Transnational Currents in a Shrinking World,' Emily S. Rosenberg suggests that world

10. D. Turnbull, p. 20. 11. E.S. Rosenberg 'Transnational Currents in a Shrinking World', in E.S. Rosenberg (ed.), A World Connecting, Massachusetts, The Belknap Press, 2012, p. 821. 12. Held at the Crystal Palace in London, UK, in 1851 and among the first of the 'World Fairs'. fairs were ordained by empire, put forward multiple, often personality-driven interpretations and by no means progressed a singular global perspective. Despite this, projected imaginaries of the peoples and histories of colonies and prospective colonies, blended images of new nations and cultures forming nations with expressions of universalism – aiming to make them relatable to a wide spectrum of colonial subjects<sup>13</sup>. This was combined with projections of fantasy, spectacle, and the *exotic* in a harmonious offering of differences – little of which came from the voices of those being projected upon.

The fairs were hugely influential in generating imaginaries of the places they depicted. This increasingly networked era was formed of homogenisation and differentiation, not opposites but imaginative counterparts operating in creative tension with each other. 1851 could be seen as a fantasy of harmonised cultural differences under one roof; imagining a vast colonial area that stretched outwards through fantastical past and future colonies<sup>14</sup>.

Even as fairs emerged to showcase their host cities or countries – mostly in the West – a major theme was a fantasy of universal peace, as much as of nationalism and of the hierarchies of the imperial era. While the fairs were not actually the instigators of global human advancement they purported to be, they were at least the broad models for visions of Western and later international progress widely adopted, at least before WWI.

While world fairs allowed for comprehension of transnational ideas and optimistic universalism, they could not be presented without the bias of their hosts, and could even reveal colonial aspirations; such as the racial hierarchy displays of US World Fairs after 1853, which preceded land grabs in South America, Hawaii and the Philippines. Racialisation of displays in US World Fairs also endorsed segregations at home, such as the Jim Crow laws from 1870, with Afro-American presenters being excluded from displays where they might express their own narratives.

In fact, far from creating a sense of universalism for audiences, many luminaries of 1851 like Karl Marx and William Morris despised the World Fairs as unrepresentative or vulgar, highlighting competing visions of a global future that could be interpreted from the displays, or resisted. But their objections did little to quell the popularity of imagining distant places and *Others*.



Image: The Foreign Department, viewed towards the transept, coloured lithograph, 1851, Ackermann (printer), V&A. The interior of the Crystal Palace in London during the Great Exhibition of 1851. Source: www.collections.vam.ac.uk. Author: J. McNeven.

#### Forerunning Knowledges

Many authors of social world-geography of the period after 1800 – referenced in this essay – talk about colonised peoples becoming newly connected to other cultures, across those empires. This *interconnected knowledge* may have blended with – or been resisted by – forerunning knowledges, based on previous interconnected regional, or even extant global networks. Many of these previously formed transnational networks, for instance in many parts of Africa under European and Ottoman rule, continued to operate under colonial supervision, or plied ancient trades and information routes in spite of it.

The idea of forerunning knowledges is something that the European and Asian transnational empires were very familiar with at home, having themselves been subjects of numerous ancient empires and forerunning civilisations since prehistory. Even when an empire fell, its fragmented cultural networks were a resource to what followed, meaning information and trading routes, like the spice route for example, existed outside of the lifespans of dynasties to meet other cultural needs. When inheriting and reforming cultural elements, the *new* order might pick and choose from those forerunning cultural materials, constructing suitable political myths and reforming projected imaginaries, racism being prevalent among these continuations.

Marlon James has said that fantasy is an essential part of creating civilisation, even today. That when you encounter something that you can't comprehend, you reach for history and the writings of your culture or that of your neighbours; and if that can't explain what you are experiencing, then of course you're going to reach for fantasy to explain it<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>15.</sup> M. James, Tolkien Lecture; Our Myths, Our Selves [online video], Tolkien Lecture on Fantasy Literature, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=jV2bysurBds, (accessed 14 August 2019).

Fantasy is also an essential *glue* that allows cultural ideas to become amalgamated, for connectivity and equivalences to be pieced together and agreed upon, or to be resisted.

Under the violence of Western imperial rationalism brought to much of the globe – also adopted in Japanese and Ottoman colonies – colonised peoples were put into pressure cookers of national identity. To explain the intense processes of homogenisation and differentiation going on within colonies – and at the hearts of empires amongst the working classes – groups and peoples reacted by generating their own national identities and nationalist narratives. At the same time, fantasies and national narratives were being projected onto them from elsewhere. There is also, of course, the pivotal roles of newspapers, telegraph, radio reportage, railway, and early cinema in producing 'imagined communities' that were influential on both the creation of the national *self* and the Other<sup>16</sup>.

What is interesting here is that nationalist regimes that appeared as empires disintegrated after 1900, drew upon common sets of images, objects, symbols, narratives and political structures. These had, at least in part, arrived with the imperial technologies of transport and communication, and with the exported European idea of *nation* itself<sup>17</sup>.

Combinations of forerunning knowledges, colonial fantasies and the socio-political desires of new nations had a huge impact on imaginaries being projected both outwards and inwards. Considering 'what have the Romans ever done for us?'<sup>18</sup> might help contextualise some of the commonly held beliefs and cultural narratives of contemporary Britons or wider Europeans. But, the influence of forerunning

16. B. Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London, Verso, 1991, p. 6.

17. T. Ballantyne and A. Burton, p. 389.

18. This British-centric reference to Monty Python's 'Life of Brian' (1979) is itself a projected imaginary of the Middle East, by White British male comedians. knowledges that were systematically destroyed in the colonial era, are harder to account for. When colonial regimes encountered places and cultures that were geographically isolated before the colonial era – and social or political systems didn't match European models – the very existence of indigenous groups could be conveniently ignored by applying the mandate of *terra nullius*, or land unclaimed.

#### 1989

It was a year of vast cultural upheavals and the end of many far-reaching political systems. Soviet-style Communism, which had offered many nations an alternative postcolonial cultural system, had seemingly failed its globalising mission. In the years following 1945, many previously colonial territories had become nation states, and some colonised peoples had regained national and cultural selfdetermination. But for commonwealth countries like Australia – that might never be entirely disentangled from the story of white Australian settlers, or be allowed to seek independent First Nation governance – the cultural imaginary of its First Nations peoples remained complicated and, after much suppression, fragmentary.

In 1989, Tracey Moffatt created a surrealist art film entitled Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy<sup>19</sup>. At times confronting and at others dream-like, it portrays an Aboriginal woman caring for an elderly White Australian. It takes as its own projected imaginaries a daughter character appropriated from the 1955 movie Jedda<sup>20</sup> (Australia's first colour film) and the archetypal landscapes of early twentieth century Arrente painter Albert Namatjira<sup>21</sup>, to talk about Aboriginal experience and colonial legacy. The film creates new imaginaries of indigenous

19. Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy, Director T. Moffatt, Australia, 1989. 20. Jedda, Director C. Chauvel, Australia, 1955. 21. Albert Namatjira 1902–1959, born Elea Namatjira of the Western Arrernte group. experience by appropriating other Australian cultural moments of the recent past. It is both surreal and sparse. Artificial staging, moveable sets and hand-painted backdrops are evocative of the language used to describe Australia in the imperial spatial imagination, as vast and empty and as yet undrawn, existing more in fantasy.



Tracey Moffatt, *Night cries: A rural tragedy* (1989), colour 35mm film transferred to video, sound 17 min. Accession Number 1999.25. Department Contemporary Art. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased, 1999. © Tracey Moffatt, courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery.

It also well illustrates comments about Australian arts performance by Richard Gough as written several years later, about "a psychology of edges, of enforced comings and goings; of 'empty spaces' at the heart (out-back), sites for projected imaginaries and dis/appearances."<sup>22</sup> These places, of course,

22. R. Gough, '1997', Performance Research: a Journal of Performing Arts, Vol. 2 No. 3, Autumn. Taylor & Francis Online. 1997.

were not empty. The effect of colonialism in Australia could be seen as the attempt to hollow-out a culture from its location, or to obscure it altogether.

As has already been said, the fantasy that Tracey Moffatt offers us is artifice itself, because that is the imaginary that was constructed for the Australian people across the racial and social spectrum. It is also emblematic of the projected imaginary that has been exported globally.

Places like Australia, inhabited or not, were a cultural paradigm of the imperial engine, under the fantasy of *terra nullius*, or land unclaimed. This colonial fantasy contrived that the peoples that existed in Australia claimed no possession of the land they inhabited, nor did they intend to develop it along European models, and thus would *benefit* from imperial *governance*. It imagined there were no interconnections between the First Nations of Australia and the rest of the world, but it also ignored the regional and national interconnections that existed before the British Empire, or the First Nations of Australia grouping<sup>23</sup>. Acknowledging this violence is essential, as is accepting that whether First Nations peoples wanted to be aware of global culture and co-opted into that cultural production or not, they are now.

# Projected Imaginaries, Rephrasing the Past and Present

Louis Pérez Jr. has observed that crucial to what we now call *projected imaginaries* of urban Cuba since the 1930s, is the way visiting artists, photographers, and writers looked to juxtapose the foreign with the familiar, the old with the

23. The term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or the person's specific cultural group (their mob), is often preferred, though the terms First Nations of Australia, First Peoples of Australia and First Australians are also increasingly common, with the term indigenous Australian becoming less common. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous\_Australians (accessed 24 August 2020).

new and the act of being abroad 'without being away, 'thus enabling 'risk-free access to the exotic'<sup>24</sup>. Terms like *projected imaginary* and *colonial fantasy* are retrospectively applied to cultural encounters of the past like this and in many of the examples of the Great Exhibitions given earlier. New cultural encounters, projections and fantasies still take place today, and remain entangled with colonial processes and histories.

In his 2012 paper on cinematic Liverpool, Les Roberts exemplifies these ideas, connecting them through the languages of Saussure and Baudrillard. 'The fetishization of place and space... is the product of a semiotics of attraction that channels a multiplicity of desires, motivations and narrative discourses. Locations and landmarks become over-determined signifiers that both conceal and express the projected imaginaries of the tourist and site-seer'25. He has previously suggested that for cinematic audiences it is the capacity of a location to match up to its cinematic experience, that affirms its authenticity<sup>26</sup>. In other words, cultural fantasies in film can appear more compelling, and obscure actual experiences. As such, projected imaginaries and colonial fantasies still clearly play a significant role in imagining and translating the cultural narratives of others, and of ourselves. Referring again to Marlon James; fantasy is an essential part of creating civilisation, even today<sup>27</sup>.

# Conclusions

Taking the example of 1851 and the other World Fairs, the formation of the interconnected global state might be better described as a transnational network of differentiated

24. J.C. Kent, Aesthetics and the Revolutionary City: Real and imagined Havana, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 16.

25. L. Roberts, Film, Mobility and Urban Space: A Cinematic Geography of Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2012, p. 36. 26. L. Roberts, 'Projecting Place: Location Mapping, Consumption and Cinematographic Tourism', in R. Koeck & L. Roberts (ed.), *The City and the Moving Image: Urban Projections*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 184.

27. M. James, Tolkien Lecture; Our Myths, Our Selves [online video].

commonalities. As such, a global fantasy of consensus, easy translation and cultural comprehensibility that was perpetuated at that time, was compelling; but largely obscured vast numbers of people and the violence that brought us many common themes and concepts – such as the European idea of nation itself.

Tracey Moffatt demonstrates in Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy, what has been lost or fragmented in the development of national and transnational imaginaries, and how both fantasy and reappropriation – of existing imaginaries – become vital tools to cultural survival for First Nations groups; in countries that may never be truly postcolonial.

Global cultural networks after 1800 proved multi-vocal yet coherent for coloniser and colonised subjects, helped along with social and spatial technologies such as the telegraph and world maps. Even under imperial cartographic and cultural dominion, resistances and subsequent nations and nationalisms, transnational networks continually exemplified differentiated commonalities – a process of simultaneous homogenization and differentiation. Not cultural opposites, but imaginative counterparts operating in creative tension with each other, to lay down new global pathways that projected imaginaries and colonial fantasies would continue to travel upon.

Forerunning knowledges and extant networks were a resource to what have become contemporary global networks. But again, it was a process of endless rewrites to get to the blended and entangled version of *consensus* humanity has inherited. Fantasy has been an essential *glue* allowing new, forerunning, suppressed and fragmented cultural ideas to become amalgamated, for connectivity and equivalences to be pieced together and agreed upon, or be resisted. Combinations of forerunning knowledges, colonial fantasies and the socio-political desires of new nations, had a huge impact on imaginaries being projected both outwards, and inwards too.

In relation to globally projected imaginaries, transnational networks have also disseminated common propagandist techniques, encouraged popular narrative arcs to national stories, and integrated cultural technologies from the TV soap to the selfie, influencing all but the most evasive of human cultures. Similar to the interrelationships of empire and colonised subject, colonial fantasies have shaped the imagination of the contemporary world, as has resistance to them. Through simultaneous relationships of consensus and dissensus; projected imaginaries continue to be formed, and are widely – if not globally – adopted.

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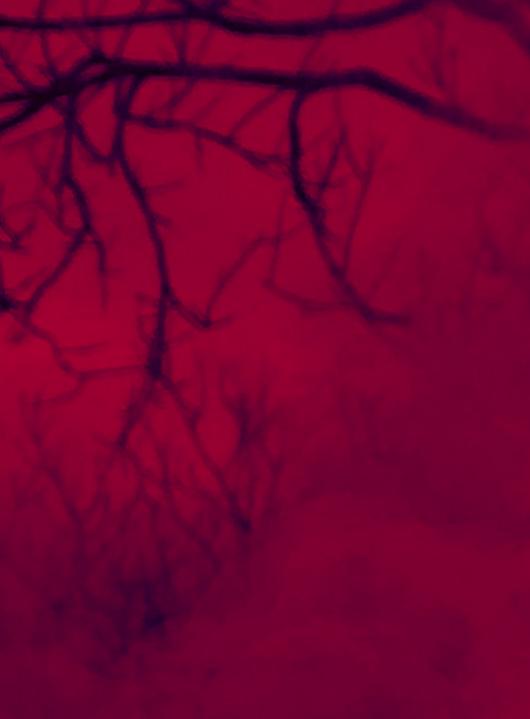
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Towards a Vision of Intra-National *Omonoia*: Notes from a cancelled lecture

Alexandra Papademetriou Manos Bazanis



The day is Wednesday, April 23 d of 2020.

In Göteborgs Konsthall's main hall, a foldable table has been set up with a chair, a microphone, a glass of water, and a small remote control. In the background, a projector illuminates the walls of the exhibition space with the blue screen of death: 'NO SOURCE FOUND'. To the left of the scene, a softly lit display of archival, bureaucratic paraphernalia is the only other source of light.

The lecture is set to start at 18:50 according to the exhibition programme; at 19:00 the lecturer is yet to show, and the members of the audience are growing increasingly restless in their uncomfortable plastic seats.

MANOS, who has been sipping coffee at the fika table in the next room all this time, finally enters the main hall at 19:02. He is wearing a ratty, ill-fitting brown suit without a tie. He appears irate and impatient, eyeing the projection indignantly. Finally, he reaches the table, looks back up again to the projection and audibly clears his throat.

> MANOS: I am sorry, can anyone fix this mess? I can't start my presentation without a proper projection. Thank you.

The projector is connected and the first slide of a presentation loads. It reads, in bold

Character Profile Greek uni professor (tenured)

Project arthority in posture and speech, condescend at every opportunity black capital letters, 'GENERAL PLAN FOR THE CULTURAL CONSOLIDATION OF THE BALKAN PENINSULA'.

long pause, enough for them to squirm a litele



MANOS: Better now. I would like to welcome everyone to what I believe will prove to be a most interesting and highly informative presentation of a truly monumental project. But first, I think it would be necessary to introduce myself. My name is Dr. Manos Bazanis and I am a distinguished professor at the University, where I have been mending young brains for the last 15 years. (uncomfortably wide grin and pause). My main research topics concern, among others, the subversive ecologies of supranational belonging, re-imagining the indigenous commons as a post-Darwinian evolution model, the lectotypification of modern Balkan history and the interdisciplinary dialogue between State, science and the arts. [extremely self-assured] I am the recipient of many awards and honours for my original research, such as the ? Joachim Ussek Lifetime Award and the Iron Cross of Transnistria, the full list of these you can easily find in my curriculum vitae. (small pause) But most importantly, I am the current Head of the Perpetual Committee for the Cultural Consolidation of the Balkan Peninsula, an interdisciplinary, interBalkan task

force first convened in 2018, a quarter of a century after the miserable, though expected, failure of the First Bureau for the Cultural Consolidation of the Balkan Peninsula, back in 1993. Slide!

MANOS looks at the projection, brow furrowed.

MANOS: I said sliiiiiide, are you deaf!?

The next slide finally loads. It is a grainy, B&W photograph from the dingy offices of the aforementioned Bureau. The eyes and mouths of the office workers have been crossed out with red MS Paint.

> MANOS: Finally. Now, where was I? Oh yeah. That farcical Bureau. You see, the only reason I mention this obscure organisation is to help you understand in how dire circumstances in which the committee was first assembled. Most of those working there were overpaid civil servants with no interest in culture, whose duties began and ended in occasionally preparing memos for the perpetually absent big heads. The utter lack of a basic understanding of the Balkan condition, much less of a unifying vision or even some honest intentions, was truly horrifying. As the years wore on the internal meetings gradually devolved into shouting matches over UNESCO's Monuments Fund and the

spir their

Speak with contempt

emphasis

too muchy maybe?

popularity of Bulgarian choirs. Finally, the war mercifully brought all this to an end. (Pauses, gently smiles as if reminiscing) And they say Milošević did nothing good. In any case, when we established the Committee twenty-five years later, we swore to not repeat the mistakes of the past and to uphold. protect and develop the vision for a common Balkan identity. Two years later, thanks to the perseverance of the Committee, and the kind invitation of your most esteemed institution, the fruits of our hard work are seeing the lights of publicity for the first time. day

MANOS pauses, then looks condescendingly at the audience.

speak with slow assurance tog on swedish white -guile and dias poric

MANOS: You don't understand anything of this, do you? But of course you don't, no need to apologise. You were brought up in the bliss of ignorance. But do not worry, I have already provided for this. Sliiiiide!

goild The next slide loads, showing a geometrical pattern made out of words.

MANOS: When we, the first callers of the Perpetual Committee, convened for our virginal assembly, we univocally agreed on constructing a call-to-arms manifesto true to our vision for a new, unified Balkan civilization. Many ideas were brought up that drew inspiration from the deep history of the untainted and untamed Balkan mind, heart and soul. Thus, the <u>Seven Tenets of Balkanness</u> were born. I will try to explain them to you as clearly and simply as humanly possible. Your full attention is essential. Sliide!

The next slide loads. It is a collage of old B&W photos depicting shepherds, traditional cafés  $\lambda$  a square and chimpanzees.

Lafaha

MANOS: First comes Camaraderie-as-Clan, the pure feeling of companionship amongst your brethren. We embrace its unadulterated, tribal essence and we turn it upside down. Our pride is no more the dividing pestilence of scheming imperialism, but being-as-belonging in a community of shared time, space and dreams, fragmented yet united against all odds. We find ourselves in the face of our neighbours, who we met again and again through sharing our spilled blood from the sharp knives of tyrants and marauders. We have nothing to fight for between us, for we own everything and nothing, seminomadic subjects reclaiming our lives through the intimacy of spaces-concepts such as the post-Ottoman kafanas, a place of horizontal relations and shared colonial trauma.

-right-lipped

Speak with increasing pride and fanfare for this segment

peak pride here, full chere

deflare suddenly

Us Greeks have a wonderful word for that, (omonoia', meaning peace and comradeship between the people of a place. Sadly, the word is now associated with one of old-time Athens' most famous squares, now decayed, polluted and filled with vagrant migr... ehrm, never mind. Sliiide!

The next slide loads. It is an overlay of old propaganda posters depicting happy workers.

MANOS: Second, honest work. We live in an age where our precious Balkan sweat has lost its value, where we fly aimlessly from one unfulfilling job to another while we worry ourselves to death. We produce, we cater and we curate our agonizing extinction into mindless drones, nondescript robots taking their place in the New Order. At the same time, we allow others to claim that we are lazy slackers, corrupted drains of public funds, social parasites in an imaginary dollhouse of poor, innocent Europeans. Enough with all that! No more failures in the hands of others. We want work for ourselves and our Balkan community, not for the fantasies of a life in a manicured suburb Cothenburg of Berlin, Paris or Stockholm. We want to feel useful again, utilising our cunning minds and dexterous hands to work wonders. No more hypocrisy and office etiquette: better civilized peasants than

increasing righteous indignation

beasts in suits and ties. We want to get our hands dirty and our boots muddy again. Sliiiide!

The next slide loads. It is the picture of a muddy field with an hagiography of the Ascension of Jesus Christ superimposed on it.

> MANOS: So, So[i/u]1, or returning to our true roots, our humic humanity. It is now widely accepted that the first farming societies on European soil were located in the early Neolithic Balkan Peninsula. At that time, the rest of early Europeans were still collecting acorns. Now, I have nothing against that, as we Balkans know acorns are extremely nutritious nuts, especially when fed to pigs. As animal and plant species have acclimatized in their habitats, evolving alongside them, so did we. Our fertile soil has nourished our bodies and souls, and we fed it back with our seeds of care. Even at times where our ancestors were made serfs in their own land, their crops stolen and their animals slaughtered, they always knew how to reap nourishment from it, always surviving. This is wh we Balkans share one of the most ancient DNA markers, standing rocks against the crushing waves of invading hordes and genetic drift. No need for Monsanto-Bayer's GMOs and cancerous agrochemicals. Our roots penetrate

is this

shift to pride

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deeply in the indigenous ground, reaching the graves of our ancestors. Nothing that grows here can escape our shared heritage: from Santorini tomatoes to Bulgarian sheep, we cultivate our identity in every field and pasture. Sliide!

The next slide loads. It contains an illustration of an extended family from a children's schoolbook, as well as a recent photo from a village celebration. A row of derelict apartment buildings and a straw hut with solar panels can also be seen.

clear and herel voice for this segment

SHORT PAUSE



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MANOS: Four, we propose the total abolition of any distinction between family, society and nation, and the restoration of the archetypical Home of every Balkan person through the lens of modern commons theory and praxis. Instead of imprisoning our desires in the parallel cells of modern institutionalized socialization, we dare to disrupt the naturalized legacy of fragmented belongings, letting them roam in a libidinal Hadron Collider. Public and private spaces dissolve into each other, as the traditional care for the neighbor becomes a driving force of social, behavioural and infrastructural change. We take inspiration from the communal cloisters of Byzantine monasteries, the bare, proud lives of the Akritai and the

societal engineering genius of themata, and we modernize them through the lens of such examples as social housing and alternative farming communities. Thus, a new conceptual and material space is born, inaugurating a paradigm shift in the way we understand and experience our everyday lives and drawing us even closer to the accomplishment of an authentic Balkan sense of belonging. *emplasis* Sliiiide!

The next slide loads. It is a slightly glitched and off-cropped collage of parliamental  $\gamma$ buildings crossed out with big red X's shaping into a path-like logo. A huge number 4 is placed in the centre, and the collage is sprinkled with many flashing GIFs of nuclear bombs.

> MANOS: It is true that modern representative democracy has become a dreadful shadow of its ancient precedent, a warped construction of mass manipulation by the elite. I believe that every last one of you in this room can wholeheartedly agree that both the left and the right have failed to offer a working system for us, the Balkan people, something reflected in all the bloody wars we fought between us for centuries. I will not even mention anarchy, which is one of the biggest evils the West has unleashed, and sadly the so-called

Sombre and assured tone

exubrant, gradually speak faseet

Third Way theories have been proven to be nothing more than the propaganda of gradually raise rolume of the Count W Russian oligarchs, who of course have no place in our Balkan homelands. Thus, the doctrine of the Fourth Way to banish the degeneracy of modern political life and urge Balkan citizens to leave behind the idiocy to become energetic co-shapers of the new Union. We propose the establishment of citizen assemblies for the trial of corrupt politicians, the mandatory enrolment of every adult into working groups, the banishment of every reactive and reformist element and the abolition of any distinction between the Union. its authorities and its citizens. Sliiiiiiide!



The next slide loads. It is a chaotic assembly of SEM depictions of bacteria and fungi in a background of blurred photos depicting feasts, broken plates, yogurt in clay pots and wine cellars.

deep breath

MANOS: Now, let's move to something truly magical.

A strange glint appears in MANOS' eyes, the corners of his mouth twitching upwards.

> MANOS: I believe all of you have heard about the health benefits of consuming probiotics as those found in traditional

fermented daily and vegetable products. Taking inspiration from their deep resonance in our shared Balkan genes, as well as Julia Kristeva's famous utterance about the collective unconscious of non-homogenized yogurt, we propose the concept of Kefi-r. It is a portmanteau of Keffir, a probiotic culture whose premise is built in ritual sharing, and Kefi, a Balkan word describing a pan-Balkanic sense of boundless joy and well-being through collective bacchanalization. At the same time we feel obliged to include, along with Kephi, the other two points of the Golden Triangle of Phi: Philotimo and Philoxenia, words infamously untranslatable to non-Balkans, such as Swedes. At the same time, keeping in touch with the latest scientific innovations, we channel our understanding of this novel concept through the well-described phenomena of microbial quorum sensing and gut endosymbiosis, which serve both as illustrative analogies and macroscopical axioms of our exceptional biological unity and instinctual, almost telepathic, wisdom; a Balkan holobiont if I may say so. And, as modern integrational, holistic life sciences teach us. in order for this holobiont to remain potent, robust, virile and healthy the accumulating toxins inside it have to be neutralized and purged in a timely and orderly

speak fast

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fashion, while its sensory nerves remain stimulated. (grinning widely now) As an almost laughing (Albanian proverb puts it bluntly, 'Life is a bloody mess, so why not get ourselves bloody as well?' Sliiiiiiiide!

> 10 The next slide loads. It is an extremely  $eer \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}$ cut-out collage of Orthodox hagiographies and Ancient Greek statues, their eyes hollowed out, superimposed with Lovecraftian pictures of galaxies, octopuses and broccoli. The entire slide is overtaken by text of seemingly random words in a small font.

twitching MANOS: (elated to the point of hysteria) Isn't all this truly, heart-breakingly beautiful. It is the first time in the history of our species that such a total and illuminated plan for a true Union between people, societies and nations has been suggested in such marvellous detail. The cultural, political and scientific world is finally taking notice, and you are now the first to have your ears graced by our unifying message of supracultural unification. Now, follow me raise and shout 'Oh Balkan Spirit, we rejoice with you'!

> The audience remains unmoved and silent for two minutes. MANOS abruptly stops smiling.

> > MANOS: (ranting loudly) Don't get all cold-blooded and superior to me, you

undeserving brats. I know you can feel the flames of the coming wildfires - our Balkan brethren taking revenge from West and East alike! But noooo! You won't acknowledge our rightful place as the Chalice of Wisdom and Authenticity. But you know what, it's fiiiiine. We still have the Two-Headed Eagle, glowing in his mystic, golden armor, shining brighter than the Sun and guiding us to accomplish our true mission and calling. When the hawks and crows go in for the final kill, we will repel them, as we have repelled hordes of vicious barbarians. marauders and other subhuman invaders from our sacred territory! Let us be, or face our Balkan fury!

growling

trembling with rapture

ALEXANDRA laughs nervously.

shouldn't this character be introduced?

MANOS: (screaming) Does anything of this seem like a joke to you, you Nordic punk? DOES IT? Who paid you to disrupt my presentation?! Was it Soros, eh, that undying reptilian bastard?! NEITHER I NOR THE PERPETUAL COMMITTEE WILL BE SUBJECTED TO THIS ABHORRENT SACRILEGE!

He furiously storms off the scene, only to return shortly after. He then moves dangerously close to the display.

MANOS: (violently screaming) THIS IS

roaring



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU MESS WITH A TRUE BALKAN, YOU FUCKING TWATS!

He savagely tears the display's lid off, then he starts tearing through the various documents and paraphernalia with his hands and teeth, wordlessly screeching and growling nonsense. After he has reduced everything to tatters and splinters, he finally stops, coughing and panting.

MANOS: (sounding hollow and broken) You know what, you don't deserve this, and most importantly, I do not deserve this. You spoiled, pretentious pricks can all rot to oblivion for all that I care. Consider this presentation finished.

Extremely awkward pause of a few seconds.

MANOS: (resigned) Any questions?

Silence.

MANOS: (bitterly, to himself) Thought so.

MANOS LEAVES THE ROOM.

A Clockwork Mouse

James Duffy

What is a clockwork mouse? How has it been constructed? Why does it remain clockwork? Using cultural histories more fully explored in an earlier essay entitled, 'The Anticlockwork Mouse: Locating Human Identity in Analogies of the Mouse', this work allegorises constructions of post-1945 white masculinity. It narrativises histories of the clockwork mouse – in its interactions with time, capitalism, war and popular culture – to explore what the perpetuation of 'Western' traditions may do or may have done to identity construction. Ultimately, this work is an experiment in using analogy and allegory to begin formulating alternative mice, mutated by human culture, imagining where they may have come from and, how these imaginaries may enable disruptions to perceptions of selfhood and presence in the world.

> "looked very much like a rat/mouse in every way" Stuart Little – E.B. White

"What is this queer enclosure of time we accept so uncritically as a 'lifetime"? The Conquest of Time – H.G. Wells

The clockwork mouse was a toy; a pastiche of a living organism. 'Outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality'<sup>1</sup>. The one I have is made of tin and has a separate key for winding. It is activated by inserting a key into a hole on its back and turning it clockwise. If then placed upon a surface, the clockwork mouse will skate on three tiny wheels that protrude from its abdomen. The key will turn anti-clockwise, slowing as it reaches its original point and the clockwork mouse will cease moving. This is what, we as humans, would call a destiny. Momentary lapses of automatism. Otherwise, deep prolongations of powerlessness. *Inanimated*. Inert or Dead.

<sup>1.</sup> M. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias And Heterotopias', Architecture Mouvement Continuité, October 1984, p. 4, https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf, (accessed 14 July 2020).

Donna Haraway describes the traditions of 'Western'<sup>2</sup> science and politics as 'the tradition of racism, maledominant capitalism, the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as a resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other.'<sup>3</sup> 'Western' popular culture has been produced by and seen through a white masculine lens, perpetuating these traditions. It is a lead spoon, feeding ideologies, in the hand of the *bigwhiteman*.

There are white men and then there are white men. White is not the colour of skin. It is the colour of robes, of makeup. Of office shirts and paper, walls and barrier tape. It is the colour of eyes, of teeth, of phlegm from the mouth that has been talking so long, it has coated everything. White men, for the most part, are an unorganised rabble, aware only of what could be. What was and what is? Not now. I have to work! In the main, the damage of white men is performed through passivity and lethargy, and an unquestioned faith that their fathers were always right. There are those, however, who yearn to be a man and 'prove' it<sup>4</sup>. To wield their bodies over other bodies. In them you see philistinism. You see voices raised and fingers pointed. Spilt pints and belches. Don't engage because you don't know what you're talking about. These white men are in the laity of another power and are striving for ordination. Let us not forget those white men who fight the power, who try to contain all of man's history in the five golden words. Sorry and thank you brandished hopefully, but these words are always soaked in power too. All white men have an infantile desire to be performers, to be heard and loved. What's more, they ache to say something that means something, even at the

2. The formatting of 'Western' is to follow Haraway's own formatting.

3. D. Haraway, A Cyborg Manifesto, University of Minnesota, 1985, p. 5. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/ currentstudents/undergraduate/ modules/, (accessed 14 July 2020). 4. V. Solanas, SCUM Manifesto, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Olympia Press, 1968, p. 1-2 http://kunsthallezurich.ch/sites/ default/files/scum\_manifesto.pdf, (accessed 9 August 2020).

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risk of it meaning anything. They are individuals and there are many like them.

But there is a mutation in the midst of white men, an inflated hydrogen zeppelin casting shadows in the morning. It is a danger to everybody. A predator, consumer, con artist. He is the *bigwhiteman*. The big man/big dick/big piece. The *big I am*. He embodies history as tradition, and as authority<sup>5</sup>. He holds the power of men, yet he always yearns for more men and more power. He perpetuates whiteness, in its history, traditions and lens. Beyond the *bigwhiteman*, is another, more manlier and whiter than the one before. It goes all the way to the top, and they are all winding up their clockwork mice.

The clockwork mouse is still a toy. What options does it have? It does not know of other mice nor can it comprehend implications of histories upon itself. Does it know where it is? It is in, what Foucault would describe as, a 'crisis heterochrony'<sup>6</sup>. Normally reserved, as he explains in his essay, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, for 'individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc. In our society, these crisis heterotopias are persistently disappearing, though a few remnants can still be found'<sup>7</sup>.

5. Alain de Benoist, quoting Hannah Arendt, writes that '…if past is transmitted as tradition, it has authority. If authority has historic credibility, it becomes tradition.' See A. de Benoist, 'On identity', *Telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary*, 2004, pp.9-64.

6. Foucault actually uses the term heterotopia, referring to space, rather than heterochrony which refers to time. Heterochrony appears later on in the text. See M. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias And Heterotopias', Architecture Mouvement Continuité, October 1984.

7. This sentence is in reference specifically to 'so called primitive societies'. It is a problematic term which Foucault also finds trouble with. Moreover, the examples given are also problematic but refer to these people within societies where these liminal or heterotopic events would incur removal from mainstream or normative majorities. Although this is not delved into in Foucault's text. there are more detailed explanations in Victor Turner's essay (developed almost simultaneously to Foucault's Heterotopias). See M. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias And Heterotopias', Architecture Mouvement Continuité, October 1984.

The clockwork mouse has shifted into this crisis. Meanwhile, the *bigwhiteman* is in the last throes of grabbing power, pussy, and cultures. He looks back at his progress as a means to go on, as the world changes tack. Fixated on the topplings from pedestals, he is coming to terms with his own necessity, realising it is no longer all about him.

The clockwork mouse is a toy. No longer is it made of metals like tin, but plastic. It has been made cheap and brittle. Devalued and easily supplanted. The 'world constituted by durable objects has been replaced by single-use products conceived for immediate obsolescence.'<sup>8</sup> Made in the new plantations of surplus. Imported from the East in their droves along the ancient paths of their biological descendants. Double production! Factories like charnel houses, bodies losing 'the last traces of individuality'<sup>9</sup>.

The clockwork mouse has gone the way of the Happy Meal toy. A plastic toy ripped from a plastic bag only to be thrown into another. Landfills like black holes where *stuff* sits on the edge. Each person, toy, trash. Furrowed in and out of the earth, forever placed nowhere.

The clockwork mouse is a toy, but a toy of 'anti-leisure'<sup>10</sup>. This is to say, the mouse is so much a part of work it cannot disconnect from work; so much a part of reality, it cannot transcend reality. A symbol of the liminal, 'diligently and laboriously between work and leisure'<sup>11</sup>. It was forged in the

8. V. Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology', *Rice Institute Pamphlet - Rice University Studies*, vol. 60, no. 3, 1974, p. 53-92. https://scholarship.rice.edu/ bitstream/handle/1911/63159/ article\_RIP603\_part4. pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, (accessed 14 July 2020). 9. M. Foucault, p 46-49. 10. Turner argues "leisure presupposes 'work': it is non-work, even an anti-work phase in the like of a person who also works. Anti-leisure and anti-work have the same definition because work and leisure, Turner argues, have merged. See V. Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology', *Rice Institute Pamphlet* -*Rice University Studies*, vol. 60, no. 3, 1974.

11. V. Turner, p. 53-92.

violence of the machine, from the shrapnel of war. Boystoys. Values ingrained by function. Our phantom limbs, in the form of mice, had consumed our ancient fields in moments. So we rubbed away at wood, vigorously fashioning through mechanical solidarity. But industry destroys work, as it does leisure, and what was left was tired wood, idleness and the clockwork mouse. A mouse with a key, a cure for deviation, a restriction to heterotopias of deviation. There is work in turning the key and the reward is the forgery of imagination. It is imagining a reality within the confines of one.

Where has it come from? Why was it created? Unknowing of a beginning, so the clockwork mouse instigated one in its own likeness. We create so we can imagine control, to function life. The clockwork mouse, on turning a key, will do the expected. Unless broken it will do this, without fail, every time. And now, it concocts the maker as much as the maker concocts it. Unaware of situatedness, it retains some control out of fear of losing all control; out of fear of another possessing all power. Holding onto control as if it were a destiny. Beguiling and addictive, power becomes a mutative compulsion. As a knee lays on a neck, a boot upon a chest, as a palm strikes a nose and a hand turns a key; power consumes all realities. The clockwork mouse is under a spell.

And what of those past rebellions? Misremembered. What of its transcendence? Too heavy. Mind, body and soul? Eroded. Designed to be dependent on time but fell unwittingly into being subjugated by it. Always running like clockwork, even in the reflection of its own entropy, even in the face of a 'future of no future'<sup>12</sup>. Like clockwork, it creates duration as much as duration creates it. The clockwork mouse cannot die in peace

<sup>12.</sup> K. Barad, 'Troubling Time/S And Ecologies Of Nothingness: Re-Turning, Re-Membering, And Facing The Incalculable', *New Formations*, no. 92, September 2017, p. 56-86. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/574dd51d62cd942085f12091/t/ 5c157cab1ae6cf4677819654/1544912043438/KarenBarad\_TroublingTime.pdf, (accessed 14 July 2020).

because even death has been monetised, but its key marks durations of death. Clockwork mice collectively counting down. At what point does the clockwork mouse sever its body from the key? At what point does it imagine other keyholes?

'Together with Derrida' and Barad, we might then say, 'Identity... can only affirm itself as identity to itself by opening itself to the hospitality of a difference from itself or of a difference with itself<sup>13</sup>. All together now!

Michel Foucault begins Of Other Spaces: Utopias And Heterotopias by describing 'the great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history... with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world'<sup>14</sup>. Masculinity has been altogether, up until rather recently, together. Fixated on ourselves and others, upstairs and downstairs. Of right and wrong, black and white; of then and now. The good, the bad and the ugly. The past, present and... These values have been ingrained, thus have been maintained. Implanted inside somewhere is the *bigwhiteman*. As I am all matter and all matter is me.

Foucault describes his own twentieth century as an 'epoch of space; of simultaneity'. No longer are we on the same 'skein' but on numerous fields of interconnectedness. Am I man or am I mouse? Both. Being is atomised. I must not think of the spacetime I inhabit, but the spacetime that inhabits me. Not the queerness I inhabit, but the queerness that inhabits me.

The clockwork mouse is a toy. It was a plaything, controlled and controlling. It subjugates and is subjugated by its histories, keeping it where it is. To break out, the clockwork

13. K. Barad. p. 82.

14. M. Foucault, p 46-49.

Duffy

mouse has only one route. To consume. Consume all that he has been manufactured from, all that he was. To ingest all of it 'like radiation: to take it into your gut, to feel it leach into your bones, mutate your innards, and reset your cellular clocks'<sup>15</sup>. To feel those hands upon its cogs and transform through touching. The mouse must succumb to oil, grease and blood on hands. It must listen; animate and dilate. Consume and be consumed too.

I glanced in the mirror, as Foucault demands, but it feels like glass. In it, the clockwork mouse has become something else. A concoction, a confusion. It can no longer be wound but it isn't broken either. What is the difference between how glass and mirror feel? An infinite plentitude of nothingness<sup>16</sup> but the place 'I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface'<sup>17</sup>. That space in there, out there, through there, moving through there. Liminal. A liminal. Aniliminal.

15. K. Barad, p. 82. 16. Barad articulates this as 'Indeed nothingness is an infinite plentitude, not a thing, but a dynamic of iterative re-opening that cannot be disentangled from what matter(s)'. See K. Barad, 'Troubling Time/S And Ecologies Of Nothingness: Re-Turning, Re-Membering, And Facing The Incalculable', *New Formations*, no. 92, September 2017, p. 82.

17. M. Foucault, p. 46-49.

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Ni Måste Namaste (You Must Namaste)

Chapter 2: The warrior

Kasra Seyed Alikhani

## **CHAPTER 2: The Warrior**

## [Int. YOGA CLASS - SUDDEN STILLNESS]

JULIA

...As if you're growing up from your feet to your legs.

All the way up to a warrior, great, arms in victory position, proudly!

#### [Int./Ext. APARTMENT WINDOW]

We are witnessing the rehearsal of a speech for the upcoming ground breaking ceremony of Sudden Hills. It is an opportunity to glimpse into the imagination of the minds that are envisioning the future of how we're supposed to live together in the city. As Julia and Larry practice some spontaneous dialogue to spice up the speech, we can gather that there is going to be a hell of a party. Larry moves on to more serious matters and gets carried away with emotion:

#### LARRY

Is it naive to believe that the young men only admired your fine new coat? just to notice that your wallet is missing? Is this the way we want it? To be strangers in our own city? Are we supposed to get used to living under constant threat? Without roots, without... JULIA Larry are you ok?

LARRY Should we say... No... Under constant threat!

JULIA There Larry, get yourself together.

LARRY And what about our children, oh God, our children!

JULIA There Larry, calm down. Breathe in through your nose.

*LARRY* Do you think Kamprad built IKEA to mess around and play the fool?

JULIA That's right, what did the coach say?

> *LARRY* He said, Larry...

JULIA Larry doesn't mess around...

JULIA and LARRY Larry doesn't mess around and play the fool.

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The couple are in fast forward motion, with wind in their hair and determination in their gaze. We soon discover it's an electric scooter that Larry has taken command of, but judging by the unbridled pride he exudes, one could imagine he tamed a wild horse. Julia, holding on to Larry from behind, keeps one hand free for her smoothie with the straw within sucking distance to nourish her heroic man.

As the couple arrive at their destination, staggering to a halt, a man hurriedly starts playing the trumpet. The organizer of the event curses the trumpet player next to him for playing ahead of cue. Not yet, he begs, only when the shovel digs the ground.

Sara Ahmed doesn't describe Whiteness as something essential, but as a category of experience that, through its very denial of being a category, becomes universal. Jeff Werner describes it as a dominant way of acting supported by society's power structures. Those who possess it often see themselves as individuals, driven by personal forces free from any categorization. But the arrival of difference can suddenly shift the focus towards what's been taken for granted. The White body becomes aware of itself and its universality becomes questioned. This exposure, not only to exterior difference, but the self as different can generate terrifying confusion.

# In These Times

Johanna Oskarsson



Reflecting over notes and events during the time span of March-June, 2020.

I don't even remember anything from September. It all melted together in a haze of what was being the guinea pigs of the master program in fine art. The Swedish sin; revisited.

It is peculiar how Sweden, the country of Jante<sup>1</sup>, and sin was at the frontline of criticism in this pandemic. How did we get here? In newspapers, national and international and online, I read that it is because of our lack of war experience. Not having to fight battles for our lives, made us too comfortable in handling crises.

The idea was good for the Swedish strategy, I guess, if we had been living in our old state of Jante, a place where shame is the ruler, and you are not supposed to think you are better than anyone else. Conform to your place.

But we did not. People have not been shamed enough. The self-image of Sweden has been shaken to the ground. That was what was said in 1986, when the prime minister was murdered:

Bilden av Sverige blev skakad i sina grundvalar.

We are now more shaken than before. Our great passports don't even mean anything anymore.

People were not able to conform enough; we are known for our rational cold distance.

Where did it go? Why do you sit next to me on the tram?

I find myself being in discomfort all the time, people are suddenly too close now.

1. Jantelagen was coined by the Danish-Norwegian author Aksel Sandemosse, but it is used in Sweden, by being an unwritten law that no one should believe that they are better than anyone else and live in conformity of the place where you are and not trying to be something better. It is put in place by social shame when people go outside of what is seen as the Swedish mentality.

# my plans

2020



'A version of the My plans Vs. 2020' Internet Meme, (Kyle MacLachlan played Paul Arteides in Dune and Agent Dale Cooper in Twin Peaks season three, both directed by David Lynch. Young Paul getting what is granted, good and noble. Dale Cooper; shattered, in constant flux, no idea what is in and out anymore.) Image source: https://www.instagram.com/p/ CAWnIPDg6Pa/?igshid=1c6na3196co11, (accessed 27 May 2020).

When humanity hit a critical fail

The situation in the world is what, in role-playing terms, is referred to as a *massive critical fail*. Every dice hits one, which will bring massive consequences that you can't control. You roll a critical fail, the game leader has rolled a critical success, only sixes. The game is basically over now.

It was what my whole master's essay lit up and put down at the same time. The probability of chance by rolling the dice. The capitalocene mutating into a virus and at the same time hitting the whole fossil fuel industry. Who is rolling this shit?!

You need to check all your stats and XP to save the situation that is the present, your fellow players also, they are affected too<sup>2</sup>.

The whole world is affected, the longer it proceeds, the more I know it will not be over by far.

2. Stats and XP (experience points) are the different numbers of how good you are on a skill or personality asset on your role playing character sheet, it determines how many dice you are allowed to use while making a move in the game.

I check myself, where is my mind? I've been gone mentally for three months, anticipating something.

Your talk about the peaceful. Well, the peaceful never got us everything.

Rise against your masters, dismantle every injustice piece by piece.

Tear down those statues of oppression.

The chaos around the globe breeds change, it offers an opportunity to re-evaluate who holds the power and the force of what is controlling it. Both in the self and global, it can change the status quo.

We cannot return to a 'before' now. No matter how much we try.

At that point, an artwork examining the consequences of living in a system driven by the fossil fuel industry. Highly neoliberal and a capitalist world.

At this point, living in a pandemic run by state capitalism. Led to a shutdown of the world, revealing the ugly face and flaws of the capitalist system. If you still can't see it now, you are in denial.

This results in... what?

- A global war against the pandemic,
- the war against nature that made it,
- and what can be described as a massacre of the poor.

The relation to class and privilege is really coming up to the surface now.

The thing we don't want to talk about in Sweden, class. We have been taught that class doesn't exist. That we all are our own welders of fortune.

To talk about class, we need to admit that there is a class war going on, and that it is killing the poor, the less privileged.

Of course, the whole neoliberal capitalist system cannot handle a crisis of this magnitude. They cut down everything within the welfare-system. And the less fortunate have to pay for it. The new normal. Or are we going back? How long will the memory of an Earth crisis last?

My second greatest fear<sup>3</sup>?

Going back to normal.

Why do we want to go back? Is the urge to travel so deep, we can't survive the summer without going outside our own country's borders? Globalism and the (human?) right to travel whenever the fuck we want to is bigger than trying to contain the pandemic.

We are now the rats of the plague ourselves, going everywhere. I just want to stay home in my safe compartment of Gothenburg, in my rat hole of friends.

It is not the end of the world; it is the end of an era. The era of neoliberal late-stage capitalism.

I will let the screenshot talk for itself.

3. (The greatest is the fucking spreading of the fascist state and the loss of democracy around the globe due to lock down laws, that may not disappear after this pandemic is over.)



Rebekah Crown 19 h

"The lockdown will have demonstrated three things: 1- our economy collapses as soon as it stops selling useless stuff to overindebted people. 2- it is perfectly possible to greatly reduce pollution. 3- the lowest paid people in the country are the most essential to its functioning." Charlie Hebdo, June 25, 2020.

Image captured story from Instagram or Facebook, Source: https://www.facebook. com/photo/?fbid=10157211867581863& set=a.10150175061191863, (accessed 27 August 2020)

Oskarsson

Some political change regarding economic wealth and the environment has to be forced in some way, through restrictions or laws.

It is my hope that the people will rise now, that everyone has had enough of this shit.

Britney Spears shared a post on Instagram, calling for a global general strike when 'this' is over, we need the strikes, we need the riots, we need the hope of change'<sup>4</sup>. But we also need to stop destroying the whole planet in the hunt for constant growth.

The Pandemic should be more about the climate changes and exploitation of nature than it is. It is entangled with globalism and capitalism at its very roots.

4. Britney Spears, Britney Spears Instagram, 23 March 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/B-FppKxAFxm, (accessed 26 August 2020). It is the capitalocene going into a stage of mutation? This is the new normal.

Everyone who is trying to buy their way out of this; Damnation. Damnation, damnation.

I wonder if the Romans knew that their civilization was falling apart.

But it was a region, an empire.

We live it globally, with a constant flow of information. When not wired, we feel bleak and distanced from it. Nothing can capture the feeling of a downfall of this magnitude.

'The culture is lit and if this is it, I had a ball' Lana Del Ray – 'The Greatest', 2019.

*Give Me More Triggers*: The therapeutic turn in the popular culture industry

**Gloria López Cleries** 

# Introduction

This essay contextualises the project [ASMR] Reading You to Sleep. Soft Spoken Relaxation about Pathologies of Capitalism. The text looks at the increase of sensorial and affective narratives within the popular culture industry. In this context different authors have identified a therapeutic turn characterised by the transformation of collective discomfort into depoliticised entertainment, which is distributed in therapeutic online communities. The therapeutic self-care imaginaries offer a new sensorial aesthetic and tactility that produce tingles or triggers as part of the immediate demand for satisfaction and the urgency for sensorial and physical experiences in the entertainment industry. These imaginaries or trends are characterised by a collective intention to deal with illnesses associated with late capitalism and its pathologies: anxiety, insomnia and depression.

In 1967 the French philosopher Guy Debord depicted 'Le Société du Spectacle' to define the spectacle as an instrument of capitalism with the purpose of distracting and pacifying the masses<sup>1</sup>. Debord understood the spectacle as a social relation among people mediated by images, and as an artificial construction where representations were more real than lived experiences. Although Debord offered an accurate portrait of our image-saturated present when every aspect of our lives is commodified, 'The Society of the Spectacle' has been redefined as the society of 'the economy of attention'<sup>2</sup>: a reality mediated by entertainment where we compete to be seen, read, *liked*, and retweeted. My aim here is to describe

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1. G. Debord, The Society of the Spectacle, London, Rebel Press, 2005. 2. T. Terranova, 'Attention, Economy and the Brain', in *Culture Machine*, Vol 13, 2012, https:// culturemachine.net/wp-content/ uploads/2019/01/465-973-1-PB.pdf (accessed 1 July 2020). and unpack the impact of the economy of attention in the ways we produce and consume cultural 'products'. How does this digital management of information and entertainment mask economic purposes? And, how are our bodies affected by the economy of attention?

To understand the complexities of the attention economy it is important to mention that it's part of the accelerated economic system in which we participate, coined as Turbo-Capitalism by the economist Edward Luttwak<sup>3</sup>. The term defines hyper-productivity and an interrupted system of production, and in this framework, attention (as part of the entertainment industry) functions under economic dynamics of production and consumption. One example of this entertainment hyper-productivity is the endless demand for self-exposure and self-exploitation, the relentless rhythm of which does not match our biological nature. According to Luttwak, Turbo-Capitalism is based on fast, irrational, and unconscious decisions. The time of production and consumption, therefore, has been accelerated in an irrational way, subjecting our bodies to perennial fatigue and sensory saturation.

There is no doubt that this acceleration and technology has transformed our capacity to feel and our ways of feeling since Debord announced the alienation and isolation of the spectator. However, it is possible to identify a huge industry with specific goals behind this saturation. In *Irresistible: the rise of addictive technology and the business of keeping us hooked*, Adam Alter, Professor of Psychology and Marketing at NYU, explains how 'Platform Capitalism<sup>4</sup> generates an addiction preceded by the sugar industry. Flavours and

3. E. Luttwak, Turbo Capitalism. Winners & Losers in the Global Economy. UK, Orion Business Books, 1999.

4. Platform Capitalism is the term used by Nick Srnicek to describe the economic model by a market competition led by private companies such as Google, Apple, Amazon and Facebook. Platform capitalism is not only a description of the technological architecture but also describes the political tactics and strategies used by platforms to transform society. See N. Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2017. flavourings manipulate the perception of everything we consume, and the industries that control its production are in control of our most primal instincts. For example, by consuming sugar hidden in any form of food, our brain stimulates the mesolimbic pathway of dopamine, the same pathway that is activated by sex and drugs. This release of dopamine via the neural pathway becomes extremely addictive. Likewise, our digital environment is carefully designed and programmed to be extremely addictive<sup>5</sup>.

Dopamine could be defined as the neurotransmitter that regulates our mood or affectivity, which 'plays an important role in shaping how people respond to rewards and pleasure<sup>'6</sup>. The digital platforms that are present in our daily lives are designed to produce addiction through strategies that stimulate our sense of gratification and satisfaction. Alter defines this addiction as a 'behavioural addiction' that carries the promise of immediate reward and positive reinforcement and would be the result of numerous specific studies conducted by the companies that design these products. In my opinion, however, and according to other researchers (Dean, 2003; Terranova, 2012; Lovink, 2019), this reality of immediate satisfaction traps us in an informational bubble of interpassivity, discontent, nihilism, and sadness. For this reason, my claim is that media and social networks act as accelerators of stimuli and, at the same time, act as collective desensitizers. This kind of desensitization, where the accelerated experience leads to a loss of sensitivity, would be the result of the lack of time to reflect or assimilate the pleasure of the experience, as the philosopher Franco 'Bifo' Berardi describes. Given that 'the acceleration and cancellation of experience go hand in hand

5. See G. Lovink, Sad by Design. On Platform Nihilism, London, Pluto Press, 2019, p. 35. 6. A. Alter, Irresistible: the rise of addictive technology and the business of keeping us hooked, New York, Penguin Press, 2017. with intensification and exhaustion'<sup>7</sup>, we no longer have time for a sensory experience that transcends beyond the superficial.

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Faced with the collective urgency to feel, both the cultural industry and the mainstream media content offer a range of sensory and therapeutic products ready to be consumed. From the USA marketing strategies in the late 70s, we were surrounded by the return of New Age aesthetics and the spiritual cult of individual wellness and self-care, a slow capitalism presented as a new market niche. Among these trends we find, for example, the Norwegian television program called Slow TV popularized around the 2000s by the Norwegian corporation NRK. Slow TV completely transformed the way of consuming television and began as a phenomenon on the national channel, with the broadcast of the train journey from Bergen to Oslo for eight hours<sup>8</sup>. Since then, the Norwegian channel has broadcast longrunning contemplative programs about salmon fishing, images of meadows with cows, or domestic scenes of women weaving. This type of Slow TV has inspired one of the most viral video-clips the Icelandic band Sigur Rós has produced, in which we observe the journey of a car trip through Iceland for nine hours9.

Similarly, the so-called *Oddly Satisfying* videos show the industrial and mechanical processes of production of

7. F. Berardi, And Phenomenology of the end. Cognition and sensibility in the transition from conjunctive to connective mode of social communication, Helsinki, Aalto ARTS Books, 2014, p. 37.

8. The trip between Oslo and Bergen with Bergensbanen is just stunning [online video], DIY Inspiration, 2016, https://youtu.be/hvHK4yZNXpk, (accessed 13 May 2020). 9. Sigur Rós - Route One [Part 1 - 1080p] [online video], Sigur Rós, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=G54tllj-SKI, (accessed 13 May 2020).

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various items, creating a hypnotic or strangely satisfactory effect. This type of sub-genre includes video montages such as: "craftsmanship and tool use", "order, efficiency and precision", "automation", "mechanical and chemical reactions", "identifying with a non-human object", "heightened sensory experiences", "effortlessness and vertigo", "food" and "optical illusions/visual experiments"<sup>10</sup>. The Oddly Satisfying videos are distributed through compilations and have become extremely popular on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram or TikTok for their pleasant or relaxing effects.

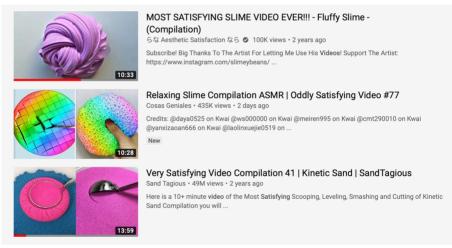


Image 1. Screenshot of search results on 'Slime Satisfying videos' on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/results?search\_query=most+satisfying+slime+video, (accessed 16 February 2020).

10. S.Werning, 'Remediating Tactility: re-negotiation of sensory experience in satisfying videos on YouTube', *INTERIN*, v. 25, n. 1, Jan./Jun. 2020, p. 66, https://interin.utp.br/index.php/i/article/view/2229/1945, (accessed 13 May 2020).

Another sub-genre of the Oddly Satisfying trend is Slime and Kinetic Sand (Image 1). It explores a new aesthetic of the haptic through images that invite the viewer to contemplate the tangible and sensorial. The Slime phenomenon is a result of the DIY (Do It Yourself) culture, a collective experiment to share and consume videos in which striking textures and materials are repetitively moulded and altered. Slime videos garnered massive fame in 2017 and came under the umbrella of ASMR videos (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response), which try to produce a sense of relaxation by reproducing everyday tasks and sounds. These types of videos are intended to induce a tickling sensation in the spine, generally through sounds and the recreation of intimate and/or self-care scenarios (massages, hair care, personal care, etc.).

The main purpose of the so-called therapeutic ASMR community is to share and create sensorial pleasure through relaxing auditory stimuli called tingles or triggers. Initially, the ASMR culture started around 2010 on platforms like YouTube or Reddit to exchange 'trigger' videos through discussion threads in health forums. Since then, subgenres have been growing and changing in response to community demands. The ASMR phenomenon reflects the growing importance of networked devices as a 'means of self-medication'<sup>11</sup> through social media, where bubbles of pleasure are heightened. This self-care collective network, initially altruistic, offers everything from videos to improve concentration, personal care and whispered affirmations to improve self-esteem or to simply reinforce the feeling of belonging to a community.

11. R. Gallagher, Eliciting Euphoria Online: The Aesthetics of "ASMR" Video Culture. In Film Criticism, Vol. 40, The Aesthetics of Online Videos, June 2016, http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/fc.13761232.0040.202, (accessed 9 July 2020).

So, the aforementioned satisfying viral content responds to the demand for immediate relaxation and pleasure, framed under the exaltation of a culture based on individual wellbeing. Such forms of self-care consumerism are not restricted to the sphere of the welfare industry but have spread over almost every societal field. Mainstream media platforms, as well as cultural institutions, have become spas or gyms<sup>12</sup> where wellbeing and relaxing experiences become another product to consume. In this context, a therapeutic culture has grown as an industry within the neoliberal economy as a legitimated solution to help calm stress. This stress is produced by the competitive demand of the same neoliberal economic system and its main affective disorders: anxiety, depression and insomnia.

Thus, I distinguish the therapeutic trend (which includes mindfulness, meditation, wellness or voga among other trends) as part of the ubiquity of the narratives of individual stress. What do I mean by the ubiquity of narratives of individual stress? Neoliberal discourse depoliticises stress and its characteristic symptoms of a saturated generation to turn it into a new industry. For example, through seductive and relaxing audio-visual content shared on YouTube, ASMR seeks the experience of sensory auditory pleasure. However, in some sub-genres such as 'personal attention' role-plays, one can identify the use of neoliberal rhetoric through motivational phrases and positive psychology. This type of content perpetuates a rhetoric that encourages individualism and the depoliticization of stress. These narratives thus create a dissociation between the economic interests of the Californian online video sharing platform and

<sup>12.</sup> One can find guided meditation tours in Stockholm Moderna Museet, yoga courses at the Natural History Museum in London, or an ASMR exhibition that focuses on the sensorial experience: *Weird sensation feels weird* (2020) in ArkDes, Stockholm.

the emotional and affective needs of the community.

Although neoliberalism creates a free market that supposedly allows people to achieve personal 'success' and satisfaction, in reality, it produces subjects in a state of perpetual anxiety. In this state, a series of psychological conditions proliferate, such as depression or consumer euphoria, leaving people unable to do anything other than seek pleasure. Mark Fisher uses the clever expression 'depressive hedonism' to define the collective emotional state: "Depression is generally characterized as a state of anhedonia, but the condition I am referring to is not constituted by the inability to obtain pleasure but by the inability to do anything other than seek pleasure"13. Depressive hedonism, or the constant search for satisfaction and pleasure, would be the engine that accentuates the urge for a sensorial experience. In this sense, for Mark Fisher, depressive hedonism will be a result of the privatization of stress, which supposes a total destruction of the concept of the public and an annulment of the structural social problems, generating a collective paralysis.

The same problem has been described by Eva Illouz, Professor of Sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and author of various books about the role of emotions in capitalism. In her research, she identifies the appearance of these therapeutic discourses in all fields of reality, and the inheritance of the therapeutic emotional style which was fundamental to the development of 'emotional capitalism'<sup>14</sup> during the twentieth century. Since then, the therapeutic discourse, specifically formulated as a 'self-help' discourse, has become firmly established as a governmental issue. Therapeutic rhetoric describes the importance of

13. M. Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*. *Is There no Alternative?*, Winchester, Zero Books, 2009, p. 22. 14. According to Eva Illouz, emotional capitalism is a culture in which economic and emotional discourses and practices mutually form each other. communication and language as the basis or foundation of emotional capitalism. For this reason, the therapeutic narrative becomes an economic language of efficiency to increase productivity and ensure discipline. According to Illouz, it is possible to identify the expansion of a narrative of collective self-help, self-realization, self-care and affections as part of affective rhetoric and therapeutic discourse<sup>15</sup>. This affective narrative makes us – the millennial generation – individually responsible for our own physical and mental well-being.

Consequently, I can affirm that the increase in narratives about affects and emotions are linked to economic development strategies in times of crisis and austerity. To be more specific and to give an example of neoliberal strategies and austerity politics: in the Spanish political context, the writer Alberto Santamaría defines the governmental strategy in the 1980s as a strategy of depoliticizing collective unrest. In this framework, emotional intelligence and self-care narratives have become the centre of neoliberal discourse<sup>16</sup>. For Santamaría, "what neoliberal capitalism generated since the 1980s is an emotional pact that has disabled criticism, producing, at the same time, a semantic mutation<sup>"17</sup>. This mutation consists of the reorientation of the collective indignation in a critical incapacity, in order to depoliticize the emotional and create isolated individuals. In fact, the fundamental message of therapeutic narratives, including positive psychology and mindfulness, is that 'the underlying cause of dissatisfaction and distress is in our heads<sup>18</sup>. If we are sad or frustrated it is because we do not know how to manage our emotions or unlock our chakras. Instead of trying to identify what is causing our anxiety or

15. E. Illouz, Cold intimacies: The making of emotional capitalism, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2007, p. 5.

16. A. Santamaría, En los límites de lo posible: Política, cultura y capitalismo afectivo, Madrid, Akal, 2018, p. 41. 17. A. Santamaría, p. 14. 18. R. E. Purser, McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality, London, Repeater Books, 2019, p. 8. discomfort, we decide to find strategies assimilated by the market to face the pathologies created by capitalism.

Furthermore, the sociologist Frank Furedi points out that the therapeutic culture is the institution of a new regime of social control. Faced with those who praise the promises of autonomy and self-realization announced by 'the therapeutic turn', Furedi affirms that the therapeutic culture works as a device of coercion<sup>19</sup>. For the sociologist, the therapy industry is based on the cultivation of impotence and vulnerability in a world perceived as increasingly threatening. With the therapeutic rhetoric of resilience, we are encouraged to conform. Or in other words, to promote positive emotional behaviour appears to be a 'sensible and uncontroversial way to achieve desirable behaviour'<sup>20</sup>.

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To sum up, this essay introduces the paradox and the trap of the therapeutic culture within the framework of late capitalism in which we are installed. Through the language of self-realization and self-care, therapeutic culture promotes the feeling of self-limitation and dependency. In this context, as we have seen, our capacity to feel, to experience time and emotions and the way we relate to each other has been captured and appropriated by late capitalism and its economic purposes. The *psychosphere*<sup>21</sup>, as a space of accelerated stimulation, then, creates a space of isolation, reinforcing the cult of the individual. In this framework, the therapeutic turn provides individual solutions to structural problems under the premise that offers satisfying and pleasant sensory experiences. Therefore, changes in aesthetic and emotional

19. F. Furedi, Therapy Culture. Cultivating vulnerability in an uncertain age, New York, Routledge, 2003. 20. F. Furedi. p. 197. 21. The psychosphere is a term developed by Franco 'Bifo' Berardi in the book And: Phenomenology of the end. The philosopher describes with this term the collective psychological state of society, and especially, what he analyzes as the nervous system of society. sensitivity would be the result of an accelerated attention economy. At this point, the challenge is to identify how to conquer desire and the capacity to feel again beyond the tendencies of the therapeutic culture and neoliberal ideology.

As part of this theoretical research about the therapeutic turn and its imaginaries, the artistic project [ASMR] Reading You to Sleep. Soft Spoken Relaxation about Pathologies of Capitalism critically examines the neoliberal narratives that have conquered the spaces of affect and sensitivity. First of all, I started the project with an investigation of the content in the ASMR 'Personal Attention' and 'Positive Affirmations' videos. As mentioned, I was interested in how these narratives are connected with the depoliticisation of anxiety and the prevalence of the therapeutic turn that individualises social structural problems. Secondly, the enquiry employed a dialogical approach as a method. In 2019 I interviewed mental health professionals, sociologists, ASMR users and creators to understand different perspectives of the therapeutic phenomenon. After that, I invited five ASMR creators to discuss and translate a critical analysis of the complexities of the therapeutic turn as part of the attention economy into relaxing sounds and whispers. The process involved multiple conversations using my master's essay as a channel to facilitate disagreement and as a tool to negotiate the possibilities of translating an academic text into relaxing sounds. Through this strategy I intended to test what kind of critical discourse could be inserted into the ASMR therapeutic community and observe a possible response.

Fundamentally, the project aimed to create a physical experience (through the triggers and whispers) of what was being criticised. Each act was performed by a different

ASMRtist: Aino ASMR (Sweden), Ailén Lucía ASMR (Spain), Abi ASMR (Argentina), easy ASMR (Slovakia) and Articulate Design ASMR (United Kingdom, based in Dubai), and performed in Spanish, English and Swedish. The text shared with the ASMRtists consisted of five different Acts:

ACT 1: Sleep-mode. The insomniac spectator in the attention economy<sup>22</sup>.

ACT 2: You are your own biggest project. The creative and happy entrepreneur<sup>23</sup>.

ACT 3: Taking care of you. Affective Capitalism (Mi amiga intergalactica te maquilla)<sup>24</sup>.

ACT 4: Don't forget to subscribe! Affective Networks and the monetisation of emotions<sup>25</sup>.

ACT 5: *Give me more triggers*. In pursuit of immediate satisfaction<sup>26</sup>.

Emphasising the estrangement and transforming the critical engagement into a physical/sensorial experience through ASMR, the result of our collaboration was shared on the ASMRtists YouTube channels and presented on the HDK-Valand online platform<sup>27</sup>. The result can be read as a sequence of performative lectures, which reproduce or mimic capitalist logic with the intention of creating possibilities of estrangement or discomfort. In this sense, the project was informed by strategies of tactical

22. ASMR Roleplay • Relaxing Sounds and Whispers about Pathologies of Capitalism • Aino ASMR [online video], Aino ASMR, 2020, https://youtu.be/ pin7zals3T4, (accessed 10 May 2020).

23. You are your biggest project. Whispers about the creative and happy entrepreneur [online video] 2020, https://youtu.be/CEV\_32EcAEM, (accessed 10 May 2020).

24. Amiga Intergalactica te maquilla - ASMR Español [online video], Ailen Lucia ASMR, 2020, https://youtu.be/ eF8W8Y60kH4, (accessed 10 May 2020). 25. ASMR Trigger Sounds about Affective Networks [online video], easyASMR, 2020, https://youtu.be/ nlbG0G89S9Q, (accessed 10 May 2020).

26. Not online.

27. Gloria López Cleries, HDK-Valand Exam Projects 2020, [website] 2020, https://hdk-valand-exam2020. se/gloria-lopez-cleries, (accessed 10 July 2020). media, appropriation, subversive affirmation and overidentification. For the development of the project I looked at artistic strategies which mimic and reproduce the codes of what is being criticised, strategies that "adopt(s) his 'opponent's' point of view and strategically over-identifies with a position in order to subvert it from within"<sup>28</sup>.

In addition, the debate created in each comments section on YouTube can be considered part of the project or a continuation of it. Followers commented and shared their opinions about the performed text and its content on the platform with different approaches (Image 2): some followers felt disappointed, others found the experience amusing and others were critical of the use of 'political content' in the community. In conclusion, ASMR: Reading You to Sleep aimed to explore how a critical discourse can be shared in the same media following the same codes that are used by the community. Looking at the sensorial experience of the satisfying ASMR videos, the desire to feel beyond the screens and the relation between bodies and devices, the project interrogates the artistic interference as an effective strategy to create new critical triggers (in opposition to the relaxing ASMR triggers).

Note: This essay is an expansion and translation of the essay Give Me More Triggers: el giro terapéutico en la industria cultural, published in exit-express, February 2020. https://exit-express.com/give-me-more-triggers-el-giro-terapeutico-en-la-industria-cultural, (accessed 3 July 2020).

28. E. Fotiadi, Cultural Activism Today. The Art of Over-Identification, Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain, January 2007, https://www. onlineopen.org/cultural-activism-today, (accessed 9 July 2020).



Elliot S 1 month ago

The irony that I was about to go through comments and "like" them to indulge social consumption of emotion

🖆 24 📕 REPLY

Hide reply



Miriam Garber 1 month ago

Yes! My participation, including this exact comment, is contributing value to the platform both for the owners of YouTube and for the content creators. But I don't think it's ironic at all. It's very human to want to reach out, communicate, and share an emotional response. Your emotions and mine are natural. But then, they are being turned into dollar values and "food" for the "parasitic" platform where we are communicating. Thanks Vlad, and Ms. López! Show less

1 2 📲 REPLY



Jackie 1 month ago

1:03 i feel like a cat being brushed

1 24 📲 REPLY

Image 2. Screenshot of followers' comments on easy ASMR video collaboration. https://youtu.be/nlbG0G89S9Q, (accessed 9 July 2020).

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Ni Måste Namaste (You Must Namaste)

Chapter 3: The humble warrior

Kasra Seyed Alikhani

### CHAPTER 3: The Humble Warrior

### [Int. YOGA-CLASS at SUDDEN STILLNESS]

#### JULIA

Cross your fingers behind your back. Weave them together and bend forward. Let your head go, it can be scary sometimes. All the way down - the humble warrior.

The repetition of gestures, movements and style in which you claim the room, constitutes the habits that maintain the well-being of the institution's body. To be non-White, as exemplified by Sara Ahmed with her own experience as being read as:

"...could be Muslim", which translates into "could be terrorist" (Ahmed, 2004), the experience begins with discomfort: spaces we occupy do not 'extend' the surfaces of our bodies."

B is still cutting her toenails on a poster for a film called *The Island*. The thundering construction is relentless as A is reading a book. To further convince himself that he's having a good time he turns and says:

#### Α

Isn't it nice with some free time?

B (looking at the poster) What is this anyway? The Island? Ni Måste Namaste

There was an artist at our home, making a film about us, it was called The Island...

Excerpt from *The Island* A film by Steve Johansson

### VOICE-OVER

The future looks bleak at 51 Milestolpegatan, the last remaining spot of the Swedish miljonprogram that the aggressive city development is about to erase from the map. Where will these people go? I spent three entire days workshopping with the community and tried to restore dignity and hope. I lived with them, ate with them, laughed and cried with them.

The beading workshop - DELETED SCENE FROM THE ISLAND

[Int./ext. BALCONY]

In Persian: *MILAD* این یارو کی انشااللُّه زحمتمون رو کم میکنه، بسه دیگه! In yaro key inshallah zahmatemoon ro kam mikone, basseh dige!

A

هييش هييش، اون همين اينجا وايستاده! Hiish hiish, on hamin inja vaystade!

#### MILAD

خب به تخمم، اون که هیچی نمی فهمه! Khob be tokhmam, on ke hichi nemifahme!

> A آخه داره ضبط میکنه! !Akhe dare zabt mikone

Milad pausing, both glancing into the camera. M (with lower voice) ببین، اون یه هنرمنده!گناه داره. یه کم کمکش کنیم خوشحال می شه. Bebin, on ye honarmandeh! Gonaah dare. Ye kam komakesh konim khoshal mishe.

#### MILAD

آخه من کار و زندگی دارم. مگه من بچهام! Akhe man kar o zendegi daram. Mage man bacheh am?

Steve who had been sitting next to them all along leans in, entering the side of the frame abruptly interrupting Milad and A.

> STEVE That just sounds lovely!

> > A and MILAD Oh, hehe...

STEVE What is that? Arabic? Ni Måste Namaste

M and MILAD (unison) Persian!

## STEVE

Persian! I was going to say! I just really love foreign languages.

> M and MILAD Thank you.

Back to A and B and the construction noise, A tosses the poster off the balcony.

> *B* But I've got one foot left.

A looks through his mail and picks out a brochure for Sudden Stillness and hands it to her. B opens it and we see a photo of Larry, grinning with a golden shovel.

The world which doesn't accommodate us, places us in discomfort and thus what's taken for granted and what's dead becomes charged with life. To blend in is to be unaware of the embrace of the world and to be negated sharpens its contours. This point of view charges the position of the negated with an agency opening up potential for destabilizing the order of things, exposing claims of universality and putting pressure on the once comfortable body.

Images of 'Real' Men at Work: Masculine Rituals and Hyperauthentic Masculinity

Åke Sjöberg

# Introduction

Masculinism and coloniality functions through an entanglement of institutionalised, structural, mythic, archetypal, internalised, and performative 'levels' of oppression that maintain each other. In this essay, I focus on the concept of hyperauthenticity and hyperauthentic masculinity. These concepts are used to unpack the production of masculinities in viewers of reality television and YouTube viewers and content makers<sup>1,2</sup>. This essay is a tool to translate, explain and deepen my enquiry into archetypes of masculinity that are being used in contemporary reality television shows like Gold Rush, and to try to expand their impact on masculinity production today. The concept of hyperreality was used early on in my MFA enquiry leading to this essay. Later, hyperauthenticity helped me unpack gender production in interaction with reality television and YouTube. This essay focuses on hyperauthentic masculinity and leaves potential hyperauthentic femininity to possible future research.

# What do I mean with 'archetype' in this text?

My use of the word 'archetype' in this text is referring to *imaginary* forms or role models of masculinity, such as the 'Goldminer' or the 'Frontiersman'. I do not believe that these images are something that existed before man invented them, as psychoanalyst C.G. Jung would suggest. In relation to Plato's *eidos*, the idea of a 'pure form', that form that the craftsman thinks about when creating, for example, a sofa<sup>3</sup>.

1. R. Rose and S. Wood, 'Paradox and the Consumption of Authenticity through Reality Television', *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2005, p. 294.

2. S. Alexander and K. Woods, 'Reality Television and the Doing of Hyperauthentic Masculinities', *The Journal of Men's Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2019, pp. 3-4. 3. E. Williamson, 'Plato's "Eidos" and the Archetypes of Jung and Frye', *Interpretations*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1985, p. 95.



Åke Sjöberg, *Hyperreal masculinity no.5*, collage of printed images taped together, 21 x 30 cm. Translation of the Swedish texts in image: 'Right now it seems to have gone bad' and 'They can't keep up, because they are unfit and old.'

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In the case of my use of 'archetype' in a hyperreal world, that is a world where the position of signifier and signified, of sign and object, of cast object and mold have changed position, and even start re-changing or updating in a loop. So, in a way this is how to understand my use of 'archetype' as really not meaning archetype at all, and therefore criticizing the use of these images, these things that are not archetypes, but contemporary role models, idols, icons, influencers, signs, and symbols that pretend that they are really old and original but actually are just as archaic as Donald Duck, (who in some sense is the very symbol of Swedish Christmas: hypergenuine, wouldn't be a real Christmas without him) but is he one of the archaic images of Swedish Christmas in Jung's collective unconscious? Hardly.

## The Author and the reader

Who am I, the Author? And who is the intended reader, that I sometimes refer to as: 'you', 'we' and 'us'? I am writing this text from the position of a White, European, middleaged man. I have a suspicion that many of the rituals that I have found urgent in my life have felt and have indeed been important for me, but not for the reasons I first thought. I think much of the urgency came from hyperauthentic demands. And, this is something I really want to understand. Maybe I could shed some light on why privileged people like myself don't experience privilege at all, only threat. Privileged White men is the group that I mainly turn to when I write 'we', 'us', 'our'. But I don't want to exclude readers in other positions, instead I draw on my embodied experience. In another way I'm writing from the 'non position' as Donna Harraway called the position of the western male, the position that according to her 'god-trick' was invisible and therefore seen as objective<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4.</sup> D. Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1988, p. 581.

### What is hyperauthentic masculinity?

Comedian Bill Hicks describes the world, how we relate to it. and how value is given to the things in our life: "The world is like a ride in an amusement park, and when you choose to go on it you think it's real because that's how powerful our minds are"<sup>5</sup>. And, he goes on to joke about the way people place importance and urgency in their jobs, their cars, and their careers. In my research for this text I looked at fishing and gold mining as masculine activities, as displayed in Gold Rush and The Deadliest Catch. Watching fishermen risk their lives on TV, in combination with re-enacting parts of these shows in one's own life, such as taking one's son on a fishing trip, is an example of hyperauthenticity. This theory was presented by researchers Randall L. Rose and Stacy L. Wood in their 2005 article. Paradox and the Consumption of Authenticity through Reality Television<sup>6</sup>. In 2019 this was further developed into hyperauthentic masculinity by scholars Susan M. Alexander and Katie Woods, where they suggested that this is the hegemonic masculinity in the USA today<sup>7</sup>. In the example with the fishing trip, there is a strong belief that there is 'genuine masculinity' being passed to the son in the ritual of fishing, according to the theory. The belief in the genuinity of the authenticity in the performed masculine ritual is what makes it hyperauthetic masculinity.

Rose and Wood describe *Hyperauthentic* as that which is perceived as authentic by the individual:

...viewers valued what we will call 'contrived authenticity,' or slightly adjust Baudrillard's (1983) notion of hyperreality, 'hyperauthenticity.' Whereas hyperreality denotes the non reflexive substitution

5. Bill Hicks - It's Just A Ride [online video], Bill Hicks, 2015, https://www. youtube.com/watch?v=KgzQuE1pR1w, (accessed 11 July 2020). 6. R. Rose and S. Wood, p. 294. 7. S. Alexander and K. Woods, pp. 3-4. of signs of the real for the real itself, hyperauthenticity denotes viewers' reflexive consumption of an individualized blend of fantasy with the real. Such viewers construct hyper authenticity by blending indexical elements of programming that connect with their lived experiences and aspirations with fantastical or simulated elements that inspire their imaginations<sup>8</sup>.

To describe *hyperreality* Baudrillard retells a story about a map, made at scale one-to-one, totally covering the landscape it depicts<sup>9</sup>. At the same time, this map turns the underlying landscape into a dead desert and the map is now our *hyperreal landscape*.

# Gold Mining YouTubers as examples of hyperauthentic masculinity

You can now order a bucket of dirt and dig for gold in the comfort of your own home. How can the concept of *hyperreality* and *hyperauthenticity* be used to unpack masculinity production in the intersection of gold mining, reality television, and gold mining YouTubers? The 'Gold Miner' is an archetype of 'real' masculinity, this is a sketch of the interactive process of *hyperauthentication*:

> Gold miners are 'real' men he thinks, as he watches the gold miners on reality TV. He goes out and digs a hole in his backyard. Step by step he learns how to wash out the heavy particles from the dirt by reading an online gold miners forum. His backyard dirt doesn't contain any gold, so he orders a bucket of gold-rich dirt to experience the thrill of seeing

9. J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1994, p. 8.

glimmering gold in his wash pan. He spends more time on a gold miners' forum, discussing his progress and problems. He buys a small camcorder and starts to film his struggles, and starts his own YouTube channel. As more and more people started following him he felt more and more like a real gold miner, and like a real man<sup>10</sup>.

This is how I imagine the career starting for YouTubers such as the protagonists in *Dan Hurd Prospecting* and *Allan's Gold Mining*<sup>11,12</sup>. The mechanisms behind the less odd rituals of many other men's *hyperauthentic masculinity* are, in these examples, more absurd, which makes it more visible. What could make a man, such as YouTuber AU79 *Prospecting*, film himself reviewing different buckets of dirt that he ordered from the internet, costing 800 dollars or more<sup>13</sup>? They are digging for gold and gender identity in the *hyperreal* landscape, where their perceptions of reality become authentic in a combination of viewing and performing, according to Alexander and Wood<sup>14</sup>. Thereby, they go against recent research that suggests that men

10. This is a poem about the hyperauthentic masculinity production, written by me and inspired by gold mining YouTubers, Dan Hurd Prospecting and Allan's Gold Mining. The problem with the concept of hyperauthenticity, if I have understood it correctly, as perceived authenticity is that you, as the subject, experience the (hyper-authenticity are [blind] see later footnote 46) unaware of the' hyper'; for you it is only genuine and an authentic experience of being a real 'Gold Miner', a 'real man'. And that can be fine, if all is fine around you, when you perform your hyperauthentic rituals, and as in the case above, there is no direct connections to 'toxic' ways of performing the hypergenuine masculinity rituals as long as vou, as I see it, stay in the backvard and don't leave your family, and run off to Alaska.

11. Dan Hurd Prospecting [Online YouTube channel], https:// www.youtube.com/channel/ UCOReOAYx8VDLwC0pOEcQD-g, (accessed 11 July 2020).

12. Allan's Gold Mining [Online YouTube channel], https://www. youtube.com/channel/UCMoleQ9XK4Y70SNABwLcMg, (accessed 11 July 2020).

13. \$1,780.00 Gold Paydirt -HUGE Gold Nuggets!! Lynch Mining Paydirt Bucket Review [online video], AU79 Prospecting, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=Y7NBad3nljo, (accessed 6 August 2020).

14. S. Alexander and K. Woods, p. 294.

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are escaping into the fantasy of reality television, that offers simple answers like: 'Frontiersmen are the "real" men on the frontier<sup>15</sup>. It is not only an escape into a fantasy, it is cosplay, a fantasy role-play, a hyperauthentic man is a man on the *hyperreal* frontier.

# Seeds, maps, and archetypes as metaphors for unconscious masculinity production processes.

In my MFA project 10 booklets, I tried to understand the underlying reasons why I was drawn to the reality television show Gold Rush<sup>16</sup>. Just as I wanted to know more about the seed of the 'Solitary man', this seed that was planted in me when I read Robinson Crusoe as a young man. It is not an exploration of my identity, but an exploration of archetypes and myths of masculinity in our society, and the invisible narratives of authentic masculinity in our Eurocentric, patriarchal, White supremacist, capitalist, imperialist society.

My MFA enquiry started in 2019 when I took some photos of the really 'masculine' reality television show *Deadliest Catch* that appeared on my living room TV. The show portrays crab fishermen with a heroic narration. I printed and put these images on the wall of my studio. I was also reading an essay about cultural propaganda, promoting certain types of masculinity, following post-WWII masculinity 'crises'<sup>17</sup>. I wondered if *Deadliest Catch* could be cultural gender propaganda, in a similar way.

Could the archaic images of masculinity in *Deadliest Catch* be a form of propaganda, and from where do they originate?

15. S. O'Sullivan, Frontiersmen Are the "Real Men" in Trump's America: Hegemonic Masculinity at Work on U.S. Cable's Version of Blue-Collar Reality, Ph.D. diss, Boulder, University of Colorado, 2017. pp. 221-229. 16. E.P.E.Poddcast – 10 Fanzinebooklets about masculinity, Åke Sjöberg [website], https://asjoberg.wordpress. com/e-p-e-pod, (accessed 11 July 2020).

17. A. Lindberg (ed.), *Den maskulina mystiken: konst, kön och modernitet*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, 2002, pp. 169-192.

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Allan's Gold Mining, Allan's Gold Mining Trommel Wash Plant, Screen Dump, courtesy of Allan's Gold Mining, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHQfhd9MVNI&t, (accessed 11 July 2020).



Åke Sjöberg, One of my 'Deadliest catch' TV-photos, black and white laser print on paper, 30 x 30 cm. Translation of the Swedish texts in image: 'Nothing is certain in fishing'.

I decided to investigate this from several perspectives, how different masculinities have been created or cultivated in history, and why. I found out that the archetype of the 'Frontiersman' was created during colonial expansion at the US frontier<sup>18</sup>. I wanted to show the background and the blueprints of this archetype, and that it was created through cultural propaganda - in cowboy dime novels and the stage show Buffalo Bill's Wild West<sup>19</sup>. And, by showing this I aimed to destabilise the belief that these archetypes were examples of old, 'real' or 'genuine' masculinities. Contemporary reality television series Deadliest Catch and Gold Rush display archetypes of masculinity originating from the American<sup>20</sup> colonial frontier. This, I think, is part of a pattern of reusing masculinities that have been used and developed in very problematic correlations. What processes and structures are behind the propaganda-like reuse of these masculine archetypes today? How could I show that they are not suitable to today's society and that they could become 'toxic'?

I investigated if I could understand this reusing of archetypes of masculinity as suggestions or suggestives, as described by Norwegian psychologist Ingjald Nissen<sup>21</sup>. Nissen describes suggestion to be a tool of manipulation, that could be used for propaganda. The suggestive seed is planted in the minds of the receiver, where it starts to grow and the results are often mistaken for their own thoughts or desires because the seeds grow within thought processes using memories and images from the individual's mind.

18. F. Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, New York, Digireads.com, 2010, pp. 112-113.

19. J. Faragher and R.V. Hine, Frontiers: A Short History of the American West, abridged edition, London, Yale University Press, 2008, pp. 193-200. 20. I use 'America' here as meaning North and South America. The 'American frontier' is often used to describe the line of colonial expansion of the United States. But here I mean it as in a front(ier) of war, the war of the colonial attacks. It's a blurred multi-layered masculinity image, but it has some Sailor-Explorer, some Cowboy, and some Conquistador.

21. I. Nissen, *Psykopatenes diktatur/ Ingjald Nissen*, Oslo, Aschehough, 1945, pp. 18-21.

Not only are these images of archaic masculinities shown on reality television shows today, but there are also historical connections between masculinity produced on an individual level and the creation of the colonial masculinist society of the Global North. These might be viewed as different sides of the same coin. These hegemonic masculinities and archetypes are woven into the very fabric of our society, so they seem 'natural' in it. Just as the ways by which our society is constructed seem natural to individuals socialised in it. R W Connell describes the development of new hegemonic forms of masculinity and the colonial project during 'the "long" sixteenth century'<sup>22</sup> in order to emphasise the importance of getting a sense of the complex 500-year development of hegemonic masculinity today. The earlier hegemonic masculinity form, the 'Landowner', is displaced, because of a handful of major changes such as Protestantism's focus on monogamous heterosexuality, the creation of overseas empires and the colonial frontier as a producer of forms of rugged individual masculinity. Growing cities that became centres of commercial capitalism giving masculine prestige to the 'Trader'. And finally, the large-scale civil, religious, and dynastic wars in Europe during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries<sup>23</sup>. This gave us new archetypes of masculinity, such as the 'Self-Made man', the 'Settler' as a heterosexual family man, the 'Capitalist', and the 'Warrior'. These became new images of hegemonic masculinity which have since then been copied and reused over and over again, during hundreds of years.

## Discussion

There is a danger of misdirected urgencies, created in our *hyperauthentic* practices. According to the theory of *hyperauthentic* masculinity, we create our masculinity

23. R.W. Connell, p. 189.

through social practices where we perform to fulfill our inner 'feeling' that there are 'authentic' ways of being masculine<sup>24</sup>. This 'feeling' of what is 'authentic' is a very dangerous compass because it is unconscious, and controlled by our held archetypes and myths. It controls us emotionally, not rationally. It tells us the 'right' way to act. And, it is easily manipulated by a range of people from ad makers, populists, politicians, to rising dictators. I have, through my enquiry into archetypes of masculinity, tried to use the word propaganda to describe the way reality television suggests what is authentic masculinity, but without success, because according to the definition of propaganda, the manipulation needs to have a certain goal<sup>25</sup>. Nissen, for example, describes how Hitler used suggestion to manipulate the German people<sup>26</sup>. The goal of the neoliberal society and its propaganda-like images is not as clear. It could be a form of concealed propaganda where the instigator is hidden to us<sup>c</sup>. But, on the other hand, it could also be just a hunch that made the reality television producers act on the masculinity 'crisis' because there's money to be made reproducing 'old' archaic images of masculinity based on physical labour.

If we know that we are – in accordance with theories of *hyperreality* and *hyperauthenticity* – seeing the world, differently than other people, we must understand that we cannot trust our own eyes, ears, and experiences alone<sup>e</sup>. We must apply a pluralistic perspective, we must include stories and experiences from people in different positions in

24. S. Alexander and K. Woods, p. 294.

25. N.J. Cull, D. Culbert, and D. Welch, Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopaedia, 1500 to the Present, California, ABC-CLIO, 2003, p. 317.

26. I. Nissen, pp. 18-21. Nissen develops a theory that uses the Norwegian word 'Suggestion' that has a slightly different meaning than the English 'suggestion', it's more related to 'suggestive'. A horror-movie is 'suggestive' of death even in a love scene. Like seeds the 'suggestions' are planted and grow and it's almost impossible to know who, when and why someone planted the seed that later came to manipulate you.

27. N.J. Cull, D. Culbert, and D. Welch, p. 41.

28. R. Rose and S. Wood, pp. 3-4.

the intersectional matrix (of class, race, gender, etc.)<sup>29</sup>. Try to transplant our own bodies into these stories, translate the stories to our life situation. This, in order to activate and practice our empathy and altruism, by listening and taking in second-hand subalternate positions. And, only after all that, we can make decisions on how to act.

# Connell writes:

'You cannot understand the connection of masculinity and violence at a personal level without understanding that it is also a global connection. European/[United States of] American masculinities were deeply implicated in the world-wide violence through which this culture became dominant.<sup>30</sup>'

Connell describes the way the colonial project shaped European culture's understanding of what is masculine, and how the masculine idea, the perception of it, and its performance shaped the way Europeans interacted with other cultures (such as the Spanish colonial frontier soldiers, the 'Conquistadors')<sup>31</sup>. But, if we look at masculine performance, the violent force is only one. There is also the epistemic violence of the European thought project, the enlightened, rational Europeans who felt a strong urge to save the souls of the 'Savages'. 'Classical philosophy from Descartes to Kant constructed reason and science through opposition with the natural world and with emotion'<sup>32</sup>. Connell defines masculinity as a character structure marked by rationality. So-called rational men are brought up in a rational and patriarchal culture. All the structures and institutions surrounding them seem 'natural', as both men and structures are created by the same culture.

29. In earlier versions of this text I used the phrasing: 'we are blind to' here. See footnote 46. 30. R.W. Connell, p. 198. R.W. Connell, p. 189.
R.W. Connell, pp. 186-187.

Masculinism as another concept that focuses on the performative aspects and thought and language based constraints<sup>33</sup>. Masculinism describes, just as patriarchy does, gender based inequality but with a focus on the 'level'34 of individual interaction, social practices and language; whereas patriarchy describes large fixed structures, that could only be 'smashed', and not understood and changed. To apply this thinking on the decolonial work in the art world, I think we can't decolonise our institutions without demasculinising our social practice in them and in ourselves. As I see it, an idea oscillates back and forth from social practice, to the individual to the structural/institutional 'level'. This (simplified explanation) goes to show that isolated attempts at 'decolonizing institutions', are ineffective if isolated to only the institutional 'level'. If it does not see the multileveled entanglement and doesn't change anything of the individual's internalized coloniality, or the social practice of the institutions, I think it is doomed to fail, because processes on other 'levels' will soon force the change on the institutional 'level' back to business as usual.

To act ethically I believe it is not possible to simply act emotionally or even rationally, one must engage in a selfcritical practice. When deciding how to act, one must include knowledge from and about the people who will be affected. One needs to understand that 'the real state of the world' can only be understood through a plurality of perspectives, a plurality of 'Situated Knowledges' as Donna Haraway called it<sup>35</sup>. Trying to see one's actions through the eyes of others and preferably not in the same matrix of privileges and subalternation as yourself. If I am White<sup>36</sup>, I am in a privileged

33. L. Nicholas and C. Agius, The Persistence of Global Masculinism: Discourse, Gender and Neo-Colonial Re-Articulations of Violence. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 5.

34. 'Level' and 'levels' in this paragraph refers to several 'levels' of oppression that maintain each other.

Such as institutionalised, structural, in language, in myths and archetypes; but also internalised, social practice based, and performative.

35. D. Haraway, pp. 575–599. 36. See the introduction of this publication for choices regarding *White* and *white*.

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position and I never have to experience the oppressiveness of racism. If I am a wealthy man I more or less never see the patriarchal inequality or experience the class-based violence of capitalism<sup>37</sup>. Besides my attempt to work against 'toxic masculinity', I strongly believe that the entanglement of performed masculinism and coloniality has not been given the time and space it needs to be examined and criticized by the decolonial attempts in the art world, museums and universities.

## Conclusion

If we assume that we are all living in a hyperreal landscape and that all we experience is our hyperauthentic version of reality, this, I would argue, would imply that: In our hyperauthentic view of the world we see, not only from our single individual perspectives, but also through a heavy influence of subconscious mental processes and biases. This gives us a perspective that is hard to understand, even for ourselves, and even harder to explain to others. This might lead to polarisation, when my perception of the world and what is urgent within it goes through my own hyperunderstanding of it, which is inaccessible to my rational mind as it goes under the radar (of the rational mind) through myths and archetypes, through fear, and other primal emotions. Then we cannot communicate about our needs and desires because they stay hidden to us. In this situation, when we are each one in our own hyperauthentic spheres, we are easily susceptible to populist manipulation. Could it be that the angry White men described by Michael Kimmel and others are the non-self-aware hyperauthentic men<sup>38</sup>?

37. In earlier versions of this text I used the phrasing: 'I am in a privileged position and therefore also blind or partly blind to the oppressiveness of racism. If I am a wealthy man I am blind or partly blind to the patriarchal inequality and the class-based violence of capitalism.' See footnote 46. 38. M. Kimmel, Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era, New York, Nation books, 2013, pp. 3-7, 17. Another category of problems arises when the 'Gold Miner' as a masculinity role model is exchanged for more violent forms, such as the 'Warrior' or the 'Pickup Artist<sup>39,40</sup>. In performing the 'Warrior' the practices involved, fulfilling the internalised standards of 'authentic masculinity' can become harmful, or 'toxic'. Another problem arises when the internalized and personal masculinity role model creates a strong sense of urgency, that is invisible to others and therefore alienating us from them. The individual experienced reality, that gives our life meaning, also has the negative effect of forcing us to prove ourselves to our internalised hyperauthentic (masculinity) standards<sup>41</sup>.

As I see it there are three points where impact can be put to break this process. Firstly, by attempting to disclose the masculinity images for what they are, and how they were constructed. Secondly, by understanding the process of *hyperauthentication*, and its consequences. And finally, by planting seeds of criticality next to the seeds of 'authentic masculinity'.

This summer I was experimenting with role-play to disclose and dismantle my own *hyperauthentic masculinity* rituals. This was my masculinity as I performed it when I was in my summer cabin. My internalized image of authentic masculinity in that context is mostly the 'Handyman', who can fix anything around the house, and who is also forced to do so, to fulfill his internalised 'Handyman' image. But, if one is unable to fulfill the inner image, one can have a gender-role conflict that creates a negative circular

39. R. Moore and D. Gillette, King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine, New York, Harper Collins, 2013, p. 75.

40. N. Strauss, The Game: Undercover in the Secret Society of Pickup Artists, Edinburgh, Canongate Books, 2011, pp. 8-12. 41. Meaning in life as in 'life force' or 'Libido' or 'Libidinal economy' as described referring to Lyotard's use in: D. Kellner, Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989.

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process, hard to break<sup>42</sup>. I've experimented with treating the process of hyperauthenticity as a role-playing game. Inside a theatre set (the cabin), I was performing a person on vacation. Trying to 'hack' and undermine my internalized 'Handyman' who controls what I find urgent. This process started with becoming aware of the impact the 'Handyman' had, and the practices and rituals it forced me into. By viewing a summer holiday as a role-playing game I would direct scenes, movie sets, and decide what scenes would make up my summer holiday (movie). This helped me get more control over the impact of my internalized self-image and the urgencies to engage in masculine rituals, such as starting a largescale construction project instead of painting the interior of the kitchen and making it into a nice scene with some fresh flowers, something more relaxing than a large-scale construction.

I often imagine myself to be rational. Have you experienced this? You try to act rationally, but irrational emotions tell us that we are not only rational<sup>43</sup>. We live in and through our own minds, in *hyperauthentic* worlds<sup>44</sup>. And our understanding of the world controls our sense of what's important. If we only trust our own senses and experiences and don't communicate about our needs and desires then we have only one perspective, each, making us unaware of the situations of other people<sup>45</sup>. According to the concept of *hyperauthenticity*, the practices and rituals that I, and many others engage in, to

42. M. Magovcevic and M.E. Addis, 'Linking Gender-Role Conflict to Nonnormative and Self-Stigmatizing Perceptions of Alcohol Abuse and Depression', *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2005, pp. 127–128.

43. I believe our rational 'self' is only one of our 'levels'. We also have emotions that are not rational. And there are many theories about our mind. Such as Sigmund Freud's 'unconscious' and 'the id, ego, and superego' or Carl Jung's 'collective unconscious'. Just to complicate the human experience of the world. And to make you believe me when I write: you can not trust yourself. 44. Our own role-playing game.

45. In earlier version of this text I used the phrasing: 'making us blind or partly blind to the situation of people other to us.' See footnote 46. create meaning in our lives, are activities that project a false sense of importance via *hyperauthentic* gender production.

We think we are rational but we are fooling ourselves, or being fooled. We can't control ourselves, because we can't trust our own experiences (alone) to give us objective information about the state of the world. We can't trust our own sense and experiences to tell us anything about the situation of another person<sup>46</sup>. And finally, we can't trust that what 'feels right' is right, because our feelings are based on an *hyperauthentic* understanding of the world, misleading our sense of urgency, making us prioritise things we (actually) know is not important, only to fulfill our *hyperauthentic* self-image.

46. In an earlier version of this text, I used the phrasing: 'We can't trust our own eyes because we are blind to the situation of other people.' Ironically, I was unaware that I was potentially oppressing a situation where I was writing about being unaware of the situation of another person. I acknowledge my previous use of language here to reveal how deeply the symbolic structure of language is, and the violence it can perpetrate, through us. This is an example of one entangled level of oppression, one that is hidden inside language, (I explain my use of 'levels' in footnote 34). I needed the situated knowledge of another person to see this. My knowledge and the content of this text has now improved because it has been read and discussed by several people, several bodies with differing perspectives and experiences. That is why I advocate for a dialogical approach to art and knowledge production.

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AU79 Prospecting, \$1,780.00 Gold Paydirt Bucket Review, screenshot, courtesy of AU79 Prospecting, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= Y7NBad3nljo, (accessed 6 August 2020).

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Circumstantial Evidence of Publicness: The means of her embodiment

Kolbrún Inga Söring



In my essay, Fuck what society wanted to make of me, I wrote about an 'undefined public' in public space<sup>1</sup>. A *public* that lives within 'the gaze we place upon each other, and as a result project onto ourselves. This is a gaze we learn to inhabit'<sup>2</sup>. A gaze which we<sup>3</sup> are conditioned to absorb, one we must critically question, deconstruct and unlearn. It lives in our languages, in our body languages. It is our inner dialogue that runs wild at the sight, sound and touch of something or someone who sparks our curiosity, admiration or disapproval. Be it our own unfamiliar mirrored image, pleasant or otherwise.

We are all creatures of judgment, to echo Gwendolyn Ann Smith's We're all someone's Freak<sup>4</sup>. Creatures of judgment in the sense that we face a double-edged sword being the judged and the one judging – ourselves and others – which is perhaps an inevitable part of the human experience. While it is not the being a 'freak' that concerns or upsets me, I am interested in exploring how the 'undefined public' collects circumstantial evidence of publicness in order to come to a conclusion of a freak verdict. Innocent until proven guilty. In order to fully flesh out my intentions with this essay,

1. K.I. Söring, MFA 2020, Fuck what society wanted to make of me, Masters essay, HDK-Valand, Gothenburg University. This essay is to be published in the University of Gothenburg's Publications Electronic Archive (GUPEA) and can be searched for via the author's name in the GUPEA platform.

2. K.I.Söring.

3. My use of we in this text follows my use of we in my essay Fuck what society wanted to make of me. It is a general and undefined we. A me and you as strangers whose meeting, often silent, brings with it a lifetime of learned and coded readings of each other's expressions, of each other's gaze. In one way or another we are influenced by our environments which attempt to. in hegemonic fashion, enforce upon us conformity and condemn all else that lives outside of said enforced norms. We are implicated by just being, existing. Me and you, who I do not know, you, as the *undefined* public now skimming over, or perhaps reading every word in this text. You who I meet on the tram, you who gives me compliments with a wide smile, who yells at me on the street, who grunts. We, who feel judged by covers of magazines, by strangers we pass, by ourselves when no one else is looking.

4. G. Smith, 'We're all someone's freak', in K. Bornstein, Kate, and S. Bear Bergman(eds.), *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation*, California, Seal Press, 2010, pp. 26-30. I will begin by laying out how I am using the terms *guilt*, *innocence* and *circumstantial evidence*. I will approach them through their use in juridical proceedings and the administration of the law. However, my intention is to appropriate and apply them to unwritten laws of assumptions and cis-heteronormative expectations and readings of people. Not focusing on the personal feeling of guilt but rather the sociocultural pressure of one being understood as answerable of wrongdoing according to hegemonic norms. *Guilt*, in this case, becomes a derogatory labeling of a freak as 'other' as opposed to being a selfclaimed freak. *Innocence*, on the other hand, holds true to a long history of pristine conformity, of not straying off track towards anomaly. An 'unspoiled' subject of cisheteronormative ideals and expectations.

Circumstantial evidence is used as indirect or inconclusive evidence from which conclusions can be drawn in assisting a verdict of one to be found either guilty or innocent<sup>5</sup>. By using this framework of circumstantial evidence I want to question how assumptions are formed and utilized to provide a 'freak' verdict. These assumptions can result in what I will call a wrongful conviction, that is, conscious or unconscious misgendering through the use of pronouns, as one example where assumed gendering persists. So let us dig into the circumstantial evidence of my own publicness: who I am, what I look like, what I sound like, how I behave, how I present, how I interact, how I react - these I's are all circumstantial, but when seen through the restricted lens of the gender binary construct, they begin to build up a verdict of a presupposed gendered subject, one that exists solely according to the strict regime of genital rule. Resulting in a depthless portrait of an otherwise complex identity.

5. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Circumstantial evidence: Law, *Encyclopædia Britannica* [website], Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 2018, https:// www.britannica.com/topic/circumstantial-evidence, (accessed 24 July 2020). Susanne Stryker in My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage<sup>6</sup> articulates a verdict: 'Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment'<sup>7</sup>. Stryker here sets up a scenario of what could be seen as an unfair trial, where perception seems fueled by the illiteracy of embodiments outside of the cisheteronormative imaginary. That is illiteracy not only in the sense of being unable to read said embodiments expressed or presented, but also as a persistence of a normative idealised and internalized trans- and genderqueer-phobic reading. Stryker's embodiment reads, in the quote, as so unimaginably foreign and unrelatable to the perception of many that she has no other choice than to claim a liking to the monster. Her verdict, her unfair trial, can be understood as a consequence of *powerarchy*; a consequence of the lack of relational literacy<sup>8</sup> – which according to Melanie Joy, author of the book Powerarchy: The Psychology of Oppression, 'is the understanding of and ability to practice healthy ways of relating'9. Joy further states in a lecture

6. S. Stryker, 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage', *GLQ*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1994, pp. 237-254.

7. S. Stryker, p. 238.

8. Melanie Joy in her book Relational Literacy 101: How relational literacy can improve all of our relationships talks about nonrelational literacy which articulates a fostering of dysfunctional and unhealthy relational behaviour which can, as a result, cause one to feel more disconnected in one's own relational circumstances. In this text, I am using relational illiteracy as opposed to nonrelational literacy, the adaptation of Joy's concept wants to highlight the perpetuated illiteracy of anything that is coded outside of the normative gender binary coding system, and

is therefore often overlooked or ignored. *Relational illiteracy* in other words looks at how bodies that are queer, trans bodies, gender nonconforming bodies are coded to be read outside of the strict gender binary categories, whilst their non normative coded embodiment is not being respected and read as presented but rather according to a myth of gendered essentialism.

9. M. Joy, 'Relational Literacy 101: How relational literacy can improve all of our relationships', *Psychology Today* [web blog], 10 April 2020, https://www.psychologytoday.com/ us/blog/relational-literacy/202004/ relational-literacy-101, (accessed 20 July 2020). that 'oppression is a relational phenomenon'<sup>10</sup> which is based on 'the belief in a hierarchy of moral worth, that some individuals or groups are more worthy of moral consideration, of being treated with compassion and justice, than others'11 which she argues is the mentality that drives all oppression and abuse informed by external social structures - hence Stryker's account as being perceived as not fully human due to her embodiment. Embodiment, as I understand it, both from Stryker and how I would like it to come across in this essay, exists as a tangible and curated expression of oneself. Shaped by the body that hosts us, its experience and interaction with its environment - our bodily histories, our bodily archives and technologies, which includes socialization as a heavy influencer on how we come to curate ourselves. Conforming to, or defying norms as they are laid out for us, or rather, enforced upon us and as a result we internalize. My own experiences fuel a reading of assumptions, facial expressions, grunts and groans and even smiles that reach from ear to ear, from total strangers that inform me of how I am being experienced, how I am being assumed, how circumstantial evidence is being collected on my publicness.

Considering a 'becoming public' in public space allows, therefore, for a consideration of the assumptions that are placed upon one in said space, of the moral considerations implied and the ethical implications of status quo morality. It is important here to highlight Stryker's too often in her phrase 'too often perceived as less than fully human', in order to fully recognize the level and consistency of the microaggressions (that take place) in public (and private) space. One such example is the assumption of pronouns as a common, socially accepted and even expected practice.

10. The Psychology of Power: Powerarchy - Melanie Joy, PhD [online video], VeganKanal, 2019, https://www. youtube.com/watch?v=NOPPE8-0hB4, (accessed 20 July 2020). 11. The Psychology of Power: Powerarchy - Melanie Joy, PhD.

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My experience of pronouns or otherwise gendered assumptions is a constant reality. A reality that is, perhaps, elevated and based on my own non-conforming ways and my desire of being read accordingly; and simply, to not be assumed at all into the rigid categories of the gender binary. These assumptions are 'too often' tainted by a series of circumstantial evidence, or as Stryker puts it, 'the means of her embodiment'. I would like to frame it here as: despite (and, perhaps, due to) the means of her embodiment; it seems to me that, where assumptions are concerned, embodiment is often purposefully left out of the equation and relational illiteracy upheld.

The circumstantial evidence that the gender binary puts up against me is often to my detriment. My empathy, my labour, my tears, my anger, my frustration, my joy, my ability, my strength - have been misapprehended as going hand in hand with my sex organs. Guilty, in a cis-heteronormative court of fabricated justice. There is no innocence in my being, my publicness. When you look at me, I understand what you see, I understand why it is that, what you see, what you hear. The pitch of my voice, the form of my face, of my body, the hills on my chest. Don't get me wrong, I hate it, I even resent you for it, but I also think that maybe, more than just maybe, you are a product of your environment. Informed by a construct, that does not give you the tools to articulate my presence, or even your own, outside of a binary gendered universe - armed with an internalised relational illiteracy, bias to a violent colonial ideology, that understands itself not for what it really is. I will try to not appropriate your gaze to meet my disappointment, but my patience is running low. As a product of my own environment I was indoctrinated to be, to think, to behave in a certain way. A way that shaped my behaviour, presentation, interaction and access to the world. I was living in purgatory, but found that being a constant

disappointment to cis-heteronormative ideals was easier to bear than following an expectation based on my gender assigned at birth.

The circumstantial evidence, therefore, that people often collect about me is informed not only by how the reinforcement of the gender binary - in particular, female socialisation - shaped my behaviour, but also how it shaped their understanding of my behaviour, of my body. And so my gender queer embodiment is almost always ignored, made irrelevant as the 'undefined public' collects evidence to assume a pronoun upon me. The 'undefined public' as the eye of the beholder, as the judge and the jury, the assumer - acts as a powerful emotional drainage pipe. What I want is a re-imagining of our access to one another, a 'gender unknown' until proven otherwise. Not based on circumstantial evidence fulfilling presupposed assumptions, but on communication, a redefined fourth wave feminist 'status quo' that allows us to live more as the ambiguous and complex people that we are.

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The Psychology of Power: Powerarchy - Melanie Joy, PhD [online video], VeganKanal, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=N0PPE8-0hB4, (accessed 20 July 2020). Ni Måste Namaste (You Must Namaste)

Chapter 4: The downward facing dog

Kasra Seyed Alikhani

#### Chapter 4: The Downward Facing Dog

The Swedish epidemiologist has recently been hailed as the reincarnation of the Swedish national soul. The Swedish national soul is inclusive and morally superior. But, it is also tender, it can't bear any real difference, in attitude or conduct. Calm, collected and with a rational gaze it freezes out any opposition in favour of the appearance of comfortable consensus.

In Sweden issues of health have long been a part of the national narrative, in which an active lifestyle has been advertised as an essential aspect of 'Swedishness'. In the early campaigns to conjure a 'whole' out of the fragmented and heterogeneous communities and landscapes which comprised Sweden in the late nineteenth century, nature and health became central attributes connected to the modern citizen<sup>1</sup>.

#### [Ext. CONSTRUCTION SITE]

Larry poses with a golden shovel on the construction site in front of a Sudden Hills billboard. Construction noise continues slightly more aggressively.

> LARRY (looking down and daydreaming) There is a sickness in our city A sickness eating us from inside spreading through our canals

<sup>1.</sup> J. Werner, 'Blond Och Blåögd: Vithet, Svenskhet Och Visuell Kultur' [tr.: Blond and Blue-Eyed: Whiteness, Swedishness, and Visual Culture], *Skiascope*, no. 6, Göteborgs Konstmuseum, 2014, p. 104-134.

and devouring our morale It's spreading like forgetfulness Of what has been Of What is possible We're here to remind you To fundamentally rebuild To turn over a new leaf A new neighborhood Built for our time Protected from threats Enriched with a symphony of possibilities An utopia in stone and forest Sudden Hills Where uour children can safely play Where you can work and develop Where you can exercise and relax All without ever having to leave your neighborhood. Are you ready?

> PHOTOGRAPHER Are you ready?

Larry pretends to dig for the flashing camera. The trumpet player plays dutifully right on cue to the delight of the organizer. A cat meowing in the background. Construction workers witness the spectacle with a mix of bewilderment and embarrassment by proxy.

The use of illness as metaphor, especially cancer, is revealing to what is considered a threat in a particular context, as illuminated by Susan Sontag<sup>2</sup>. More importantly it points to

 $2,\, \text{S.}$  Sontag, Illness as Metaphor, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978, p. 84.

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anxieties of some uncontrollable force that is blending with the body itself, or in the context of nationalistic ideologies, the body politic. Metaphors for illness seem to aim to rid the body of affiliation with mysterious forces with malicious intents and to re-establish an 'order' and a sense of a whole. Homi Bhabha speaks about 'performative narratives' (a repeating and liminal temporality of the present different from the linear historical narrative of nationalism) splitting the nation within itself as opposed to a binary opposition of one nation's individuality facing an external otherness<sup>3</sup>. Similarly imaginations of cancer threatens concepts of homogeneity within a body, making the body different from itself.

# *VOICE FROM THE BACKGROUND* DEAR GOD, THE BILLBOARD!

The trumpet leaves the mouth of the player in the slapstick manner of air leaving a balloon before it's been tied properly. We turn to see three stripes sprayed on the letter 'I' on the sign so it reads 'Sudden Hells'. Julia is devastated and in tears and Larry, deeply offended, repeats phrases like:

'This is exactly what I'm talking about!' and 'The fence needs to be electric' and 'Is this a way to live?' and 'Can we photoshop this?'

3. H.K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, New York, Routledge, 2004, pp. 199-204.

Larry throws the golden shovel in a fit of rage and exerts his revenge on the local cat visiting their site of performance. It's Señor Wences, we can assume, that meets his untimely death. The trumpet player, now as alert as ever, quickly starts playing upon seeing the shovel touch the ground again.

Aluminium foil unwrapping like the sound of sparkling fire. The couple are now wrapping up today's festivities with a kebab.

> LARRY Careful not to spill any kebab juice on yourself!

**Ghosts In Our Time** 

Beate Persdotter Løken

During my master studies I have been investigating my remembering, misremembering and the gaps in my memories by reconstructing and re-enacting my traumatic viewing of the British short horror film Out of Town (1988) at the age of 11<sup>1</sup>. In 2018, I managed to relocate the film, but held back from watching it in order to make a set of experiments around the event, dealing with remembering. By reconstructing the film, and the environment surrounding the viewing, I wanted to explore and understand different aspects of my memory. and possible damages made to it, by the passing of time and retelling. I have specifically applied methods of crime scene reconstructions in which the witness reconstructs the event they have witnessed by placing figurants (in my case, puppets) and directing the situation like a director on a theatre stage. In the later stages of my investigations I have mainly used theories and methods from forensic psychology and memory studies to investigate how my spatial memory works<sup>2</sup>

The result of the investigations was planned to be exhibited at Göteborgs Konsthall as an installation interpreting the setting of the original location of my watching of the film, a Norwegian *kjellerstue*<sup>3</sup>.

When the cancellation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic happened I was halfway through building the installation in the workshops at HDK-Valand<sup>4</sup>. I was forced to adapt to the new situation and instead of a full-scale installation I made a

1. Out of Town, Director N. Norman Hull, 1987, http://www.imdb. com/title/tt0242748, (accessed 17 July 2020).

2. Spatial memory is the memory that records information about environment and spatial orientation. See N. Burgess, J.A. Bisby, 'Spatial Memory', *Encyclopædia Britannica*, *Inc*, 2018, https://www.britannica.com/ science/spatial-memory, (accessed 27 August 2020). 3. E.F. Loftus and K. Ketcham, The Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse, 1st ed, New York, St. Martin's Griffin, 1994.

4. Pressmeddelande Göteborgs Konsthall, Göteborgs Konsthall [website], 2020, https://konsthallen. goteborg.se/pressmeddelanden/ forandringar-kring-kommandeutstallningar-pa-goteborgs-konsthall, (accessed 17 July 2020). small model, filmed inside it, and then projected it onto the walls of an empty room; like a ghost of the installation that was not yet realised. It felt as if this adaption of the project answered both to the situation in the world during the pandemic, where isolation and computer screen interaction have made people feel like ghosts, as well as to my practice where ghosts could be seen as a memory that echoes across times.

In Norway they have a supernatural phenomenon named *vardøger*. It works as a warning or an omen, a premonition that forecasts one's arrival. A vardøg is something someone possesses, it is a personal spirit, or a service so to say, connected to a specific person, and works like a herald who runs before you and announces your entrance. It can be the sound of car doors closing in the driveway, but no one is coming into the house and when you look out there is no one there. Minutes later a car stops on the driveway, and you get a visitor. Or, it can be the sound of footsteps on the staircase and a key in the lock before the person you live with comes home from work.

A ghost (spectre, wraith, haunt, phantom, or spöke in Swedish) on the other hand, is an echo of someone that used to live. The ghosts are unhappy souls, haunting the living, not allowing them to forget. While a vardøg can be described as a precognition of something yet to come, the uncanny sensing of a ghost is rather a recognition of the past or present.

> The ghost makes itself known to us through haunting and pulls us affectively into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience as recognition. Haunting recognition is a special way of knowing what has happened or is happening<sup>5</sup>.

5. A. Gordon, Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination, New University of Minnesota Press (ed.), University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. 63.

A ghost is something that has been, while a vardøg is something that is about to happen. A ghost is a memory of something that used to have a body, a corporeal form. A vardøg is a forecast of something corporeal that is about to come.

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A couple of months later, I now look back at the alterations I had to make to my project. I believe that the outcome of my work has benefited from the situation concerning Covid-19, manifesting itself in a different way than the originally planned physical form.

The multiple layers that have been added feel like they are corresponding with the many layers of retelling and remembering that I have been applying during my process, all coming together as this shadow-like projection.

I want it to exist in this haunting shape forever. A shape where I will never know whether my projection piece is a vardøg of my cancelled original idea that will never get a corporeal form, or a ghost of a future installation that hasn't happened yet?



*Re-watching Out of Town*, documentation of installation adapted for Covid times. Video projection, dimensions: 200 x 300 x 300 cm. Duration: 11:37 min. Photo: Beate Persdotter Løken.



Inside the model of the gillestuga. Still from filmed documentation of mixed media model 1:6,66, dimensions: 50 x 55 x 31,5 cm. Duration: 31 sec. Photo: Ludde Falk.



The model of the gillestuga during filming, May 2020. Mixed media (balsa wood, styrofoam, fabric etc), dimensions:  $50 \times 55 \times 31,5$  cm. Photo: Beate Persdotter Løken.

A Landscape of Absence: Reflections on participatory installation during a pandemic

Reyhaneh Mirjahani

With the emergence of the pandemic, contemporary art museums and galleries cancelled or postponed their upcoming exhibitions. Since then, there have been many talks about how to 'become public'. This has been more of a problem for projects that were almost complete and ready to be shown in a public venue, designed to interact with the human body. The focus since has been more on finding a way to reach a public, with online showings presented as a simple solution: often using it as a platform instead of a media, with little consideration for the effects this shift will have on sensory installations or participatory projects. Even if the sensory experience is not the focus of an installation, it is always a present element in this form. How do the limitations on our physical presence affect our sensation, perception and understanding of participation? This text moves through two parallel threads: a journal of a failed audience-activated installation and an academic overview of the conflict, interspersed with scattered thoughts.

> The past year, my artistic practice has revolved around questions on the existence of political agency in an audience-activated installation. The concept of social individuals<sup>1</sup> has served as the foundation for my artistic choices, whereby the audience's interaction with the installation was designed to explore the notion of agency; in other words, the installation demands the stimulation of each observer's concern of agency and subsequent awareness of any resultant decisions/ actions.

> For the exhibition in Göteborgs Konsthall, through this interaction, I wanted to explore the notion of agency within the field of sensory experiences and affects. This derived from my reading about the relationship between agency, perception, and physical involvement

1. This is my term, departing from what Marvyn Frost states, that there is no such a thing as a pre-social individual; because we are constituted as free individuals only through participation and mutual recognition within social institutions, which are grounded in certain norms. See M. Frost, Ethics in International Relations: A Constitutive Theory, Cambridge University Press, 1996. with our surroundings and the *space between* as a space for action, speech and the public act of appearing<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, in this stage of my project, my aim was to use sensory experience as a method to activate our understanding of agency; explore different aspects of the concept of agency through sensation and affects. To what degree can physicality and sensation affect our understanding of an abstract concept such as agency?

A physical work is originally displayed in a physical space. It is designed to include people, objects and light. It is designed to have its own aesthetics and implications. It creates a subjective experience for the audience *because* we perceive it through our own senses. The context and the space is set up to prepare us for the experience we are about to have.

More than any other type of art, installation art invites us to engage with the work sensually within the physical space. In the book, *Installation Art*, Claire Bishop explains that the viewers of an installation have their various senses entangled with the work, rather than being just a pair of disembodied eyes surveying the work from a distance. She concludes that the presence of the viewer is 'arguably the key characteristic of installation art'<sup>3</sup>. An installation work (and indeed any artwork) is not only meant to stimulate the viewer's sensations to contemplate images, but also, according to Julia Kristeva, is an act of communication between beings. Her claim is that there is a wish from the artist to make the viewers feel – through the abstractions, the forms, the colours, the volumes, the sensations – a real experience<sup>4</sup>.

2. Kirsten Ainley, 2006; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Jacques Rancière, 2004; Hannah Arendt, 1958; Judith Butler, 2011. 3. C. Bishop, Installation Art:

A Critical History, London, Tate Publication, 2012, p. 6. 4. S. Bann, 'Three Images for Kristeva: From Bellini to Proust', *Parallax 8*, autumn 1998, p. 69. In addition to sensation, the second crucial element in the experience of installation art is movement. Our movements and the gestures of the body are creating correlations with the space, the objects and other bodies contained therein. There are philosophical approaches explaining how much our movements and actions are raised from thoughts. Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his book, *Phenomenology of Perception*, identifies the body as 'a natural self and, as the subject of perception'5. For him, being in the world is achieved through the body, not as a thing which belongs to the subject, but instead as a series of joint negotiations with an environment<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, when we reach out our hand to pick up an object, the thinking and reaching out are inseparable and form an integrated bodily performance<sup>7</sup>.

These temporal movements, according to conceptual artist Ilya Kabakov, can serve to create the drama of an installation<sup>8</sup>.

Hence, it is through the body and thoughts, movement and gestures, that we engage with installation art. Even if we are only observing from the outside. It is, firstly, the presence of our body that enables us to engage with what is happening around us. In this sense, there is no possibility to *be passive*. As long as we are present in the space, we are actively *being* there. In that being, we, the spectators, share our being. We share our experience of our being around the artwork with others. The spectatorial parameter<sup>9</sup> –

5. M. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, London, Routledge, 2005, P. 239. 6. C. Cazeaux, 'Sensation as participation in visual art', Aesthetic Pathways 2, vol. 2, 2012, p. 15. 7. C. Grammatikopoulou, 'Breathing Art: Art as an Encompassing and Participatory Experience.' Museums in a Digital Culture, edited by Chiel Van den Akker and Susan Legêne, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2016, p. 44. 8. T. Korpilahti, 'From Physical to Non-material Art – Design Choices of the Digital Artist', in R. Aylett, M.Y. Lim, S. Louchart, P. Petta, and M. Riedl (Eds.), Interactive Storytelling: Third Joint Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling, ICIDS 2010, Edinburgh, UK, November 1-3, 2010, Proceedings (Lecture Notes in Computer Science), Berlin, Springer, 2010, p. 143. 9. S. Bara, The Gestures of Participatory Art, Manchester, Manchester UniversityPress,

2018, p. 22.

## that can be in itself the beginning of sharing, affecting and communicating.

After the lockdown, though it did not happen completely here in Sweden, the planned exhibition in Göteborgs Konsthall was cancelled. Since then, I have been rethinking the enquiry, especially in the context of the digitalization trend (before and after the pandemic) and the talks about 'translating' art projects into a virtual setting. What about the works constructed around the involvement of bodies and sensation? What about audience-activated installation works? To what extent can the documentation present the work and also preserve it? How can a participatory installation happen online? What might it do differently and how does it do it? Between all these questions, I decided to finish the installation and install it in a white cube setting in one of the available rooms at the HDK-Valand Academy building.

This decision was made to document the current situation, i.e. the lack of an audience and consequently the absence of bodies for the installation. In particular, the current situation has led me to explore one of the thematics of my work in a more specific way: investigating the relationship between socio-political installation art, the importance of physical presence and public assembly as a political act. What was seen in this temporary, one-hour long installation can be defined as a failure. A *supposed-to-be* political artwork, without a public. An installation waiting for an activation with bodies, but instead, sat as a very solid landscape of a frozen time.

The physical movements around the objects of an installation are engaged with our senses. The distribution, or organization, of our sensory experience, according to Rancière, is essentially political, because presence and experience is bound up with the discursive processes – argument, agreement, disagreement, etc. – which is necessary for sustaining political space<sup>10</sup>. We always sense and perceive in relation to the world and other people; not as individuals but as parts of a collective or community. This is fundamental in installation with participatory elements, or those that demand activation from the public. The type of connection these installation pieces have with the physical space (both negative and positive space), influences the way a viewer conceives of the work in relation to the presence of other bodies inside the installation.

It is not only a one-to-one relationship between these installations and the viewer, but instead the public becomes the co-creator of what is going to happen inside the installation. The viewer is not necessarily required to participate or enter the installation, but where simply spectating the situation is already the engagement. 'Sort of participation without belonging -taking part in without being part of<sup>11</sup>.

Additionally, Gareth White mentions the use of terms such as 'immersive', 'invitational' or 'experiential' performance as a way to avoid conventional *proscenium* stage works<sup>12</sup>. I suggest that the participatory aspect of these terms can be applied to an installation either to create a vivid reallife participatory experience or an experience to critically respond to neoliberal conditions<sup>13</sup>. However, these terms are not introduced necessarily only for physical installations, but I would argue that the sensory experience can boost the potential of these terms in socio-political driven installations. In installations with a specific socio-political approach, especially when they demand some type of activation or

10. C. Cazeaux, p. 9. 11. S. Bara, p. 23. 12. G. White, 2012, as cited in S. Bara, p. 45. 13. These two contrasting claims on participation are taken from Bara's book. See S. Bara, p. 43. participation, Merleau-Ponty's series of negotiations with the environment can be developed into discussions, arguments and conversations between spectators. This level of engagement renders the participants *co-creators*, not merely spectators. Bishop's research on recent critics and artists writing about installation art, emphasises the importance of the viewer's active presence more as a political and ethical implication than when compared to engaging with traditional art; a transitive relationship is implied between activated spectatorship and active engagement in the wider social and political arena<sup>14</sup>.

> In the end, the activation of the project was my own experience in an empty installation, and of a video lasting one minute and twelve seconds, made in collaboration with a sound designer. That was all I had to present.

And, I am thinking that if the public, the bodies, do not have the opportunity or a place to meet and be triggered sensorially, linguistically, verbally or perceptually, what is happening to the idea of *art as social change*? If there is no public program, there is no actual conversation in the designated space, does the documentation just become a flat news report? If due to a pandemic situation, we cannot create any assembly of bodies around socio-political subjects, what is actually happening to those subjects? How does this lack of physical presence actually work in our crises? To what extent can online platforms fill the effects of this absence?

Months have passed since, and people have started to reclaim assembly in the streets to oppose and resist. But, still, how long will it take until we will have people back in art institutions or in public installations? Or back in a space to participate, engage, *belong* after all this

14. C. Bishop, p. 11.

pressure and fear? Should a finished project wait till then? Does a finished project make sense even after a global pandemic? Within economical, psychological, political and health crises that are highlighted or raised from pandemic, where is art standing?

How can we follow thoughts through bodily movements when there is no body, no encounter, no physical interaction, no presence? Bishop says that installation art offers an experience of centering and decentering: work that insists on our centred presence in order to subject us to an experience of decentering. She claims that this constructs a set in which the viewing subject may experience this fragmentation of dispersed subjectivity first-hand<sup>15</sup>.

What is mentioned above does not imply that perception can only happen through the body between sets of planned objects, but to only highlight the relationship between physical presence and perception. In-gallery participation might be only an experience in a temporary 'microtopia', and nothing more.

But, now, we are in a precarious situation. The pandemic intensified the move towards digitalization, and the lack of criticality about the context, concept, public and role of the artist is the problem. Uncritically translating projects for online platforms disregards the importance of the physical works, and especially of socio-political participatory-driven works, to create an assembly of bodies to exercise our social being. What we easily forget in all our scrolling is what Lev Manovich, author of books on new media theory, had said: "the synthetic computer-generated imagery is not an inferior representation of *our* reality, but a realistic representation of a *different* reality."<sup>16</sup> Indeed we might not be able to communicate together with our known signals such as gaze,

15. C. Bishop, p.130.

16. L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001, p. 135.

movements and gestures; but on the other hand the lack of multi-sensory features in non-material art might create a space for users to 'take on different roles from what they are used to'<sup>17</sup>.

Shortly after the lockdowns in Iran, an online digital performance festival entitled Re-connect started its program of performances, lectures and conversation on Instagram live<sup>18</sup>. Since then, there have been some criticisms around the format of the festival itself, the rise of online presentation and participation, its relation to the limiting of discussions and the role of authoritarian forces (especially since the festival is accessible for everyone and also archived online by everyone). Shortly after, one of the founders of Re-connect, Nima Dehghani, a digital media artist/researcher, responded to these criticisms with a short text on Instagram. He believes that the current situation is the emergence of a new beginning; a beginning that might come with various valuable and invaluable live events. He emphasized that the current moment could be (and maybe still is) the beginning of a movement - this moment of 'searching', 'reflecting', 'tolerating', 'reporting' and 'giving opportunities'. From there we will not ask why they are live, but we will check between whom the live is happening and gradually we reach the transition from 'selfcentered' to 'dialogue'. That this opportunity of being live might guarantee the dynamic in the current standstill<sup>19</sup>. This view is reminiscent of Joseph Beuys' approach to art: art as the only way to provide a space of 'playful activity' free of the means-ends relationships of capitalism<sup>20</sup>.

I would say we, the ones who write and make, still need to

17. Aylett, p.145.

18. Re-connect Online Performance Festival [website], 2020, https://www. reconnectfestival.com, (accessed May 2020). 19. N. Dehghani, *Nima Dehghani Instagram*, 29 April 2020, https:// www.instagram.com/p/B\_ k0NmSAOiX, (accessed May 2020). 20. C. Bishop, p.104. hold on and wait to see the situation fully unfold in relation to what is happening with art right now, before assessing the role and importance of art at this particular time.

> The occurrence (happening) of these Covid-19 days, in the first place, is the questioning and eliminating of the physical presence of the body in the public sphere. We might still engage and participate in online events, but what do we have when our physical presence is out of context? What does it do to the happenings with a socio-political approach? There might be various choices between virtual art events or many opportunities for companionship from home, and they probably have positive effects in our post-pandemic lives (if it exists). There is a potential there, but also a difference. The numbers of participants in Instagram lives, Facebook lives, Zoom meetings and webinars are constantly changing. Cameras and microphones switch off and on, sometimes because of weak connections, sometimes because the food is ready or some other interruption. Or we might choose to do something else. just because we can and we are not being watched.

I want to finish here: we don't go to museums, concerts, performances, seminars, and other types of social or group activities in public spaces *accidentally*. We don't visit a museum just because it is on our way. We choose. We think. We read about it and we plan it. We check the route and then we arrive at our destination, and our body *appears* in that space. Sometimes alone, sometimes among others. The physical body does not move that easily between events. There is a difference when we are present, and that has to be considered before all these virtual happenings.

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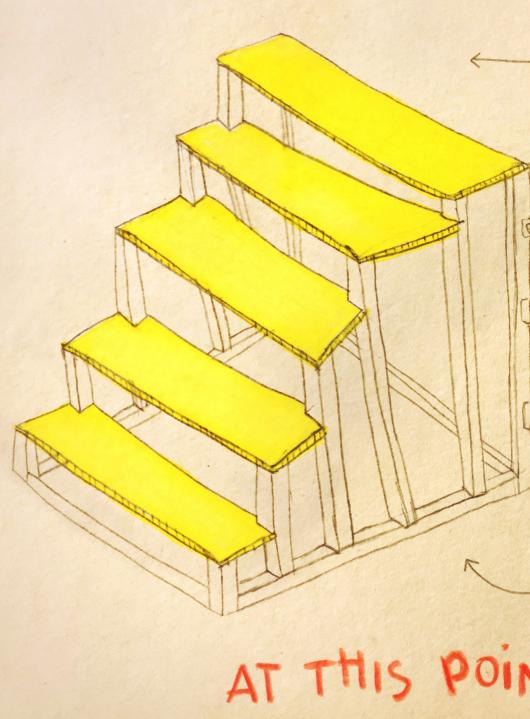
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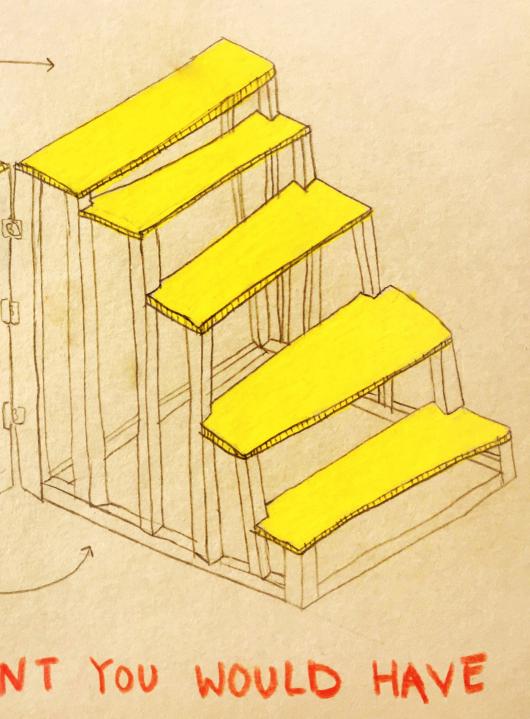
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# At This Point

Una Sigtryggsdòttir





Ni Måste Namaste (You Must Namaste)

Chapter 5: The child

Kasra Seyed Alikhani



#### CHAPTER 5: The Child

[Int. YOGA CLASS - SUDDEN STILLNESS.] Construction noise escalates.

JIII TA You're children The child as a little seed Laying there waiting A few breaths here Deep breaths towards what's coming The new... You're children, soft, helpless Soften your jaws, lips, soften your mind IN THROUGH YOUR NOSE OUT THROUGH YOUR MOUTH Towards what's coming Close off all obligations Imagine a place Where you can return after a day at the office And feel at home Where you can recognize yourself in each other A clean and fresh place No meat juice on the sidewalks, no kebab juice As far as the eyes can reach Stay there for a few moments...

A raises his head as Julia approaches.

Ni Måste Namaste

## JULIA (whispers) You must close your eyes, if you want to!

With two fingers pointed like the gesture of a quotation she presses his head back down. A hand strikes a small bell that rings out into silence. We return to the image of the billboard, only now we're there, at Sudden Hills. The place is dead quiet. A pinkish light pulsating slowly over the row of identical houses. We turn to see the source of the light: the sign of Abbas Grill. With large block letters the cardboard blocking the window now reads: 'Free artist residence'.

We look back at the houses and approach a window, the light inside slowly turns on revealing a figure we've seen before.

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----- Forwarded message -----Subject: The need for context

Gloria López Cleries James Duffy Kolbrún Inga Söring



### Introduction

As an enquiry group, we came together around collaborative processes and feminist methods of learning. This manifested publicly during the 2019 PARSE Research Conference in Gothenburg<sup>1</sup> and at the 2019 Parallax Forum in Katowice<sup>2</sup>.

This contribution uses email as a tool and as a dialectic exercise, which we used as a framework to communicate during the current pandemic. Emailing offers new opportunities in the way that we speak with one another, whilst enabling time to think and write. Not necessarily offering resolution, or an answer, we invite the reader into our processes of negotiation, understanding and interpretation.

The exchange of emails does not exist as an essay with a conclusion, but rather an exposing of the ongoing development of an enquiry group.

1. Note for the reader: PARSE is a research publishing platform at The Faculty of Fine, Performing and Applied Arts HSM & HDK-Valand Academy of Art and Design at the University of Gothenburg. In 2019 we participated in the third biennial PARSE Research Conference Human (13-15 November 2019) with a performative lecture, Exploring Alternative Applications of Autotheory that exposed the vulnerabilities and frictions of workshopping within a conference setting. This resulted from a series of workshops around the theme of Autotheory. Along with the performative lecture we produced an open-ended publication entitled Alternative Explorations of Autotheory. The group consists of nine individuals: Gloria López Cleries, James Duffy, Kolbrún Inga Gunnlaugsdóttir Söring, Linea Kornum Rask, Lucy Wilson, Maia Daniels, Nika Helia Persson, Riikka Gröndahl, Tove Posselt, You can find more information about the performative lecture and the open-ended publishing process here:

https://autotheoryworkshop.wixsite. com/mysite.

2. Note for the reader: Parallax is a project that discusses issues concerning the role of the art academy and the educational processes it involves itself in http://parallaxnetwork.org. The project's network consists of four art institutions: Chelsea College of Arts London. HDK-Valand, Academy of Art and Design/University of Gothenburg, University of Plymouth and Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, During the 3rd Parallax forum Stereotypes & Storytelling. Research Strategies for Art Education (5-7 December 2019), we hosted an open workshop and a lecture titled Likes, Stories And Stereotypes. The workshop manifested as an open laboratory where, together with students and forum attendees we problematized the idea of the stereotype by exploring possibilities of new imaginaries. https://www.instagram.com/ likesstoriesstereotypes/

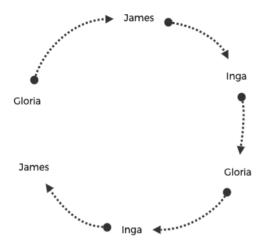


Image: Email exchange order.

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## From: Gloria López <glo\*\*\*\*\*\*\*@gmail.com> Date: Thu, 18 Jun 2020 at 11:52 Subject: The need for context To: James Duffy <jam\*\*\*\*\*\*\*@outlook.com>

Hi James, I hope you are well. I want to share with you the following thoughts and questions:

Since our formation in 2018, we (as a group formed by three students) were interested in unpacking *Autotheory* through a queer perspective based on Paul B. Preciado's text *Testo Junkie* (2013). We exchanged references and created a way of thinking and working together. As an attempt to expand and problematise the production of knowledge as a collective in a bigger group, we co-organised a workshop on *alternative methods of Autotheory*. As part of our performative lecture at the PARSE Conference, our intention was to create 'one voice' formed by the agreement and disagreement of multiple voices. However, in my opinion, this method became somewhat paradoxical when our single voices mixed with the members of the group, creating a conflictive discourse without any context but the one that focused on the institution and the building we were in (HDK-Valand) in that precise moment (Nov. 2019).

For Donna Haraway, situatedness means awareness for a personal and political context. If we define ourselves as a group, as a unique entity, formed by different people with different backgrounds and situatedness, is this not a contradiction? *Co-authored thinking* becomes problematic when we can't define it, or when we are not able to name it. To explain one such contradiction, Tom Finkelpearl argues that *collaboration* 'implies a shared initiation of the art, and start-to-finish co-authorship'. When not all the participants are equally authors of the project, especially in the initiation and conceptualisation,

then we need to talk about *cooperation* 'that simply implies that people have worked together on a project' with different roles.

In our framework of *Autotheory* (and the need for individual situatedness), how can we use the words 'collaboration', 'collective', or 'collective thinking' without facing a contradiction in our intentions?

Gloria

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On Mon, 22 Jun 2020 at 10:51, James Duffy <jam\*\*\*\*\*\*\*@ outlook.com> wrote:

Hi Inga,

From what I understand, from the previous email, finding one shared voice of the group when there are so many counteracting and corroborating individual voices is a contradiction. I agree, but it does depend on where we believe the focus of these words should lie. If we think about a shared voice of experience, then we will always struggle. I think the power of togetherness for us, whether it was at the beginning with only three or later with nine people, has always been in the 'not knowing' and 'collective understanding'. That is the 'not knowing' of theory, or a reference, as well as the not knowing and the never 'knowing' of somebody else's experience. To me, collective thinking has always been a tricky term. To say 'collective thinking' suggests a possible stagnation of the development of thought, in that we all agree; and maybe even a dogmatism. Experience and how we perceive it, is not always rational or logical, words I associate with 'thinking'. We need room within the shared voice for illogicality, not in analysing, but in the being present.

I have always viewed our collaboration as a collaboration to understand and act. This is something, as three people, we have found difficult to expand towards within the larger group. I believe no group of individuals can concretely say its workload, ambitions, and knowledges are the same. Collaboration in our past usages of the word, I have always thought of as slightly unrealistic in its expectations of each collaborator to make up equal sums of collaborative output. Instead, I would say we are 'individually not knowing' in order to collectively understand. In encouraging the not knowing of the individual we offer a place of sharing knowledges for collective understanding (understanding as a verb).

I don't know if this goes any way, either, to helping understand what we mean by these words. Maybe we need other terms. I am always interested in the tensions of thought in the group. Do you think the group has the facility to nurture tensions? How far could opposing thoughts or opinions exist within the group? How does this affect the ideas of collectiveness/togetherness?

# El mar., 23 jun. 2020 a las 16:07, Kolbrún Inga Söring <kol\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*@gmail.com> escribió:

Hey Gloria,

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I would like to first address the proposed contradiction in using Haraway's situatedness as means to collaborate and in the manifesting of a voice spoken by the group. As I understand Haraway's situated knowledges, it is not just the personal and the political she forefronts, but the multiplicities of the personal. Haraway puts value to making visible the many different perspectives, opinions and experiences that participate in any kind of structure or institution - that more often than not have been left peripheral to popular discourse of the White cis male

'objective' lens. The contradiction, therefore, as I see it holds little merit, if not to reinforce the singular lens that we want to challenge with the group. What I mean by this is that the contradiction lies not in relation to the method of autotheory. but as an inevitable result of a working group like ours. That is to say, a group that is in constant negotiation. Furthermore, I believe that the individual voice is often contradictory in itself. Recognising each thought process and voice involved as nuanced, complex and fluid highlights the value of the collaborative negotiation of the many experiences, opinions and perspectives in any given context. And so, I do not believe that the 'one voice' mentioned needs to be uncontradictory. Perhaps we undervalue the contradictory nature of collaborative and/or collective practices. On that note perhaps it is not about a term that defines the group as collaboration, cooperation or collective but much more about the act of collective thinking as a method of autotheory, as seen through the lens of Haraway.

To say that collective thinking 'stagnates' the development of thought, is to simplify the collective thought process, is to suggest that collective thinking remains as a mere outcome of a negotiation instead of the ongoing negotiation itself. Collective thinking implies an approach of multiple perspectives upon a matter, whether as individual or as a part of a group. To me, it is in line with Haraway's notions and what we have been attempting with the working group. The inevitability of conflict in a group of nine or even three has shown itself, but conflict cannot be realized or negotiated when unspoken. Whether the conflict be external or internal to the group, it remains an essential part of the collective thinking process and, as it has been shown, an essential part of the output of the working group as well.

Future development of this group is much more tied into the tensions and negotiations rather than a definite terminology of what it suggests is its nuanced inner workings.

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I now understand that we all have fundamentally different approaches and ideas of how to articulate what this group is and how it functions and perhaps that underlines the beauty of contradiction best of all. And, perhaps that underlines the necessity of a collective thinking that includes many situated knowledges as its basis. Is it more about accommodating the multiplicities as they are negotiated, as we have attempted in our performance with the group as in unison, rather than proposing a 'voice' as a necessarily singular entity?

Inga

# On Wed, 24 Jun 2020 at 14:03, Gloria López <glo\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Inga!

Let me clarify with two examples what I mean by *paradoxical* in my last email.

The method of *collective thinking* is not an abstract action; the outcome is materialised (collectively or individually) and shared through different formats and forms with the public. When we presented the performative lecture at the PARSE conference, we were understood/perceived as 'one singular' (and very White) voice/entity without any situatedness or contextualisation according to the multiplicities within the group. That happened because of the choices we made to remove our names in the performative lecture. In this case, the lack of contextualisation (of situatedness) created a gap in our encounter with the audience. That gap made me aware of how important it is to contextualise what we did and which terms we used.

I agree with you both that productive contradictions and the conflictual enriched our internal discussions, but what I identify

as 'problematic' is related to the form (the collective thinking and the auto-theoretical methods) and how it can be made public.

My question here is not about *what* but about *how* and the methods and terms we used to communicate it. If the responsibility of making the outcome public requires creating a site of encounter as a common understanding, *how* can we 'accommodate the multiplicities as they are negotiated', but also include the audience in that process? In terms of inclusion and *togetherness*, *how* do we credit and recognise a collective practice formed by that multiplicity of collective thinking? And in addition, *how* can one credit the collective co-thinking in one's individual practice if it's auto-theoretical?

The second example expands the paradox I mentioned in the use of descriptors and language. In the conference, our position and use of terms were not read in the way we expected. In my opinion, that happened because the group positioned itself in a kind of 'subaltern position' (and here I'm talking about misusing Spivak's concept of 'the subaltern' and the use of specific terminology about oppression). Words condition our interpretation in the symbolic regime of artistic research, and with the lack of a proper definition, the site of encounter can vanish. That's why I think it's essential to define and question the terminology we use. As James said, maybe we need to create our own terms to describe the unknown.

Thus, and expanding James' question about the tensions created by collective thinking, *how* can we share these tensions with an audience taking into account our previous experience during the conference?

#### -----

## On Sat, 27 Jun 2020 at 14:49, Kolbrún Inga Söring <kol\*\*\*\*\*\*\*@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi James,

It is true that we were criticised for the complete lack of intersectional perspective and rightly so, which is something we definitely need to actively include and forefront moving forward. But, to suggest that we were inherently perceived/understood as 'one singular' voice/entity undermines the performance and the diverse understandings of the performance that was evident in the Q&A (or how I experienced it at least). I do not mean to undermine the importance of situatedness or contextualization that was highlighted as necessary and the identifying of problematics that have arisen. It is, however, important for me to recognise the multiplicities in that situation as well.

As an attempt to challenge the often conventional authorship present at academic conferences, where the author performs knowledge, we decided to leave out our individual authorship from the collective thought process. In the first section of the performance we do touch on this, and to quote the script directly:

**Person**: I think this is a bit confusing. Do we mean naming our group or ourselves as individuals?

**Person**: How can we present multiple voices concerning autotheory? Should we leave out our names from the presentation and speak a collective of voices<sup>3</sup>?

It continues, and here we situate ourselves very much as a 'collective of voices, as multiple voices' not as 'one singular' voice. I am therefore a bit confused by the argument in the previous email, not to ignore the fact that some did, in fact,

3. Note for the reader: this quote is an excerpt from a script we used during our performative lecture. The script was written by using notes and other material accumulated during a series of workshops leading up to the event. You can find the open-ended publishing as a pdf on our website: https:// autotheoryworkshop.wixsite.com/mysite receive us as 'one singular' voice/entity, but rather that perhaps, as we have discussed on several occasions, the common understanding was not there, perhaps, because the format we were experimenting with is not necessarily found in academic conferences. In that sense, to try and fit a mold in that context to best 'meet' or encounter a public perhaps is problematic in itself, which we were adamantly trying to avoid. Perhaps the disrupting of the audience's understanding is where the contradiction lies and where the space was made that made it possible to have such a rich and critical Q&A and discussion after the performance.

With that said, I absolutely agree with your question: 'how can we "accommodate the multiplicities as they are negotiated", but also include the audience in that process?' I do not think centering the audience's understanding should be a priority especially within the experimental, or seemingly experimental format, that we chose to use as our presentation.

## On Mon, 29 Jun 2020 at 10:14, James Duffy <jam\*\*\*\*\*\*\*@ outlook.com> wrote:

Hello to you both,

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What seems to be arising out of this conversation marks three different, but linked problems.

How do we come to collective agreements or a collective 'agree to disagree' about the positions/understandings of the texts?

How do we navigate this individually within our group in terms of influencing us into an outcome? How can we share this with a public? I think we need to return to the beginning for a moment. We started as a reading group looking at texts to find pathways into becoming an enquiry group. This collective reading of texts was, I believe, incredibly important in shaping our definitions. Your interpretations, as you see them arising between us, begins earlier. I find Haraway difficult to understand, whereas you both don't. My interpretation of the text, I would argue therefore, is not as substantiated as I have formed my conclusions alone, unargued.

I believe the dynamism of this project is in how we work with these problems specifically when tasked or confronted with an established form of public engagement such as a conference, a lecture. We need, however, not to contextualise in the academic sense, but to ground in a real-time sense.

Maybe it is important to return to the questions that we asked ourselves at the beginning of working together. We probably know these answers individually, but we should keep returning to them as a group. Let us look at them again. What are we setting out to find out? What are we specifically interested in? What is happening in the world that makes this relevant?

Speak soon James

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# Notes on contributors



## **Alexandra Papademetriou**

My current research cycle concerns the relationship between cultural production and the formation of national identity: how states, museums, galleries and individual artists, deliberately or not, participate in the construction of a national self, normalise behaviours and discourses, and eventually perpetuate nationalist ideas. Through humour, and with the juxtaposition of text and drawings, I aim to draw attention to the arbitrary nature and absurdity of inherited identity.

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#### **Alexander Stevenson**

Theatrical video, costume and sculpture help me question how cultural projection onto places and their histories masks understanding. The artwork, *Antarctic Thought Experiment*, originates from conversations with academics who have never visited or touched their object of study – Antarctica. In this work, I used knitted props – referencing the wool of early explorer garments – hand-made costumes, and sets to symbolise colonial visions of Antarctica. Drawing attention to the complicated relationships humans have with the narratives of history, I examine how much of the way that place is described is actually cultural imagination and projection.

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#### Beate Persdotter Løken

I am investigating my remembering, misremembering and the gaps in my memories. The outcome of these investigations often manifest artistically in installations containing scenographic, filmed and audio recorded elements. By using methods inspired by crime scene investigations, forensic psychology and memory studies, combined with elements from my theatre background, such as puppets, props and scenic performance, I try to understand different aspects of human memory and its winding ways.

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#### Elín Hafsteinsdóttir

In my doctoral thesis *The Art of Making Democratic Trouble* I studied four art events in Sweden and the Netherlands to interrogate the conditions of democratic and political subjectivities and the constitution of political speech. The analysis tracks the space of conflict that arises in the four chosen art events. The theoretical framework consists of poststructuralist radical democratic theory, and the empirical material includes e.g. printed media, radio, online comments and social media.

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# **Gloria López Cleries**

My artistic research is concerned with critically reflecting on the political, social and ideological networks of a present mediated by technology. Specifically, my work focuses on emotional capitalism and new online models of productivity, affect and collectivity. Through hybrid processes that include collaborative practices, dialectical methods, appropriation, remix, installation and text I investigate the construction and circulation of the political imaginaries of care and welfare, and the relationship between neoliberal ideology, consumerism and emotions.

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#### Johanna Oskarsson

My research examines the new geological epoch - created by the lust for never-ending growth, capitalism, and the exploitation of natural resources - called the *Capitalocene*; and how neoliberal politics and rhetoric uphold this exploitation, perpetuating the class system and the need for cheap human labor. My project was a tabletop roleplaying game set in a hypothetical dystopian future. Through the physical act of role-playing with others, I was experimenting with how to talk, narrate, negotiate, and experience a future that could be.

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#### Kasra Seyed Alikhani

Through painting, film and music I set up fictional worlds that allow me to weave together and recode elements from multiple sources ranging from mass-culture and critical theory to subjective experience. I'm interested in ideas of sameness, hybridity and dissimulation and most recently how these relate to fantasies around illness/wellness. Via flirtations with genre-film I form narratives that are both distancing and inviting. Through these settings and narratives I aim to highlight and re-perform the subtle menace and absurdity lurking in certain imagery, attitudes or cultural expressions that might otherwise go unnoticed in its commonplace.

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#### Kolbrún Inga Söring

My research explores possibilities of using the body as an autonomous site of provocation, problematising cisheteronormative ideals while questioning the deeply rooted 'myth' of masculine desire. Through the tool of autotheory I engage in a process of rethinking popular narratives by unpacking my own troubled relationship with said ideals and desires within a framework of self-representational body politics, body modification and politics of desire. Furthermore I am working to highlight the multiplicities of LGBTQIABB+ communities and experiences through thematically curating *Enqueery: Festival of Queer Curiosity*.

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#### **Manos Bazanis**

Building upon a legacy of using mixed-media overidentification and pataphysical practices to explore and expose the intersections of Greekness, natural sciences and far-right imagery, my most recent work aims to lucidly delineate the boundaries and the failures of such endeavors. Thus, by drawing inspiration from the recent explosion of "subversively affirmative" artworks by Greek institutions and their accolades, I have been pursuing the (methodo) logical end of such projects and the notions of artistic practices that they entail.

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#### **James Duffy**

I search cultural histories for strategies to disrupt social institutions that influence identity construction. Social institutions can be defined as structures that perpetuate social order, such as government, work, economy but can also include shared perspectives of time, space and matter. My practice begins by piecing together seemingly unrelated found imagery, collected anecdotes and forgotten objects. These become linked by cultural and autobiographical associations through experiments with collage, assemblage and writing. Defining these experiments as concoctions, I aim to disrupt their credibility and conclusiveness, reactivating them in subsequent performances and curatorial actions. These, too, become part of a practice that is constantly folding, unfolding and looping back into my body of work.

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#### Reyhaneh Mirjahani

My artistic practice and research focus on the notion of individual and collective agency in dilemmatic sociopolitical situations and the disposition of ethics in this discourse. I am concerned with the interrelationship between agency and physical involvement/presence. Through immersive audience-activated installations, I inquire and track the affect generated by sensory experience in investigating the (im)possibility of political agency in our contemporary life: how can an audienceactivated installation become more generative in its capacities on questions of politics around (im)possibility of agency?

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#### Una Sigtryggdóttir

My recent research focuses on how variations of temporal experience can be investigated or expressed in an artistic context. This has been looked into through various themes, from financial derivatives to bottles popping, exhibition conventions and hidden spaces in the architectural framework of an art institution. I set up installations with the aim to observe if a viewer's interaction can teach me anything about their experience. The tools I have used for this are wooden structures, drawings, sculpture, words, performance, video and time spent.

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# Åke Sjöberg

In my artistic research I investigate how archaic images and narratives of masculinity have been created, and what effects their reuse in today's reality television have on individual masculinity production. I cut up *Gold Rush* and *Deadliest Catch*, physically cutting up printed stills as well as text from my theoretical excavation of masculine archetypes, compiling it into fanzine-like booklets. I strive for plural perspectives by organising a podcast in which collective readings from the booklets are the starting point for dialogues.

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